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Person to Person in Norway

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Breanna Suguitan

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November 2014

Cultural Interview

Country: Oslo, Norway

Interviewer: Breanna

Interviewee: Mari (classmate)

Date conducted: November 1, 2014

One of the things that surprised me to learn about my Norwegian schoolmate was her attitude towards education. Compared to how I feel in the states, there is less social pressure for her to engage in higher level education by a certain age. In my experience, after you graduate from high school, it is expected that you go to college. Then, if you're very ambitious and able, you might study for a master's degree. This route seems the most socially accepted among my sphere of influence. However, for Mari, there is less attachment to her age and the level of education she achieves. Many options exist for young adults after they graduate high school in Norway. Some continue on to vocational school or complete an internship. After that, they may consider pursuing a bachelor's degree. I've noticed that in my class, I am one of the youngest students. Learning for Mari is seen as leisure. Perhaps this attitude comes because there is less competition for jobs in Norway. Citizens have the luxury of knowing they are economically secure and will be employed throughout their life.

From the interview, I discovered that Mari cherishes her Norwegian Christmas traditions as much as I value my own holiday traditions. She told me what the traditional Christmas dinner looks like, where salted and dried lamb ribs (pinnekjøtt), potato dumplings (raspeball), and rice pudding (riskrem) are specialties. I also learned some unique Christmas treats, including *Julebrus*, the Norwegian's beloved Christmas soda, which I tasted homemade. Her concept of time is fairly similar to mine in that one arrives promptly for school and work, but is unhurried for social events. Her concept of space varies, however, confirming what I've noticed in the city. Mari explained that Norwegians

have a very large “bubble.” A bus is considered crowded when you have to sit next to someone. Furthermore, it is considered rude and intrusive to strike up a conversation with a stranger. Unless you have something very necessary to ask, you don’t talk to someone you don’t know. This is how people respect one another’s personal space in Oslo. This is a change from what I am used to back home, where smiling to someone in the street is a polite, kind gesture. However, I can’t complain: I prefer this degree of interaction than the opposite extreme of being cat-called.

Another similarity I discovered from the interview was Mari’s perspective on health. Mari acknowledged that many of her peers are very health conscious. They are picky with what they eat and make a point to exercise often. Mari thinks that this is a social pressure that hasn’t existed for very long in Norway. Still, she finds it is valuable educating society on how to keep themselves healthy. Heightened prices of tobacco and junk food also allow people to think twice about what they consume. She feels the cost is worth it to keep people out of the hospitals.

Listening to Mari informed my perception of both Norway and the United States. I learned that many eyes are watchfully on the US. The degree of influence my country has on others was not as obvious to me before. For instance, Mari knew many American television shows and popular song artists that even I hadn’t heard of. She was familiar with our entertainment even growing up (“Friends” being one of her favorite TV shows). But despite this, I saw distinct preferences, tastes, and humor that Norwegians share. Based on Mari’s interview, I learned how much value is placed on society taking care of each other. Everyone carries a role and is responsible to care for his/her environment and family, contributing to society’s quality of life overall. This egalitarian way of thought still feels new to me, but I appreciate it very much. It is a relief from the very individualistic focus I’m used to.

I am also fascinated by Mari’s perspective on money. Regarding everyone being employed and the perceived prosperity, she mentioned, “People think it’s free money but it keeps the crime rate low.” Safety is fiercely guarded and comparing to my hometown, I’ve never seen so few people on the streets. In this way, I am glad to be challenged in what I consider the “norm.”