feedback

Do not let prejudices cloud understanding

To the Editor:

I heard a story the other day that I'd like to share with you.

Two Russians were invited to visit the United States. In order to understand us better, they decided to go to a baseball game. Their American host, knowing they would be lost otherwise, explained the rudiments of the game. Armed with this information, they drove to the stadium.

They watched the game for a few innings, and then one remarked to the other, 'What a stupid game! The guy stands up, picks up a club, and pretends to be real macho. When the ball comes to him, he swings at it and then chases his tail around a big circle. When he returns to his starting point, he raises his hand and the crowd cheers! A homing pigeon could do better!' His friend replied, "You're right. Except that you forgot one thing. Sometimes he doesn't make it all the way around the circle. He stops, afraid of the bullies on the other team. Such a bunch of cowards!"

A short time later, the conversation continued. "My favorite is when a player stands, waiting for the ball. It comes one, two, three, four times and he doesn't even hit it. Then, really proud of his 'accomplishment,' he walks part of the way around the circle. He thinks he's beat the bullies on the other team. Hah!"

A man sitting close by couldn't help overhearing the conversation, since the two Russians were speaking so loudly and with a decided accent. Enraged by their total misunderstanding of the game, he got into an argument with them. Later after the game, he mumbled to himself, "Those Russians came to see what America is like, but they'll never see anything but the sights, the external things. They aren't trying to understand how the American views his world. They came thinking that America is bad, and they'll look for proof wherever they go. Cross-cultural exchanges only work when the guests try to see the world as their hosts do."

Robert E. Malchman, I pity you. In the April 15 issue of The Tech, you wrote about a bar mitzvah. You described a lifestyle that you've studied, but never tried to understand. Like the Russians in the story, you brought your own prejudices and let them cloud your appreciation and understanding of what was happening. You should approach lifestyles other than your own with an open mind so that your life can be enriched.

Heidi Brun '84

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