
Halfway Across the World

Halfway across the world, as I sit in my room and watch the rain fall almost noiselessly on the grass outside my window, it strikes me as odd that I haven't got a story.

I've been here in the United Kingdom for just over three weeks, and out of the States for almost six. Surely, my feelings prod me, there must be something poignant, something important I've encountered or experienced or overcome.

But I haven't saved any children from malaria yet, I haven't experienced the pain of the poorest nations, I haven't

come to an epiphany of life-changing proportions...

The world's the same all the way around. There's grass and trees and dirty brick buildings. The rain is the same. It pours from the sky onto people and buildings and washes the colors away.

Somewhere in the distance the thunder rolls. I hope it rolls off to a Garth Brooks concert.

The first three weeks of my program abroad were called "Sussex in September," because, well, we were studying at Sussex in the month of September. It's a separate program from the normal school terms, designed for students who either want a short study abroad experience or whose schools are set up in semesters, not quarters.

As a result, several of the students who arrived in September did so from America (since more European universities are on the quarter system than American universities). But not everyone was from America, and everyone was, regardless of their nationality, very friendly and interesting. Over the first weekend most of the group took a trip out to Beachy Head, a spot on the southeastern tip of England overlooking the channel.

There must be a story here. I feel more prodding.

The bus dropped us off at a pub on the hillside, somewhere halfway up a windy cliff. Once crested, the hill of rippling grass gave way to a magnificent seaside drop. A gull flew lazily through the broken windows of an old lighthouse.

It was one of those cold summer days, where the wind kept whisking the heat off to somewhere else that didn't need it. And

it looked as though someone had absent-mindedly run their thumb along the horizon, smudging it out of existence. It was an odd sensation. I felt like I was on The Truman Show.

There's the prodding again, no—I've just left a pen in my pocket.

"Could you take a picture of us?" someone asks me. French, I'd guess by the accent.

"Of course."

She jumps nimbly over (and far too close) to the edge, joining two of her friends on a little outcropping. I make sure to get the lighthouse in the background of the picture. I've been back to Beacy Head since, and I'd swear and up and down that this outcropping doesn't exist anymore.

"Thank you," she says.

"Are you here for the whole term," I ask, "or just the September program?"

She looks at me strangely, "September? No, I was here for the summer. I leave to go home next week."

"Where is that?"

"Near Paris." France. I was right.

We talk for a few more minutes before she wanders off to her friends again. It's such

a small world, I think to myself, and everywhere I go people are just...people.

I think of my friend in Israel. I visited him just before coming to Sussex, and he told me before I left that he was having trouble doing his thesis—the thesis was the reason he spent the summer in Haifa in the first place.

"Why is it so hard?" I asked him.

"Because," he explains, gesturing to encompass the nightclub we were at, "of this. I came here to study the way cultures collide and how Haifa is unique but when I got here I just found...this. It's just people, living. It's life. How can I write about that?"

He was right.

It's stopped raining now.

I still don't have a story; there's really no story to be told. People here are the same as people everywhere. They have friends, enemies, likes, fears, and quirks just like everyone else.

I've been here three weeks.

People have already formed their "we're not cliques" cliques, and romance is abound. The girl who lives next to me has already found a companion here; so really nothing's different. Except here the walls are thinner, so I can hear them.