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Sundays, A Day of Rest in France

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Aix, France

October 16, 2016

Sundays, A Day of Rest

While France and the US are considered occidental societies and we share similar morals, believing in fundamental human rights for all and separation of church and state, there continue to be differences that one doesn't miss between our cultures.

One aspect of French life that was slightly stronger at an early epoch but rests in the culture is the idea of the family Sunday. It is still not legal to mandate that an employee works on a Sunday in France because for a long time it was a day for the family to be together: get up early and make brioche to share for breakfast, go to church if that applied to the family, or do sports and outdoor activities together and have a brunch later in the day. The idea is togetherness, and even though that manifests differently today in France, the tradition is still alive in families. My host mom's family practiced the tradition I described of brioche, sport and later brunch. In general for the daily life of the French, alcohol is de-stigmatized, and sharing an aperitif with friends or family is a way to spend time with loved ones. I was surprised at first by this practice, but it became normal. I was surprised that my host mom has actually never been close with any of her neighbors that she lives next to throughout her life. In the US, I think we are always trying to be involved in the lives of our neighbors whether it's in class, in home or in the office.

My host and I are very similar in our outlook on most things and preferences. We are pretty liberally minded and economically conscious. We try to keep the waste down in the house, and we sort the trash we do make. She is very careful to only buy local fruits and vegetables. We both prefer to eat less meat. She has a deep appreciation for nature (like me) and a very profound appreciation for the arts from music to dancing to paintings and sculptures and film. I have been learning from her vast love for the arts. I really enjoy the arts and they are a big part of my life, but she makes a true effort to go to shows and exhibitions. She is Catholic like a lot of Europeans, but she doesn't believe in the rules and certain values of the church, she just believes in god. So she still considers herself Catholic. However, since I don't believe in the dogma of the church, I choose not to belong to it or practice it. That is an interesting difference that I find even beyond between my host and me but between me and other French people.

I have learned to appreciate the different way of life and enjoy integrating. I see the US from a more unbiased standpoint I think. When I look at the background of France and what is happening there today, I can understand the setting that I am experiencing today. When I look at the US and our background, I also understand the setting and appreciate the different mindsets and see how they work for each person. I can also see certain things that I just thought were faults in humanity but are really just special to our culture in the US, like giving too long and extensive answers in a casual conversation and talking too loud.