

A Tale of Two Birthdays

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In three weeks of life in Washington, I have encountered various kinds of cool experiences and cultural shocks. It is inspiring to reflect on every little detail such as the way people dress, greet, talk and even smile, which can all be boiled down to their own cultural traits. I'm deeply impressed by the colorful lifestyle here, although you may consider Chinese people more conservative. Before I came here, I read many articles on how to avoid or minimize cultural shocks in a foreign country. But now I would say diversity makes up the world like different spectrums in a rainbow. The interesting part is, while diversity makes me feel like I'm a little girl in a big world, I also feel that the world is so small. Nothing can provide such a representative example of how diversity gives me two contrasting feelings than the two birthday parties I attended one weekend.

Last Friday night, I went to a birthday party for another Chinese exchange student who attends Sidwell Friends. Her host family was kind enough to invite some other Chinese students, including one of my schoolmates from Shanghai. For the most part, we sat at the table, chatting, telling jokes and doing card tricks. Light Chinese classical music filled the air, bringing everyone memories of home. After dinner, I gave my friend a poetry anthology as her birthday present with two lines of ancient Chinese poetry

written on the first page. That made us nostalgic, but she was happy that she was not lonely on her eighteenth birthday. We talked and laughed late into the night, and the next day she legally became an adult.

On Saturday night, I went to another birthday party. Around twenty junior girls celebrated the birthday of one of my new classmates. Rhythmic music, strobe lights, delicious food and creative costumes all added to the atmosphere. Girls danced to the music, took pictures and chatted together in the hot-tub. Though I didn't join the dancing, I felt as happy as everyone else was for my friend's sweet sixteen.

Within two days, in the same city, I participated in two birthday parties of different styles. It reminded me of the last night at the ASSIST orientation during which students from different parts of the world presented their own cultural performances on stage. There were German acrobats, Chinese Kongfu fighters, and Vietnamese dancers, among others. It was one of the most amazing talent shows I've ever seen, and it was all because of diversity. NCS also has students with various cultural backgrounds, and student organizations like the Equity Board and International Club provide us with a platform for communication and cultural expression. I hope diversity can add more colors to our society in a constructive way.