

# What's Keeping You From Crossing Cultural Barriers?

Crossing cultural barriers often comes unexpectedly.

It's as if God had a plan in mind for us, and quite often it only takes a little attention to engage in these new opportunities for developing friendships and discussing belief.

The following people crossed my path. They were a part of my everyday life.

The saga begins with a barely used third floor of my home.

In Boston neighborhoods, this doesn't happen and unused bedrooms are gold mines. With 70 colleges and universities, students are always looking for rooms for rent. So we put the room online for rent.

I am not sure how it happened, but we decided on a young Muslim couple from Saudi Arabia. He was taking English classes, and she was pregnant.

It was around 2008, and over the next six months we had casual conversations and learned about each other's families, eating customs, language and faith.

Being an aspiring chef, I was interested in their meals, especially the basmati rice.

The rice dish I came to adore was al kabsa - a spicy tomato sauce with tomatoes, okra and a few other ingredients served over smoked basmati rice.

The cultural exchange was not one-sided. We prepared burgers from the grill, and sweet, syrupy southern iced tea. We were also honored to take them to the Museum of Science, for a wonderful evening on Arabia on the surround screen.

Our friendship grew. We listened to one another and mutual respect grew. It was enlivening to confess that I believed that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. He did not understand it, but he knew I felt Jesus was more than a prophet.

Our care and love grew for this young and far-from-home family. After they had their baby, our Saudi friends moved to Texas to continue his education.

During this time, I was working as a part-time chaplain at three local hospitals where chaplains visit and minister to people of all faiths. I visited many Muslims and prayed with some; most were grateful.

There were also Muslims working in these hospitals. One was named Hassin, and he would often give me brief, easy lessons in Arabic.

Concurrently, our two children were swimming on a team at the local YMCA. The team was open to all races and religions, and we became friends with one of the Muslim families who eventually invited us to an open house at their mosque.

Our church bought flowers; I gave them to someone at the mosque and enjoyed the afternoon.

Not long after this, a new Caucasian imam moved to Boston. I wanted to welcome him.

He had previously been a member of a Christian church in Oklahoma. Being disenchanted, he turned to Islam.

After study in the Mideast, he moved to Boston. We set a time and date and met in his office and discussed everything from faith to the Boston Celtics.

It was now 2013, and I had purchased an Arabic language lesson book with a CD. Others books and CDs would follow, and I'm now able to say a few basic phrases in Arabic, such as "Good morning," "Where are you from?" "Pleased to meet you" and "Thank you."

With the ongoing squabbles over various races and religious traditions, I have learned several things from these experiences that I did not know about our relationships with different people groups:

1. It is easy to have unfounded opinions about people or racial groups with whom we have no contact.
2. We fear what we do not know much about.
3. Some people do not want to meet or know those who are different than themselves.
4. Only Jesus can help us to see that we should not call "any man unholy or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

There are great cross-cultural adventures awaiting us if we choose to keep our eyes open. If we are alert, our palates, understanding and friendships can be marvelously expanded.

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