College Student Reports About Their Braver Angels 1:1 Conversations

Here are three detailed reports from students who participated in a Braver Angels 1:1 conversation as a class assignment.

Shared with permission of the students from Allegany College of Maryland, a community college in Cumberland, MD.

1. Red/Blue Conversation, from Dylan, Red

I really enjoyed my first Red vs Blue conversation through Braver Angels. I chose the subject Red vs Blue because it's a very weighted subject and something that most people are typically scared to talk about. To make it even better I am a 17-year-old kid, from an all-white town which is in the most republican county of all pa, Fulton County. So you can imagine my surprise when I joined my call to see a 60-year-old white man named Nick who was prominently Democratic. I was very uncomfortable at first however we were able to find common grounds and interest in each other's upbringings. I am a very active student and so he asked many questions relating to my activities and upbringing so that he could better understand how I think and I did the same for him. Turns out Nick was brought up in Baltimore, Maryland where he witnessed hate firsthand, he likes the assistance the government offers to predominantly African Americans, due to the fact that he was actually raised by an African American woman for most of his childhood as he was transferred from home to home. I really liked his argument and I agreed with a lot of what he had to say about how he believes people shouldn't judge one another because of their political beliefs but rather converse with them to understand why they think that way. Only Nick does lean more right when discussing the conflict of self-responsibility because that was my main stance on why I am more right-leaning. I see Americans as in charge of their own lives so the government should not intervene and allow them to build themselves. We didn't argue a lot because I think we were both a little timid about offending the other. However, we both agreed that in our next conversation, we will research more specific policies to debate. In conclusion, I really enjoyed my conversation with Nick and I think it built me as a person. Braver Angles is doing a great job at starting the conversation so that people can better understand the other side as opposed to ignoring it.

2. Conversation Across Generations, from Anonymous, younger generation

To say this was eye opening is an understatement.

A little bit about my cultural background is I was born and raised here in America. I'm a Hispanic American. And part of the Gen Z generation. We bounced around from time to time in my early childhood and eventually settled in Maryland about 14 years ago. I grew up in a two-parent household with my mother, stepfather (only man I've ever known as a father figure), and my three of four brothers. Because we started over so many times with just the clothes on our backs, we became a close-knit family of values that centered around protecting and being there for the ones you love, always. Growing

up and finally stabilizing in Maryland with a solid friend group and other extended family on my dad's side taught me a lot. I assumed life was hard for everyone, because it was for us. I thought everyone went through the same things as us and were all just trying to make ends meet. But I quickly found out that wasn't the case. But everyone did have unique struggles that are specific to their lifestyle, no matter how well off/poor they were. Predispositions/attitudes/tendencies that were instilled in me were to not even worry about my Hispanic background because I was going to grow up answering "Caucasian" on everything anyways, always be a go-to should someone need something because "do for others what you would ask them to do for you", and to behave as if someone is always watching so I avoid fitting the stereotypical "child from poverty" which also meant excelling in school to make something of myself.

Cultural perspectives affect interpretation in a lot of areas. If you're not striving to be culturally aware, you run the risk of ignorance leading most of your interactions and isolating yourself from other cultures or cultures from your own culture. In some cultures, it isn't okay to look someone in the eyes when they're talking, as a sign of respect. In America it is disrespectful to not look someone in the eyes when they're speaking. An interaction as simple as where you choose to look while someone is speaking can cause HUGE conflict. If you look a Native in the eyes, they'll think you're asserting dominance and being disrespectful which then leaves a bad taste for the American Culture from their perspective. If a Native refuses to look someone in the American Culture in the eyes during a conversation, the American's think they're not showing undivided attention or taking initiative to show interest and are being rude. Which then leaves a bad taste for Natives from the American perspective. Thus, dividing the two cultures. And this could've been completely avoided had the two cultures been aware of what was to be expected in conversations with the other culture. Another issue in the Social and Political realm would be media. In America we have the First Amendment. We believe everyone has something to say and they have the right to say it without censorship. But you're not exempt from the repercussions for the words you speak, that's the catch all. In China, they don't need a catch all. They may be the biggest market for social media, but they censor everything. Twitter? Facebook? Youtube? Blocked. In America, from our cultural perspective we think this is absolutely unacceptable and a reason for a revolution. But, in China this is done, so they claim, to protect their government and their citizens. What is okay and what isn't okay is up for debate based on your culture. Things like the clothing you wear, the social media you use, the symbols of communication, and the books you read are all up for cultural interpretation.

For my braver angel's community project, I chose conversations across generations. This put me in contact with 82 and a half year old Jo. Jo comes from some "strange circumstances" as she calls them, and she is the only child from a union of two people who raised 5 children together after having an affair after immigrating to America. Her parents lived through the great depression, so Jo experienced catching "the wave" of the American Dream and working on upward mobility after the devastating effects of the depression. Jo says she witnessed a lot of people miss that wave and it breaks her heart. She says the rumors of the elderly eating cat food are true, she has witnessed it

herself. And that other issues her generation is facing is relationships being circumstantial/transactional to avoid isolation, the "killer" of the older generation in her words, rather than serious love and care for one another. But, despite all of this, the calmness that has come with her age and the wisdom from her experiences has been wonderful. Her heart goes out to the younger generations and her piece of advice was "hellish things are happening in the world, but they *have* happened before, and you *will* get through them again." And Jo hates the idea of "labeling generations" because yes, it defines trends. But the nuance is gone, the individuality of a person gets lost when you put them in a box or make them a statistic. But this doesn't make her and her generation blind to the reality of life today. They know the "American Dream" is no longer alive and achievable. They don't know to what extent, but they know we won't be given the same opportunities the government gave them for upward mobility in their time after the depression. She also wanted us to know that we need more young people in touch with the older generation because it keeps the older generation aware and accountable, as well as shows the younger generation that they are people who need interaction just as much as the next person and they have wisdom to offer.

This conversation with Jo was truly inspiring and insightful. I tend to think the older generation is incredibly out of touch with the fact of the pandemic effects as well as inflation literally suffocating our generation who were just trying to get on their feet and put money in their pockets. But I was wrong. They're directly in touch and hopeful for us because they experienced this and got through it so they know we will too. It may look dark and daunting now, but it'll all be a distant memory one day and we'll hopefully get the chance to say, "we survived and now we thrive." Jo helped me realize that the old American Dream may be gone, but a new one is in the works. Our world won't be the same as it was before, but a new norm will bring about new experiences, wisdom to be gained, and a life to be worth living after the effects simmer down. Culture can be generation barriers and in order to understand our own culture a little better, we have to be willing to see the older generations' value and wisdom that they can pass down to us due to the culture they experienced in their lifetime. Overall, I can't wait for the second conversation to bring about new perspectives for me.

3. Rural/Urban Conversation, from Luci, Rural/Small Town

Though I did not get chosen for my first topic of choice, Conversation About Race, Ethnicity, and Culture, I was pleasantly pleased with the information I learned during our conversation about Rural/Urban. I was surprised at how our conversation made me really think about the area where I grew up and currently reside.

Participating in Braver Angels was a first for both of us. He chose to participate to learn more about other areas of the world, while I was participating as a class assignment. He, originally from California, moved across the United States to get as far away from family as he could, moving to Manhattan, New York, where he has resided for the past twenty years. No family close by. He enjoys the friends that have remained within the same apartment building as him. One of the things he likes the least about living in New York is the turnover of friendships within his living area. When he feels he has

developed a good friendship, the person often relocates, moving out of the New York area, leaving him to find and develop new friendships. In his experience, many people come to New York to live and work, make money for the short term, not staying long term, as he has. He spoke about his apartment, that has a beautiful view of green grass, trees, and the river. He loves where he lives, everything being within walking or bicycling distance and having a subway for convenience.

A common stereotype for me is assuming those residing in Manhattan, New York not having access to fresh vegetables or gardens, where both are plentiful. I was pleasantly surprised when he told me that there is a fresh garden on the roof top of his apartment building, as well as many other buildings in New York. He also has access to fresh vegetable markets a few times a week within a few blocks of where he lives. Fresh vegetables are plentiful whereas fresh proteins, meat, are not as readily available. He said the focus is more on fresh vegetables and not necessarily the proteins. Another stereotype of Manhattan, New York could be based off famous television shows like Law and Order or Criminal Intent. I assume a city, such as New York, has a high crime rate. He said that he feels safe living in New York and that having a high crime rate is a misconception. He also shared how many New York residents lined up awaiting their first COVID-19 vaccination, without hesitation. There also was not a lot of hesitation or protest when it came to wearing masks during the COVID pandemic. Also, during an LGBTQ parade, many attended, as well as participated, without protest of the event, joining in to support the cause and have a good time. At the end of our conversation, I gathered my thoughts, smiling, desiring to revisit New York and share the city with both my husband and daughter.

As I previously wrote, I continue to live in the area where I have spent my entire life, staying close to family and friends. Staying close to family is common for our area. There are some that may move away for college, a career, or other reasons, but often come back to the area. Most homes in our area have a large lot (yard) to multiple acres, some into the hundreds of acres. This is quite common for our area, where our vegetables are often grown from our own land. A fresh vegetable market is approximately thirty minutes away, where I love to go during Spring and Summer. Though, I do not visit fresh vegetable markets often because of the inconvenience and cost of vehicle expenses to get there. My area is more about protein, poultry, beef, pork, lamb, venison, etc., while vegetables tend to follow. We have many protein farmers that have begun to advertise and sell on digital platforms like Facebook. Most, if not all items are within driving distance for us, including our work. Public transportation is not easily accessible. As you navigate closer to a larger city, like Charlottesville or Harrisonburg, public transit is readily available, as well as bicycle lanes with many sidewalks for walking. We also have beautiful views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and depending on where you live, you may have a gorgeous view of a pond, lake, or river. For a small area, our crime is high, potentially higher than what I was told about New York. Sadly, we have more groups (extremists, intolerant, radical) that are not afraid to display or express their strong opinion relating to the COVID vaccines, wearing of masks, LGBTQA, or other opinions they feel strongly about, more recently the banning of many books within our local school system. It would be great if those types of groups would

focus on more pressing issues, like drugs, abuse, preventing overdoses within our communities, homelessness, or raising extra funds for our public school system. As the person I spoke with during this 1:1 conversation said, maybe it is because there are less things for others to do within our community, being less involved, being invited into a world of drugs or other groups.

I have always wondered what it would be like and semi desired to live in another area. When I have those thoughts, I think about the others that have left the area to return years later. It leaves me to wonder, would I really be content living anywhere else. For now, I will continue to visit, learn, and explore other areas and cultures of not only the United States but also the world.

We both enjoyed our conversation and were thankful for the opportunity to meet one another through Braver Angels while learning about one another's culture and living environment. Braver Angels and other organizations promoting and fostering communication such as this will not only help build relationships, but it will also foster empathy, compassion, and encourage verbal communication skills. I look forward to future conversation.