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Welcome to Nottingham!

Jordan Jacobo
Linfield College

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Journals from England 2009-2010 (University of Nottingham)

2009-09-17 Welcome to Nottingham!



This is the library for Lincoln Hall, where we roomed during International Students' Week.

Wednesday

16 Sept. 2009

Nottingham, England

22:55

Today was my first full day in England, and it lived up to all my expectations in a certain surprising yet pleasant way.

After breakfast, I started off the day by attending a few orientation meetings that felt a lot like freshman year Colloquium at Linfield. I think the University of Nottingham has done a good job of helping international students feel comfortable here. It is a strange and new sensation to sit in a room full of students with new accents, clothing, cultures, and perspectives on the world. Since this first week is devoted entirely to international students, I find myself surrounded by Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Norwegian, Nigerian, Brazilian, and Canadian peers. I came to Nottingham expecting to interact and make friends with British students, but I have had an excellent time talking to students from around the world in the last day and a half. I've even met several groups of American students (from Georgia, Illinois, and Minnesota), which has caused me to realize I don't even know much about the other states in the country I live in.

Being a minority in a new country surrounded by new words and customs, and never knowing what to expect when I do something new is definitely enough to make me understand the idea of culture shock; but I think new experiences, in fact any experience in life, is never good nor bad. Life is not about what happens. It's about how you react to what happens. As I walked with the Linfield group of students into the neighboring town of Beeston, I looked around and paid attention to the millions of everyday occurrences that flash before our eyes with little effect when we are in a familiar environment: I saw a man washing his green sports car along a row of beautiful, old brick houses; I saw a pigeon poking his head around cigarette butts among the pedestrian pathways, startled by the noise of nearby traffic and construction; I noticed what I noticed, to borrow a phrase from Allen Ginsberg, one of my favorite poets.

For lunch in Beeston I went to my first pub (The Greyhound), ordered my first pint of foamy, dark, delicious Guinness, and listened to the working class midlands accents as they floated around the air in trivial, happy conversation. I discussed the whirlwind of traveling thousands of miles and crossing eight time zones with my Linfield friends, who included people I'd known for nearly two years and people I'd known for only two days. I ate a new meal of cheese toasties with mushroom (something like a grilled cheese sandwich), which I had no idea how to picture when I ordered it. I came to realize that the day, and this entire trip, is about trying new things, seeing what happens, and not being disappointed regardless of the outcome.

In the evening, Katie Paysinger, Tim Wager, and I decided to go on a semi-spontaneous adventure. We asked around till we got some information about the bus system, and headed off on the Rainbow 4 line for the Nottingham city centre. Somewhat disoriented in the dark, we stepped off of the bus and looked up at the buildings around us : It was our first Welcome to Nottingham! moment, and I think it was even more fun because we did it on our own. We walked around, soaked up the sights, made note of a few places where we would return sometime soon during the daytime, and made our way toward Nottingham Castle, which looks especially majestic and foreboding in the dark. At the south end of the castle grounds we arrived at our destination: Ye Olde Trip To Jerusalem, a cave that was built into a pub and claims to have been around since 1189 A.D., 800 years before I was born.

On our way back, Katie, Tim, and I waited around for our bus line at a bus stop on the opposite side of the street from the one where we got off. We waited for about 35 minutes before coming to the conclusion that we were at the wrong spot, and asked some friendly locals for directions to the correct stop, which was less than two blocks away. This was just another one of those moments where something goes wrong and you want to be frustrated. But how can you really be frustrated when you are part of a 4-month adventure in England? Needless to say, we laughed it off, were glad for the experience, and vowed to learn from our time spent waiting for a non-existent bus in the cold. All in all, it was a memorable first full day in Nottingham, and I'm looking forward to more adventures and new experiences in the months to come.

Jordan Jacobo, Mass Communication
Linfield College Semester Abroad Program in England, University of Nottingham