

*How did you go about understanding local customs, traditions and communication protocols?*

It was a great decision that I have ever made to start my Delaware life with homestay. I cannot imagine my life in here without my homestay family. Even I can say that the flower of the ELI would be to have a homestay experience. Not only could I improve my English, but more I could also have ideas about American culture and customs: table manners, traditional dishes, and the community work. I have lived with my homestay mom for over six months now. During the time, I have shared everything with her, from the first day of arrival in Delaware to today. Of all these valuable moments, I would like to share a few memories here.

Not before long I arrived here, my homestay mom arranged dinner with her kin: her daughter, her son in law, and two grand-children. She said it was a just family gathering and having dinner together. We prepared food and drinks and made the table. At first, it looks like formal western dinner, using a fork and knife. I started recalling what the right way is to use silverwares. I felt little bit awkward. I didn't know how I sneaked into their conversation, and how I should response to their joke. To be honest, at first I didn't know that was even a joke. So, I just smiled and smiled and smiled. That was only thing that I can show my gratitude toward this dinner. It wasn't easy enough to enjoy the dinner for over two hours. Then, these two kids started arguing about eating chicken. They didn't want to finish their chicken. But because of their parents and grandmother, who is my homestay mom, were looking them and expecting them to finish their portion. They secretly put their chicken to each other's plate and started fighting. Our dinner was finished in yelling and crying out. I got tired even I didn't talk a lot and ate enough food. However, somehow, I became to feel comfy and love this gathering. It was not

anymore formal western gathering, but a close family gathering. I liked the way the kids get along with me, and I liked to watch their fierce conversation with their grandmother. I strongly think for the most times the kids win over their grandmother. Because this gathering is not formal, I could feel what the average American life looks like and I could naturally be in the group as a family member.

Here is another unforgettable moment that I have had with my homestay mom. I am a nurse and had 6 years of experience. As a nurse, I feel worthwhile when I could help others. Fortunately, my homestay mom does a volunteer work called 'Meals on Wheels', which delivers meals to people who are not affordable for grocery shopping or accessible to food. I had chance to help her. It was marvelous experience, and it was the moment when the community was brought in my life. I saw the seniors' lives and how they live and more importantly how other seniors help the other seniors. That experience changed whole my prejudiced image on America. My thought toward Americans mostly was occupied with egocentrism in which Americans could thrive the highest level of economy and advance in many different fields. However, Altruism would be more fit to portray the America custom. Not only does this experience help me understand the community, but small donation booths on the main street are also good examples. On the main street, there are a few campaigns going on to help others or to support minority groups, even the weather is not favorable. At least people in Delaware, no matter how old they are, care others consciously and environment seriously through small, but precious campaigns or movements, such as no straw movement in a bar to save marine creatures. Their lives go along with the poor. Whenever they have a party, they frequently allocate some part of profit for others. I think it is a part of their customs. Thanks to my homestay mom, I was able to see the community itself. This small town is living with not only college students, but also other

neighborhood. They help and flourish each other. Since all these reasons I could not help but love here.

In conclusion, I could understand and feel the America culture and customs through homestay experience. Have I not stayed in a homestay, I would still be confused and try to find my own folks. It helps me become to enjoy being around with Americans. On top of that, looking around and taking a careful look at others, especially some community works and campaigns, are also a decent way to have an insight on the community and customs. It will be much better, if I can join the community and devote to the work. Basically, the key that I was able to understand their life is to jump into their life. At first you will feel awkward and uncomfortable, but it is normal to feel that way. However, I am sure people around you will be your group and you will find a great hospitality from them as I have had.