

LET DOWN YOUR FENCES

By Nicole Walters



Nicole T. Walters loves to experience and to write about this messy, noisy, beautiful world and cultures not her own. Though her family's roots run deep in the soil of the southern United States, Nicole along with her husband and their two little ones are learning to love hot milk tea instead of sweet iced tea as they make their home in South Asia. She hopes to help others create space to hear God's voice in all the noise of life as she writes about faith from a global perspective at A Voice in the Noise. She has authored essays in several books and her writing has appeared in places like Relevant and CT Women. She is a regular contributor at The Mudroom, SheLoves Magazine, and READY Publication and is a member of the Redbud Writers Guild.

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I thought he was going to choke on the bite of taco he had just swallowed. I was having lunch with friends and telling them about someone I recently met who lived in a dangerous part of the world willingly, where bombings and kidnapping threats were common. I've been to some of those sorts of places myself, and that kind of trip seems ridiculous to most Americans, who tend to value safety above most other aspects of life.

We live in a society where prayers for safety take precedent over prayers for boldness. Still, many of us hear the stories of terror happening all over the world and want to help. We feel torn between safety and the desire to love people who are subject to all kinds of atrocities we could only imagine but, frankly, don't want to.

Yet in America today we do not have to go to the ends of the earth to speak love to the nations. God is bringing the wounded and aching to us, and I believe many of us are missing it: The world's people are on our doorstep and we are turning them away.

When my husband and I returned from living in the Middle East, we wanted to find a way to still love our international neighbors. We would drive an hour to visit vibrant markets and attend interfaith events such as a dinner at a nearby mosque during the month of Ramadan.

But we struggled for years with how to engage the international community in our midst, to show

we truly care. We weren't seeing people of other cultural backgrounds stepping into our churches or homes. How could we do something to grasp this obvious opportunity in front of us?

Our church staff obviously saw the need as well, and I was thrilled when we visited a community less than an hour from our church. One of the largest refugee resettlement areas exists in Atlanta, but there are only a few struggling ministries doing the hard work there.

When I first stepped onto the streets of Clarkston, Georgia, my heart was overwhelmed. A young African couple met us with broad smiles, wide-eyed at the newness of it all, only days into a new start on our shores.

Their caseworker talked to them right there on the street about ESL classes and doctors' appointments, the daily realities that had already replaced their reality of escaping war and then life in a refugee camp.

I came home beaming and my husband and I set out to recruit a group from our church to adopt a family just entering the country. We would help with basic needs we take for granted, like setting up an apartment and learning how to enroll their kids in school.

Can you imagine being dropped into a new culture with only three months of help from a caseworker before being on your own to build

