

Learning to Appreciate Culture

CWIL essay

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Traveling to Grenada was an amazing experience that made me more aware of the impact culture has on every aspect of life. Traveling alone and living with a family forced me to examine both my own culture and the culture I was being immersed in. No other experience has made me more aware of the importance of culture or made me appreciate culture more.

Living with a Grenadian family and working in a Grenadian hospital allowed me to see and experience Grenadian culture first hand. During my time in Grenada, I learned how they do their laundry and go grocery shopping, what their school system and health care system are like, what the religious atmosphere of the island is and what a Catholic mass is like, how their families are structured, what is important to the people of Grenada, and many more things. There were some aspects of the culture that were similar to my culture. Family life, spirituality, and respect are very important in Grenada and in the culture I grew up in. Other things like what kind of TV shows the children like to watch, bedtime rituals, and how they pay their bills were also similar. There were many differences also, like shopping in the market for most of your food instead of grocery stores, the bus system, Catholic masses, and sense of time, to name a few. The similarities and differences were even more obvious to me in the hospital where I worked while in Grenada. Similar medical terminology and definitions of medical conditions are used in the United States and Grenada. The ranking of nurses, doctors, aides, and other hospital staff is also similar. The differences I observed in the hospital though were much more striking. The attitude the nurse and doctors had about labor and birth were very different from what I experienced in the United States. In Grenada, labor and birth are seen more as a natural part of life versus a special and unique event for each person. The nurses also related very differently to the patients. They were much

more matter-of-fact with the patients. Staying in the hospital was also viewed very medically, so there were many rules for the wards and visitors were much more restricted than in the United States. Nurses also had different roles than nurses in the United States, especially on the Maternity ward. Nurses in Grenada are the ones who deliver the majority of the babies.

Seeing the similarities and especially all the differences in the two cultures helped me see the role culture plays in people's everyday lives and how culture stems from the identity of a people. Seeing the differences, especially those in the hospital, I could have wondered why Grenadians did not do things the way I have done them or seen them. Initially, coming from a medical culture that is so advanced in the United States, I was tempted to question the way I saw things done in the Grenadian hospital. But as I got to know the people and culture more and as I saw more differences and similarities, I realized that the way Grenadians do health care, and everything else, is part of their culture, which is a reflection of who they are as a people. There is not only one right way to deliver a baby, relate to a patient, or organize a hospital ward. We do things one way in the United States because it fits who we are as a people and people in Grenada do it another way that fits who they are and their specific situation. Realizing this allowed me to appreciate, rejoice in, and participate in the Grenadian culture more. It also made me more aware of my culture and how it influences my opinions and ideas and ways of doing everyday things.

Although I know a culture is unique to each place and group of people, there were parts of Grenadian culture that I wish were part of my own culture. One thing was the role music plays in their culture. In general, the people of Grenada were very musical. Many of the nurses would sing or hum as they worked, people were always playing

music in their cars or shops, young adults would gather in the city centers and listen to music or make music together, and all the children seemed to love music also. It made the people so joyful. Another aspect of the culture I loved was the social aspect of the people. Grenadians are not isolated and individualist like many people in the United States can be. They love meeting new people, they always have time for a conversation, and they greet everyone they pass as if it is one of their close friends. On Saturday nights, most people between the ages of sixteen and forty head into one of the main cities and spend the evening and night “liming” (hanging out) and listening to music and grilling together. A Catholic mass usually lasts two hours, partially because the sign of peace lasts so long because everyone wants to greet each other. And when mass is over, people still linger around afterward for a half hour to an hour socializing and talking. Grenadians are never in a rush when it comes to people.

Being immersed in another culture is such an amazing experience. I think it has the potential for making you more culturally aware and appreciative of both your own culture and another culture like no other experience could. After traveling to Grenada, I have a great appreciation for Grenadian culture and my own culture, but I am also more aware of how important culture is in each person’s life.