

An Encounter

“PATIENT NEEDS A TRANSLATOR.” While walking around the third floor with the hospital book cart at Mercy Gilbert Hospital, I came across a neon yellow sign with these words posted outside a patient’s room. I almost walked past the room, but a “thud” made me rush into the room. To my surprise, the patient threw a book on the ground to grab my attention because he was deaf and mute. Initially, I did not know how to react; my only source of hope was my iPhone. Who knew that the notes application would be helpful? We communicated through my phone. He knew five languages. He was transferred from Latvia, where he left his family behind. He only wanted a person with whom he could communicate. That Friday afternoon I never expected to have a conversation with a deaf Latvian patient, but I realized that I had never interacted with such international communities or people.

Through one person, I was able to connect with multiple communities: the Latvian community and the deaf community. I was lucky to have such an interaction; I would most likely not have such an interaction on a regular day. I view my interaction as an accomplishment and as a form of prosperity because I was able to learn about a new community.

One does not need to meet a deaf Latvian patient to gain exposure to different communities. We are surrounded by distinct communities in schools, offices, grocery stores, gas stations. At every corner there is someone new to meet --- one of the advantages of living in a diverse country. However, we often do not realize that we interact with distinct communities every day. Although we are surrounded by communities, we do not recognize the communities around us. When we interact with others, we often generalize and make assumptions about their backgrounds. Communities are not only based upon race. Communities can be based on history, culture, background, beliefs, and traditions, factors that we cannot determine from one encounter.

In order to strengthen our unity we need to learn about the communities around us. Learning about other communities does not highlight the differences among communities, but instead allows people to comprehend the similarities between their community and other communities. By understanding other communities we can learn to empathize with others; we can understand their perspective of the world. Additionally we can broaden our own perspective by understanding the perspectives of distinct communities.

The best way to accomplish this task is through simple interactions. It is important to acknowledge that neon yellow sign. A true interaction should be void of prejudices. Deaf, Chinese, Indian, English, French, Vietnamese, Indian, Kenyan, or Latvian, each person has a background and a history. Successful interactions among communities rely on a balance of open-mindedness and kindness. Every community has a story --- a story we may not know.