

# Breaking Down Barriers

The first week of August, I was New York for a meeting with young people from my hometown Reggello, Italy. They decided to spend their last days in US visiting the “Big Apple.” As I did two years ago, this year I was again able to organize two weeks for them with hosting families in Ohio.

They wanted to visit me in Wayne, NJ, but we decided that I should meet with them in New York to save time on transportation. We met at San Gennaro's National Shrine at Little Italy. I did not personally know these young people, but from their features, I could guess who their grandparents were. (I have been away from my town for too many years and lost track of people!)

I was struck by their reactions while visiting the City, especially Times Square; they became extremely excited and thrilled, falling under the spell of New York. Obviously, they were not aware that they had been hypnotized: they observed how everybody was doing what they were doing, and they thought everything was normal. They will sober up when they will go back to their daily routine and realize that if one is unable to wake up from this spell, one is not free. It is the “Maya’ of the Buddhist tradition or “Vanity/Emptiness” of the Bible and its powerful spell that hypnotizes people, a spell that triggers the mechanism of sufferings and greediness. I hope that this experience will be a wake-up call for our kids.

We, the animators of the trip and myself, tried to evaluate their experience which, seemingly had sparked a keen interest in the USA culture and provided fun and educational opportunity for all, creating an occasion to start long-lasting relationships.

Through their hosting families, the young people had the chance to meet new international friends, and learn the interesting differences between various languages and cultures.

They were extremely grateful to their hosting families who had provided a safe and comfortable environment for them. This experience has proved to be the best means of breaking down the barriers of culture, language and geography that divide us.

~Fr. Michael Davitti SX

