

Making a home away from home, outside the comfort zone - Emma Perichon

In the blink of an eye, here I am, on the verge of graduating from the University of Delaware. Four years had just flown by. But still, I am not ready to move on from these simultaneously wonderful, confusing, rewarding and irreplaceable years that have made me the person that I am today. When I close my eyes, I retrace my first time walking around campus and picturing myself as a student, imagining what it would feel like to be lounging in the quad, or rushing to make it to class on time. Today, I feel connected to the places I pass each day as they are infused with memories: jumping in the South green fountain, picnics on the green, marathon study sessions and tears shed in the Morris library.

As an international student, I was looking for a fresh experience. I wanted to abandon my comfort zone and immerse myself in a different culture. That breathless leap of faith is at once exciting and oh-so-terrifying, a butterfly made of lead roiling my stomach on the day I landed in my freshman dorm. I felt unsure whether I would ‘fit in’ with others and anxious about what would come next. The first night, I made a promise to myself: I would not permit uncertainty to obstruct opportunity. After all, the hard part was over. I had already made that first and biggest step moving abroad to study. I had arrived, and while I didn’t know what would happen next, I knew one thing was certain. Now was not the time to chicken out.

Leaving your comfort zone means taking steps that may in other circumstances leave you paralyzed with fear. And it’s not the big things like navigating visas or flying halfway across the world. No, true growth lies in the small victories of everyday life. The courage to introduce myself to the girl sitting next to me in class, who led me to meeting a true friend in my major, a study partner who will be standing next to me during our graduation ceremony. Finding my

voice to say “Hi” leads to shared memories and a friendship that I will carry long after I throw my cap in the air.

Studying abroad can still feel scary and leave you feeling like a fish out of water. I often felt apprehensive that my own culture, my experiences, and my humor were out of place and that people wouldn't get it, that they would judge me and find me strange. For my part, I find many things in this place, this culture, and this language hard to wrap my head around, too. Sometimes the way I would say things would sound a little funny and make people laugh. To be fair, hippopotamus is NOT an easy word to pronounce! But what I love about UD is that here, the differences make you unique, they create laughter, start new conversations, and ultimately bring people closer together.

Now firmly out of my comfort zone, my second step was to leverage the many resources available to students. By attending events like the club fair, I was able to pursue topics and pastimes that sparked my interest and explore them, wear them for a day to see how they fit. I learned how a television studio worked, how to put a show together and write a script from scratch. Those skills were not only fascinating but helpful for my writing skills and a deeper understanding of how to communicate with others. In another club, I traveled to Chicago and learned about the merits of promoting EQ in the workplace at a student conference. I met high-flying CEOs and made connections across my chosen industry.

The best decision I made far and away from my comfort zone was joining the University's Greek life. At first, all I had ever known about fraternities and sororities were boiled down stereotypes and cliches from the movies. However, I was impressed with the size of the Greek community when I first toured the University of Delaware and caught myself wondering what it would feel like to belong to such a large and diverse community. This was a surefire way

to meet lots of new people with whom I shared similar interests and values. This motivated me to 'rush' for a sorority and see if they would accept me. Once again, the dizzying feelings of fear and excitement pushed me over a new edge of comfort and delivered me to an even greater experience in University life.

With my comfort zone a distant memory, I met girls from all different backgrounds filled with contagious positive energy. This has led to truly unforgettable memories, finding in myself the capacity to lead and organize, and forging deep roots to my closest friends. Our adventures took us on trips to Europe and across the US to learn about each other's experiences, in which we discovered that all of us arrived at University excited and terrified, that we all really left behind a comfort zone to try new things and meet new people. We all shared many of the same feelings and desires before ultimately finding each other. This journey to seek out what's different and to try out the new ultimately led me to finding people that I trust and learn from the unfamiliar. This fulfilled that itch that led me to study abroad.

This community has become my home, an expansion of my comfort zone. With the support of my friends, my classmates, my professors, and alumni, I can count on this shared home to carry me onto the next adventure, the next launch and that new edge. Only this time, I'll have close friends and great memories to accompany those feelings of excitement and fear.