

## Building a wall for refugees

By [Kendra Weddle](#)

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In March 2000, my husband and I spent a Saturday afternoon browsing our way through a local home-and-garden show. We left with a yard ornament—and an application to host an exchange student.

It wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind in our going. (I had hoped for sparking an interest in a nicer outdoor patio). But, we followed through with the application and a few months later—after some screenings—we welcomed a young German into our home.

This was a pretty big change for us. Thomas was 17 and since we did not have children, we had never had anyone live with us before, let alone a high school student whose first language was not English.

We were nervous and excited as we drove to the DFW airport to meet him. We easily picked him out of the crowd, not only because of his 6'7" frame, but also because he looked different. His socks and shoes especially set him apart from what most American boys wore. But his quick smile and easy-going attitude quickly put us at ease and I think our interest in his country and family helped him feel welcome in our home.

Over the course of that year, we developed a genuine love for a person whom we would have never met had we not taken a chance of extending hospitality to a stranger. It was a simple thing: provide a place to stay and some food and maybe a little guidance from time to time. And yet the experience itself transcended the practical measures of shifting our lifestyle for a year.

In contrast, as I listen to some of our public discourse today, mostly what I hear is us vs. them. We, as Americans, seem to make so many people an *other*: immigrants, refugees, minority groups of all sorts. The literal and metaphorical walls appear to get erected before we even try to build a bridge.

Last weekend as my husband and I Skyped with Thomas and Sabrina (he is now married), Thomas excitedly told us, “We built a wall!” He then proceeded to show us how they had divided their two-room apartment to accommodate one more living space.

They had been distressed by the current refugee situation in Germany, feeling like they wished they could offer a place for someone to stay but knowing their apartment as it was would not work well. Instead of giving up, however, they decided to build a wall—but not to keep someone out. They created a third room so that they can host a refugee.

Sabrina and Thomas also told us about how small villages throughout Germany are finding buildings to host refugees—not vacated buildings, but places where recreation occurs. In other words, they are sacrificing public spaces in order to practice hospitality.

These aren’t the kinds of stories that make our daily news cycle. Even today I heard how refugees are creating havoc in Germany and the chaos is escalating. But I also know what else is going occurring. A young couple is opening their home to a stranger; they are extending hospitality. They are showing the love of God in a hurting world.

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