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Living in another country involves adopting a different point-of-view. It is like taking a step back from yourself and then having the ability to see yourself from a more objective perspective. You can't help but compare your life in this new place to your life back home, and making this kind of comparison is enlightening. You discover what things you were doing right in your other life and how you can fix the things that weren't going so great.

Some of these things you might not have even realized were good or bad until you stepped away from them, and thereby you become an outsider not only in this new country but you gain an outsider perspective of your own life as well. This experience enforces the idea that life is ultimately controlled by you, and it is your responsibility to find your own happiness.

Deciding to study in Brisbane, Australia was hardly a difficult decision for me. Good or bad, I knew that I couldn't help but grow from the experience. While the University of Queensland is a fine institution, my scholarly education abroad was not my primary concern. Studying film at USC is about as good as it gets. However, film school had overwhelmed my life. Not only was film school demanding all of my time, but I found myself constantly surrounded by other film students. My boyfriend was a film student, all of my closest friends were film students, and I lived in the capital of the entertainment industry. There was no escape and it seemed as though I had forgotten how to have an intelligent conversation that didn't focus on some aspect of the film business. A semester abroad in a city I had never heard of sounded like the perfect solution. A semester spent anywhere other than LA sounded perfect at that point. Once arriving at my temporary accommodations in Australia, I immediately realized how quiet and peaceful this new world was to me. Alone in a dorm room, I had no cell phone, no computer, no television, and no friends.

Spending a large amount of time by yourself without any distractions forces you to get to know yourself. Could I entertain myself with my thoughts alone? And yes, I was thankful to discover that I could. It gives you a strong sense of independence that is liberating. However, I eventually met other people in the dorm who were beneficial to exploring the city and finding housing.

Looking for housing was much more difficult than I had anticipated. I decided that I absolutely wanted to live with Australians rather than bunching up with other Americans. Most of my new American friends wanted to live together, but I found this idea to be somewhat obscene. I had just flown to the other side of the world and had no intention of living with Americans while in a foreign country. Throughout my program in Brisbane, I was continually shocked by the behavior of the other American exchange students. They cemented their own stereotype with their loud voices, their pretentious manner, and their penchant for traveling everywhere in large packs. Securing my living accommodations with Australians proved imperative for embracing pure Australia. Finding available housing through the school, I still found the entire process quite grueling and felt as though I were rushing a sorority (an experience I felt fortunate to never have inflicted upon myself). I made several appointments with prospective roommates and proceeded to visit each of the houses. These roommates were judging me

upon sight and the pressure to make meaningful conversation was evident. While I first assumed that I would visit all the potential houses and then choose which one I preferred, I had no idea that there would be so much competition for these rooms. Drove of other exchange students were visiting these same places. In addition, most of the roommates did not make a decision right away, which meant having to stay in expensive dorm accommodation and waiting patiently by the phones for an acceptance call. After a week and a half of waiting, I luckily got a place. Though it may not have been as clean as I had wanted, I reminded myself that the situation was temporary and felt fortunate to be the only girl living with three Australian males. More roommates meant that I would have a better chance of meeting new people. This living situation proved ideal and had the strongest impact on my semester.

Not only was I learning about this country from its own people, but I also learned a lot about boys in general. Most of my social situations involved me and a group of ten rowdy boys. I loved it! In USC film school, most of the boys were effeminate, pseudo-intellectuals who talked about their own theories and frequented coffee shops. On the contrary, these husky Australian boys loved beer, their cars, and 'sport'. It was refreshing to know that I could easily make friends with all types of people. And after a while they kind of forgot that I was girl and really let me into their lives.

My time in Australia allowed me to really relax in a way that I had never quite succeeded at before. Back home I had a job, intensive schooling, and items like cell phones and cars that required a degree of responsibility that I did not miss having. In Australia I did not have a job or the pressure to succeed in school beyond passing my classes. I soon found myself with a huge amount of free time.

At first I was a bit overwhelmed with suddenly having all of this time now at my disposal. Though I had always thought that having plenty of time was the answer to my happiness, I never pinpointed exactly what it was I intended to do. I discovered that with the absence of school pressure, a feeling I had not experienced since the 5th grade, I discovered that my social life was what I had been neglecting. Sure I had plenty of friends, but time with them always felt strained due to the constant pressures of life. Focusing my efforts on social interaction was imperative to my growth.

People skills are vital to any career and to a social life in general, and this opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people was conducive to my own character-building. It is important to be aggressive about meeting people when you come to the country alone, and this kind of situation instills confidence. I also loved being from another country because it makes you stand out and immediately gives you something to talk about with other people. Though I loved my friends in Australia, at a certain point I became withdrawn and depressed. My time there was like this big black hole, and everyone I met would eventually be out of my life. I was scared to open up to people because I thought it was pointless. All my life I felt as though all my activities were building up to something, to this big grand finale where I would finally be able to relax. But life there was like a frozen moment in time where my way of life and the people I met were only temporary. But eventually the warmth and humor of these people drew me into them regardless of my fear of getting close to people I would inevitably leave. I couldn't help but want to spend all my time with them. I didn't just learn about Australians, but rather about people in general. Finding people that you love in another country is a very comforting feeling. I think that most everyone in my life is replaceable.

Even though I love my parents and friends in LA, I found that I didn't have too much trouble living without them. And by the end of my stay, I would have been completely content not seeing any of my old friends and family for another five years. Though this sounds quite cold, you realize that there are amazing people everywhere and that it is your responsibility to make these relationships for the sake of your own happiness. Before I always saw myself as an incredibly independent person and I thought that I didn't really need people at all. Or maybe I at least wished that I didn't need people. But I most certainly do need people in my life in order to feel secure. I've gained independence in the confidence knowing that I can find these people anywhere. By growing close to people in another country, I experienced the culture of Australia as well as discovered who I am now and who I want to become.