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Grade 10

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Unlikely Friends

I suddenly feel a tingling feeling in my foot. No, it's now a burning feeling, and it's getting worse. *What's going on?* It feels like my veins are on fire. I look down at my foot to find the source of my pain, and there, on my foot, are some fire ants. My mom had warned me about them, how they're named fire ants for a reason. I understand what she meant now.

It's winter of 2014, and I'm in Costa Rica on vacation with my two younger sisters, my parents, and my grandmother. It all started when I was standing in the soft grass, picking flowers for a flower crown. I weave them into vines hanging from trees around me, their rough surfaces rubbing against my little hands. I observed my surroundings, the lush fruit trees, the countless blossoms, and the bright green grass; it was so beautiful there. Watching the fire ants carefully, now scrambling to find their place in line after my foot so rudely disrupted it, I hear a soft noise coming from behind me.

tap* *tap* *tap It's the slight sound of gravel under someone's foot. Looking around, I saw another family walking by. I was surprised to see anyone else near the rural house we were staying in. I greeted them with a sing-song, "Hi!" and proceeded to show them the flower crown I so carefully made.

"Hello," replied who I assumed to be the mother, while talking in a thick accent to the others in a language I didn't recognize yet.

Afterward, I realized they were speaking Spanish to each other. I felt a bit deflated as I was excited to make new friends. One girl even looked around my age.

Later on, they happened to be at the nearby lake at the same time. I learned they live in a house near ours. We tried to communicate with hand signals and occasionally some English. It was hard at first, but as time went on we got better at understanding each other.

“1... 2... 3... GO!” I shout gleefully, counting simultaneously on my fingers and signaling when to jump into the refreshingly cold lake. Me, my two sisters, and two of the other girls in the other family, all playing in the lake together, having an amazing time. Even though we couldn’t talk to communicate with each other, we still were able to play and have fun. Not knowing each other’s language didn’t prohibit us from becoming friends.

Splashing and jumping for hours and hours off the bright yellow platform that floated on the lake; we eventually had to go home. I never saw them again as it was our last full day there, but I still cherish that experience of an unlikely friendship.

This whole experience has stuck with me and reminded me you make friends in unlikely places. It may be difficult, but language barriers aren’t an excuse for not making friends. We even have technology that allows us to translate at the tap of our fingers. My family, and our experiences like these, is what shape and define us. We travel, learn about new cultures, make friends along the way and learn new things every day. Our openness to new experiences and cultures is what defines my family as free spirits.