

My junior year, I made a very important decision regarding my student teaching placement. As a returning student to Illinois State University, and a self-proclaimed introvert, I really wanted an experience which would bring me out of my shell and give me the confidence I needed to enter into my professional teaching career. I chose to study abroad the second half of my senior year in Eastbourne, England. In the months leading up to the experience, I day dreamed of all of the places I would visit. Frugally, I watched every penny, tucking every cent away I could in preparation for my adventure. As the days approached closer to my date of departure, the reality of the journey I was about to embark on slowly settled over me. I'd been waiting for a year for my trip: the opportunity to meet new people, see new places, and gain new experiences in a different school which would be invaluable to my future career. I can say with great certainty that nothing could have prepared me for all of the emotions I felt when I first stepped off the plane in London Heathrow. Exhausted, excited, nervous, and determined, I had finally arrived, beginning the most eye-opening, spectacular adventure of my life to date.

My home for ten wonderful weeks was a large coastal town located in the south of England called Eastbourne. I like to describe it as being as far south as you can go without actually falling into the English Channel. What I found to be the most amazing thing about traveling in Europe is there is literally history around every corner. I lived in Old Town in Eastbourne, and my daily walk to the bus stop, just down the street and across the road, put me in the path of a house casually marked with a plaque signifying it as an establishment Charles Dickens visited in his time. My favorite pub, again, just conveniently down the street, was a charming place called The Lamb Inn. The Lamb was founded in 1180 A.D., one of the oldest pubs in the country, and a place I felt so incredibly privileged to have been able to have had a cider or two during my stay. Many times throughout my travels, I marveled at how so many wonderful places in Europe are so much older than the birth of the United States. The novelty of this conclusion never wore off. How could it? Standing in front of Stonehenge, touring through the Roman Baths, seeing the Shard, so incredibly new and cutting edge (pardon the pun), just across the Thames from the Tower of London; it was amazing to see history still untouched coexisting with modern day life.

There are so many brilliant memories and stories I would love to share with you. Looking back, it seems I truly had a whole lifetime of experiences in ten weeks. It makes it difficult to pick a few to share, but I will give it my best effort, and even then, I know I will come up incredibly short in my account. The moments which stick out the most in my mind, the memories which when recalled cause me to smile almost instantly upon recollection are these: being completely awestruck walking through Westminster Abbey, touring through the dungeons at Warwick Castle with a most unhelpful jester as a guide, making acquaintances with the many ducks who call Bodiam Castle their home, being engulfed by the chilly night air on a boat tour of Paris down the river Seine, sitting underneath the Eiffel Tower late in the evening and watching it light up on the hour, standing atop the Bunkers in Barcelona and looking out across the city, being in Stratford-upon-Avon on Shakespeare's birthday, and seeing my students' faces light up as they watched *The Lion King* being performed at Lyceum Theatre in London. Upon reflection, even the seemingly small moments during my time abroad were very significant. For example, my train ride every day to school, although short, filled my mornings and afternoons with the beautiful, green scenery of the English countryside, a sight I miss constantly. Having dinner with

a full table of lovely people at my host family's, dinner being a rushed meal I normally have alone at home between classes and work, was a welcome change. And, I can't even begin to explain to you how wonderful a hot cup of tea was upon returning home after a long day and a cold, damp commute. In fact, there are many things I would give right at this very moment for a proper cup of tea.

So, whoever you are reading my very summed up account of adventures and happiness, I implore you, if studying abroad or even traveling is something you are considering, please do it. I can't begin to explain the amount of confidence and independence you will feel after successfully navigating the London Tube or finding your way through the streets of Barcelona. Upon this opportunity, perhaps like me, you will find the world to be a much more connected and manageable place full of endless possibilities. The friendly taxi driver in Spain who is forgiving of your broken Spanish, the old man in front of Salisbury Cathedral who will tell you of his family's time in Chicago in the 70's, the kind individual sitting next to you on your transatlantic flight who plays Uno with you to pass the time, and maybe even a student at Illinois State University you shared a class with but were able to befriend through your travels will make you think about how the world is truly just one spectacular neighborhood full of amazing people just waiting to be truly met if only you take the time to smile and say "Hello." Or, maybe you will look upon a piece of the Magna Carta, hear Big Ben chime on the hour, taste black currant ice cream at Fortnum & Mason where the Queen shops, and touch the stones of Lewes Castle and marvel at how truly surreal each of these experiences will seem later on. In any matter, I assure you your great adventure is out there as well. Be brave and go boldly.

