

“Love is Everywhere”

Xiao Ma, 11<sup>th</sup> grade  
Academy of the Sacred Heart (Grand Coteau)  
Roxanne Guillory

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The first time I met Victoria was when we were eighth graders. She was an exchange student from Mexico coming to study in America for one year, and we soon became good friends in the boarding school of Academy of the Sacred Heart where I have been living for five years.

Coming from China and living among students from across the world has taught me the differences among cultures, and when Victoria invited me in 2017 to spend the summer with her and her family in Mexico, I seized the opportunity. Living away from home and traveling the world has taught me that a country is a big family, and every family has different family structures. However, the same traditions appear in different culture, and by uniting people, there's love.

Families are love. It has been two years since I last went home, so family life can be a little bit unfamiliar for me since I am used to being very far away from home. I was self-taught to be independent, and I have learned that it is not other people's business to care for me. Living in a boarding school, I steel myself against loneliness. I have distanced myself to a point that I did not even call for help when my nose bled for hours a few days after I arrived in Mexico due to climate sickness. It wasn't until Victoria found out and took me to the doctor that I discovered I had fever. Victoria's little sister switched rooms with me to let me rest better, and at night, Victoria's mom would come to check how I felt and bring me water and medicine. Those tender moments reminded me of when I was with my parents and how they used to take care of me when I got sick. I relished the gentle calm I felt to fully trust someone and to let my guard down. At that moment, I felt at home. I was with my family.

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Friends are love. Knowing Victoria has enhanced my life. Living in Mexico for two months gave me the chance to meet new people and to expand my friend circle. Communication could be difficult since Spanish is the first language in Mexico, and half of the population barely knows English. I went to visit Victoria’s high school, and I talked to girls who are my age. Even though we were from different places, had different social backgrounds, and grew up in different cultures, we had things in common: we all liked partying, watching movies, and listening to the same bands. I spent my birthday in Mexico City, and it was the best birthday party I’ve ever had. The day before I left, Victoria secretly gathered up all the friends I had made in Mexico to come to the party. It was the first time I ever experienced a Mexican birthday party; we played traditional games, ate cakes, and said goodbye. Victoria asked me once, “Did you ever think that one of your best friends would be from Mexico when you were little?” I keep thinking about her question, and each time I think about it, I am amazed by how unexpected life can be. When I was little, I never thought about studying in America; all I knew of America was a great country far away across the ocean. My dad used to put up a world map on the wall near our dinner table; I would stare at the map for a long time wondering what was on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Fantasies and imaginations are always perfect, yet the action we take faces the reality. America can seem so close on the map, but it is in reality so far away that I have to take a 20 hours flight from my home in China to get there. It was a hard decision to make to go abroad, especially without knowing anyone before going to this brand new place. However, going abroad has given me friends from around the world. Even though we don’t always share a common language, my friends and I have learned that sometimes it’s not all about communication in words; to communicate with hearts is what matters. Relationships between friends are interesting; we are not related by blood, and it is not our responsibility by birth to care about

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each other, but still we do. I'm fortunate enough to have many friends who I know would support me regardless of how far apart we are.

Mexico is love. Mexico is a country full of colors, happiness, and diversities. Chinese and Mexicans have many things in common. Our ancient cultures form in us a commitment to build strong bonds among family members, and we learn in our families to take care of the elders while being independent ourselves. Even though Victoria lived apart from her grandparents, her family would go visit her grandparents every weekend, and it is something my parents would also do. People in Mexico not only take responsibilities for their families, but they also develop a closer relationship with their neighbors. The first day I went to Victoria's house, their family was watching a soccer game with a few other families who are their friends. People squeezed closely together to sit on a big couch and watch the game, and they burst into tears when their team scored. The families cooked Spanish food that day, and Victoria's parents brought some to share with their neighbors. During the two months I lived in Mexico, I noticed that people usually have a close relationship with their neighbors, and it is common for them to talk to strangers on the street. In China, unfortunately, these close relationships are slowly fading away, and children are now taught to beware and never trust strangers. Most people in Mexico gave me a feeling of sincerity, and it was not because of the area they lived in or their race, but the way they made me feel welcomed among them as one of their own.

Love is everywhere. Both China and Mexico are considered developing country. Being in Mexico reminds me of my hometown in China where street performers go on the middle of the road risking their lives to try to get a little bit of money. Even though America has homeless people, the rate of homelessness is much lower. Living in a developed country and a wealthy

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neighborhood can blind a person from what is really happening in the world. Because we do not know does not mean it's not happening. While I was amazed by the unique cultures, travel to other countries also let me see the scars which our world tries to cover. Poverty, unemployment, human rights abuses. These are issues that young people may not pay attention to, but we are all global citizens no matter our race, gender, age, nationality, or religion. These issues are relevant to our lives, and all people are breathing with us under one sky. Social awareness is important, and to care about everyone else like how you care about your family and friends can be hard. It is easier to love someone who is lovable than to love someone who you disagree with. However, making those human connections and understanding is the right thing to do, and it is our job to spread the love we have and to make our world better place.