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Person to Person in Costa Rica

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Person to Person in Costa Rica

I think that the fact that my host mom is fairly preoccupied with the state of cleanliness of the house has surprised me the most. In the States, we do clean up after ourselves, but not to the extent that my host mom does here. The kitchen is always clean, the bathroom always smells good, there is no clutter around the house, the sheets are changed weekly, and there aren't stains on the carpet or on the tablecloths. My family in the US cleans frequently, but a lot of the time, we're too busy running to the next activity that things pile up (dishes in the kitchen, dirty laundry, etc.) before we get around to dealing with them. Here, that's not the case. Immediately after something gets dirty, it's cleaned. This applies as well, to the appearance of people. In Costa Rica, people generally dress very nicely to leave the house. They shower before leaving and always look presentable. In the US, many people, especially in college, are generally unconcerned with their appearance. We wear sweatpants and flip-flops to classes, rolling out of bed just five minutes before leaving. I doubt this would happen in Costa Rica.

I actually think we have many of the same values. We value our family and our friends. Time spent with them is precious to us. My host mom also believes in staying busy. She's taking adult classes at the university, writes in her spare time, reads often, has her own catering business, takes dance classes, goes on field trip with her university, and still has time to spend time with her family. I think this is something that is true for many Costa Ricans, because the rest of my family seems to do the same.

I think something that is different is our outlook on life. She tends to be more optimistic about life, more easy-going I think. She lives every day as well as she can and doesn't seem to worry too much about the future. I, on the other hand, seem to worry too much about what's going to happen. I'm always planning the next thing, always looking ahead. In the US, there's tremendous

pressure to do well at everything; to get ahead to as to get the best job available. The competition is stressful at times. I worry about not enjoying my experience here instead of just letting it all happen. This is something different between us. I think the cultural mindset of competition is slowly creeping into this country, but right now, I think it's still more relaxed, which I appreciate a lot.

The interview gave me insights as to how my host mom thinks about things, not just on how I perceive them everyday. It gave me the motivations behind her actions. I learned a little more about how she thinks about her country in respect to the health care system, the cost of living, the cultural aspects, etc. For example, before the interview, I thought that the health care system in Costa Rica was a really good program, because it provides health care for everyone by taking a little out of everyone's salary each month. I learned that there are downsides because sometimes the care isn't as great as people expect or isn't readily available due to wait-lists. However, it does seem like a viable option for a better system in the US, where the people who cannot pay for health care don't receive it. I can appreciate the good and bad aspects of the systems of both Costa Rica and the US. This extends to many other aspects of the culture as well, including the food and dress, the attitudes of the people, and the style of living. I think, overall, the experience has made me more open to different ways of life, because I see how different cultures make do with what they have available.

Interview: October 18, 2011

Interviewee: My host mother: Yolanda Torres