

Tuesday, September 13, 2009: My first full day in Edinburgh

So today is my first full day in Edinburgh—and also first time being on the University's campus. What a gorgeous city! Not having visited for so long, I had forgotten how much the city captivates me. The architecture on the old buildings is reminiscent of medieval times. I can only imagine the city minus all of the cars, streetlights, and other modern-day amenities—sitting in all her glory as the capital of ancient Scotland.

I checked into my accommodation this morning. After the strenuous traveling experience from Sunday-Monday (delayed flight from Philly, missed connection to Edinburgh, 6 hour layover in Heathrow, no sleep for 36 hours...), I was in no mood to move in last night. My room is more than adequate. I am living in a postgraduate flat (so all of the residents are postgraduates like myself) and the majority of the residents are women (which I am also pleased about). The biggest positive about my room though is that I have my own bathroom. After living on my own for two years, I don't think I could have stood sharing a bathroom with an entire floor of girls as in undergraduate.

Most of the morning was spent at Adam House registering/matriculating for my programme and paying for my course. I had to wait in line well over 1½ hours for Matriculation—but this gave me the opportunity to meet some very interesting people. One observation is that there is a very strong Asian presence at the University, mainly from China. One of the girls behind me I spoke with was a freshman (undergraduate) from China. Her name was Susan, and she immediately took to me, hardly leaving my side the entire day! To be honest, at first I was a little annoyed, but then I remembered how homesick she must be (she had already been living in England the past year learning English and did not get to go home prior to coming to Edinburgh) and how this could be a great opportunity to mentor a young lady at a very crucial time in her maturation and development. I think some of my duties as an Ambassadorial Scholar are to act as a role model and leader for those around me. Being a postgraduate at a major University like Edinburgh will give me the chance to model good behaviors and share academic strategies for success with the undergraduate students I come in contact with.

I have also met my host counselors. I don't even know where to begin. What WONDERFUL WONDERFUL people! Their names are Thelma and John Band and they are both retired. Technically, Thelma is my host counselor and John is not a member of Rotary. However, he has been just as supportive as she, so I am making him my honorary host counselor.

John and Thelma met my parents and I at the airport yesterday. They were actually at the airport at 925am, when our flight was *supposed* to arrive. When we arrived at Heathrow and were told not only did we miss our connection to Edinburgh, but that the

next flight didn't leave until 115pm (not arriving in Edinburgh until 345pm). I was thankfully able to make contact with Thelma and John, who were extremely understanding of the situation and didn't seem to bat an eye at the massive time difference in the arrival (despite them living over ½ hour away from the airport). They helped us to the flat where my parents will be staying the next week and offered to take us sightseeing one day later this week. I am very much looking forward to spending more time with them! I know they will be a great support system during my stay here.

I am including pictures of a couple snapshots I took of the city while walking around today and of the view from my parent's flat. Also including some packing photos because I thought you all would get a kick of all my suitcases 😊

Upcoming Plans:

-**"Getting to Know You" afternoon** in Livingston with some of District 1020's Rotarians, Ambassadorial Scholars and their corresponding Host Counselors

-Sunday, Sept 20th

-**LINK Weekend in Leicester:** a tremendous opportunity to meet all of the other Ambassadorial Scholars in the UK and to stay with a host Rotarian family

-Weekend of Sept 25th

-**International Night at the Portobello Club:** a night arranged just for the Ambassadorial Scholars in the District to be welcomed to Scotland by the Portobello Club!

-Sept 30th

Monday, September 20, 2009: Week 1—A Week of New Culture, School, and Rotary Fun!

I have been in Edinburgh for one week now and am LOVING every minute of it. The city is magical. It is large enough that there are plenty of shops, activities, and sights to see, but small enough that you can find your way around fairly easily. Even though I have only been here a week, I can already make my way around campus and throughout the city rather well.

I have settled into my accommodation and selected my courses for the year. Classes officially start tomorrow, but I will only have class on Mondays and Thursdays—so I have quite a nice 3-day weekend and a "mini-holiday" during the middle of the week. However, I am sure those "days off" will really be translated into study/research days fairly quickly!

My programme is spread out roughly over 3 semesters: I have to take 120 credits of Taught classes total and then 60 credits for my Dissertation. My classes are spread out over the first two semesters and the third is reserved for final research and dissertation writing. The classes I will be taking my first semester are as follows:

-Political Issues in Public Policy

- Research in the Social Sciences: Data Collection
- Public Health and Health Inequalities
- Globalization and Public Health
- Intermediate French

I had dinner in Dunbar with my host counselor, Thelma, and her husband, John, this past Saturday evening. (My host club is located in Dunbar, which is about a 45-minute bus ride from the city centre of Edinburgh.) We ate at a lovely hotel overlooking the North Sea and the remnants of Dunbar Castle. (Dunbar Castle was the castle where Mary Queen of Scots was held before she received the news that the future would not bode well for her...or her head, as she was beheaded in the following year.) It was a lovely evening!

Sunday, I went to a Rotary meeting in Livingston (about a 45-minute car ride from Edinburgh) put together for all of the scholars in the district. In total, there are nine of us. The majority of us are studying at the University of Edinburgh, but several students are studying at the College of Art and New College nearby. It was nice to meet the other scholars and finally put faces with names, as we have been regularly emailing each other in the past two months with questions, advice we have each received, and contact information. All of the Rotarians in attendance, including District 1020's District Governor, Alastair Davies, were very excited to have us visit. I will send along pictures from the event!

This upcoming weekend is the LINK weekend! It is going to be held in Leicester. We are to arrive Friday and the programme will run Saturday and Sunday morning. The rest of the scholars in Edinburgh are traveling by plane, but I am going to take the train. The prices for both the train and plane interestingly enough come out to be the same, but I prefer to see the countryside and travel by train. It will also give me a chance to catch up on some reading. I am looking forward to meeting the other UK scholars (and seeing Wes as well!)

The country here is very different from the States, especially Delaware and MD's Eastern shore. The most marked difference is the hills and elevation. There are so many steep hills here; even just walking through the city for a half an hour will give you a pretty good workout!

It is also interesting to note how much the culture here is very much a "walking culture." Everyone walks everywhere. Of course this is possible because everything is very close. In addition, there is a fantastic public transportation system (both bus and train), which will take you about anywhere you need to go (or within a 10-minute walk of such!)

The other big difference I immediately recognized was the contrast in the University system over here versus that of the States. Everything is much more lax here. As mentioned, I did not pick my classes until this afternoon—and classes officially begin

tomorrow! In the US, classes would have been picked and schedule set at least 2 months prior to ever stepping foot in the University. Also, professors here want to be called by their first names. It is very casual. I am already finding that eliminating “Dr.” from my vocabulary will be a tough habit to break!

Upcoming Events:

-LINK Weekend: Sept 25th-27th in Leicester

-International Night at the Portobello Club: Sept 30th

-Safari Dinner with Dunbar Rotary Club: October 3rd (There are some South Africans visiting and the club has arranged a Safari dinner for them. There will be one dinner course over the spread of 3 residences, with everyone walking from one house to the next, and we will all convene at the end in one house for coffee, etc.)

-District Conference: Friday Oct 23rd-Sunday Oct 25th in York, England

**Sunday, October 11th, 2009: Reflections of the Past Month in Edinburgh—
City of Culture, Tartan, and Rotary**

I cannot believe I have been in Edinburgh for almost a month! It seems in many ways I have been here for ages. I am still loving the city and am learning so much.

I am getting into the meat of my courses at this point. I have two essays due at the end of the month for my Public Health and Health Inequalities and Political Issues in Public Policy classes. I am a bit nervous, as these are going to be my first assessed assignments! The grading system is much different here in the UK than in the States. Anything over a “50” is passing for postgraduate students. However, it is rare that anyone ever makes a mark over a 65-70, I have heard. Apparently, anything in the upper “50s” is good and anything between a 60 and 70 is fantastic.

I attending the LINK weekend on the 25-27th of September in Leicester, England. What a great weekend! I traveled down to Leicester by train—all together about a 5 hours train ride from Edinburgh. However, it was beautiful to see some of the countryside and to just relax on the train. Saturday, all of the scholars met and were given free admission to the Leicester Space Centre. Afterwards, we all took a bus to Leicester University for a fabulous meal and some traditional English dancing for the rest of the evening. There were Englishmen in full traditional country costume performing for us after the dinner—and then we were all asked to join in! I have some very descriptive pictures of this event. We also had the opportunity to meet the Lord Mayor of Leicester. He gave a tour of the old Leicester Court House before our dinner and a brief history of the city. I was able to get a picture of him and as it turns out, I am the first person he has ever met from Delaware!

On Sunday, we had an “informational session” during which we discussed how to give presentations, important safety information, and had a webcast from a previous scholar about her experiences both during and after her scholarship period.

Overall, I very much enjoyed the weekend. I think the best part was meeting so many other scholars with equally dedicated attitudes towards service above self and reaching out to the larger community. I was so inspired in speaking to the other scholars and it was fascinating to hear so many different background stories and intentions both during and after their scholarship periods. I look forward to continuing to develop these friendships over the upcoming year and beyond.

Last weekend I attended a “Safari Dinner” with the Dunbar Club (my host club.) What a lovely night! The whole concept of the Safari dinner is to move around from house to house and to have one course at a different house with different people each move. So for example, I had appetizers at one house, moved to another for the main course, yet another for dessert, and we all gathered together at one house at the end of the night for a party with coffee, wine, cheese, etc. It was a fantastic way to get to meet all of the members of the Dunbar club in a more small-group setting because at each venue, there was no more than 8-10 people. Not to mention, the food was amazing! The food element is also another “surprise” element in the night—you don’t know what kind of cuisine you will be served at the next house! I had everything from Spanish Tapas to traditional Scottish food (black pudding, neeps, tatties, etc.)

As I am sure you can tell, I am having a phenomenal time. I am so grateful to be here, having this experience—both academically and culturally. I can happily say I have had very few moments of homesickness. Yet, there have been times when I will see something that reminds me of home and I get sentimental. I do miss my family and friends in the States very much, and also just “familiarity” in general. As mentioned though, my host Rotary club, and especially host counselor have been incredibly supportive of me and the transition has been MUCH MUCH easier than I anticipated. I am meeting fabulous people, making good friends, and getting the chance to network with Rotary and get a Master’s degree at the same time—what more could I ask for?!

Thursday, November 26, 2009: Mid Mo’veember Reflections:

So it’s nearing the end of November and I am finding myself thinking where the heck did the time go?! I remember everyone telling me before I left that time would pass more quickly than I could imagine, but at the time, I wasn’t sure if I believed them...! So much has happened in the past month and a half...

I have made several more speeches to local clubs, the most recent being Edinburgh Breakfast Club and Haddington Club. We did a formal exchange of banners, so I have been continuing to add to my flag collection to bring back to the RBSRC next fall ☺ One

interesting thing to note though is the gender disparity in the clubs over here, especially in the more rural clubs. Haddington is a great example. I went and spoke there last Tuesday (Nov 17th) I have been trying to get some of my friends involved with Rotary, so I brought one of my close girlfriends, Jacqueline, with me. We were 2 out of 3 women in a group of 25!! I remember Susan (Giove) telling me before I left that the clubs in Western Europe were still very much 'old gentlemen's clubs', but I honestly didn't expect it to the degree she emphasized. I noticed the same thing though when I was at the LINK weekend at the end of September. I assumed that the wife of the host family I was staying with was a Rotarian and when I mentioned such to her, she was so taken aback by my comment, stating that the wives are *certainly* not Rotarians, but rather members of the Inner Wheel, which has been described to me as 'the sister organization of Rotary' in the UK. However, I had a ball socializing with the gentlemen of the Haddington club and Jacqueline and I received several emails after our attendance last Tuesday thanking us for our visit and commenting that we were 'a breath of fresh air.'

My studies are also continuing to go well. I am nearing the end of my classes for this first semester. My last lecture is this upcoming Monday morning (Nov 30th) and the rest of the time I am here I will be working on my Final Assessments for my courses (all of my courses are assessed by one essay, which accounts for 100% of my grade...a bit intimidating!) My last essay is due Friday, 11th of Dec. My Global/Public Health courses are only 5 weeks, so I finished two of those courses and started a new one roughly a month ago. My other two courses, Research Methods and Political Issues in Public Policy are continuous throughout an entire semester. One an exciting note, I did receive one of my essays back already and received the highest grade in my class!

I have not been traveling as much as I had hoped to do because of the amount of schoolwork I have, but I have managed make several small trips, one of which was to Glasgow about 2 ½ weeks ago. Glasgow is much more 'city-esque' than Edinburgh in terms of industrialization and shopping, but I find the architecture in Edinburgh much more aesthetically pleasing and Glasgow certainly lacks Edinburgh's 'quaintness.' I traveled by train (very convenient—a train leaves Edinburgh Waverly Station every hour for Glasgow and it's only about a 45 min ride) and saw some interesting sites while there. I went to Glasgow Cathedral and explored a huge necropolis that sits behind the cathedral on a massive hill overlooking the city. I am hoping to make another small trip this upcoming Monday, which is St. Andrew's Day, actually up to St. Andrews! A friend from college (in the States) wrote me about a month ago and mentioned she had a good friend studying for his Master's at St. Andrews and that we should connect while I'm over here. Hopefully I will get to meet him Monday!

This week has been busy in particular, mostly because I have been busy prepping for Thanksgiving!! I started celebrating early this past Sunday. A few of my girlfriends and I got together and went to one their boyfriend's flats to cook an American-style Thanksgiving. We cooked EVERYTHING and it was all homemade!! The extensive menu included:

- sweet potato casserole
- green bean casserole
- Stuffing (veggie and sausage)
- rolls
- pumpkin pie (and hand-whipped whipped cream!)
- pumpkin cheesecake
- regular mashed potatoes
- brussel sprouts
- and unfortunately we couldn't find a turkey, so we cooked two large chickens and stuffed those instead 😊

Tonight I will be attending another big potluck 'American-style' with many of my international and American friends. Afterwards, I will be going to a Norwegian Christmas Carol Concert at St. Giles Cathedral and then hitting the Edinburgh German Christmas markets, which open today!!! Will continue to keep you all posted and look forward to visiting the club when I am home in December—2 ½ weeks!! 😊

PS—I say 'Mo'vember' in the heading for this entry because apparently November is celebrated as 'Mo'vember' and many of the guys here on campus are growing out a mustache this month to show support for men's health issues...Google 'Mo'vember' for more information!