

[with thanks to Holly, Wan Ling and True de Bolt and to Megan Smeaton for organising these contributions

My Story by Holly Scott-Riddell

Moving to St Andrews from Zimbabwe for university was one of the biggest changes I have experienced in my life. I moved to a place I had never been to, where I didn't know anyone, I was on the other side of the world from my family and in a country where the climate and culture was very different to what I was used to.

Although I had lived in Dubai for 8 years when I was young and so was used to living in a first world international culture, I had also spent the last 7 years living in a third world country that was my home, my culture and at a time when the country was on its knees. Moving to the UK meant moving to a country where there was always electricity, water, petrol and food on the shelves (with more choice than I had seen in a while!). No potholed roads; no street vendors or beggars on the street; no police roadblocks or crazy commuter omnibus drivers who think the rules of the road don't apply to them. And most importantly a country that didn't have a corrupt government. A rather welcome change! But having everything available to me also made me see the things that were missing.

This was a culture that didn't know hardship or have true poverty around them. Not that I would wish for anyone to experience that, but it's very easy to take for granted everything we have and to develop a selfish mind-set. At first I struggled with the "me-centred" mind-set and levels of waste, until I realised it's just because people haven't been exposed to poverty stricken situations and have every billboard and advert screaming "live for yourself" at them. I do love the fact that living is so much easier here and I am so very thankful for everything that I do have.

Although Scotland isn't too different from Zimbabwe culturally, there are still a few things that I miss about home and that I struggled to wrap my head around when I first moved here. Firstly, we are a very open, affectionate and rather direct nation. We are very physically affectionate, always giving people hugs and kisses and a touch on the shoulder - something the British are not very accustomed to and that my friends have had to learn to deal with! We are very easy going and talk to anybody - if we had good public transport systems people would not be sitting in silence avoiding eye contact with anyone but chatting about anything under the sun. We live a much slower pace of life and it is not unusual for someone to come over for a cup of tea and stay for 3 hours. We are direct but not rude and aren't afraid to show our feelings. We have been raised in an environment that isn't bound by health and safety regulations but by strong discipline. We played in the dirt, climbed trees and rocks and learned for ourselves what would hurt us and what wouldn't. We were well disciplined by our parents as young children so that we knew what was allowed to be done and what wasn't. We were taught good manners, to have respect for others, especially for our elders, and to be aware of other people and our surroundings. Teachers are still allowed to discipline students and you would never hear of students swearing at teachers or behaving inappropriately. I think it was the behaviour of



the youth in the UK that shocked me the most and has taken the longest for me to adjust to. Not that all young people in the UK behave badly, but just that it is very different to the way Zimbabweans are raised.

So moving to St Andrews was a little bit of a culture shock and it took a while for me to adjust. What helped me settle in the best was my church. From the moment I walked through the doors I was made to feel welcome and a part of a church family. To be surrounded by like-minded people who loved me, cared for me and that I could talk to and pray with was the greatest blessing ever. When I felt far from home I had the support of friends who became my family.

It has reached the point where I go home for the holidays and miss my St Andrews church family so much that I want to come back! There is a part of me that never wants to leave. I feel at home in both St Andrews and Zimbabwe and although I ultimately want to return to Zimbabwe, if I had to stay in the UK it wouldn't be a bad thing! (I would definitely miss the sunshine and warmth though!) I never thought that I would live in the UK, but God knew where I was meant to be and I don't think I would have been as happy studying anywhere else. The friends I have made are so precious to me and the lessons I have learnt from them are invaluable.

So yeah St Andrews is definitely my home away from home!

My Story by True DeBolt

When I left my home in the USA to go to school in England and then to University in Scotland, I found it extremely difficult because I left a lot of the things that meant a lot to me.

It became hard to feel comfortable without the familiarity of my family and in my house where I felt the most like myself.

As I was going through this difficult time, I started to pray more. I found such peace and comfort through praying. Praying and my relationship with God gave me a constant force no matter where I was in the world. When I joined the bible study group in my fourth year of university, I felt so at home and part of a community through learning from and being a part of other students' journeys in their faith.

When I was at bible study, I felt the ability to be myself like I felt when I was at home in America.

My Story by Loh Wan Ling

Hello, I'm Wan Ling from Malaysia! Coming to Scotland gave me a lot of mixed feelings. I was excited, anxious, scared and yet anticipated my trip overseas. When I arrived, initially I was very upset that I came and even regretted the idea, as I was not familiar with the culture in Britain.

The people in Britain talk more openly, greet strangers on the street and also talk differently than the people in my country. As a Malaysian, I was very shy and not talkative which makes it very hard

for me to make new friends and be around strangers. Going to events and parties was a very, very big challenge for me as I hated the idea of people I do not know talking to me.

Generally, I had very low self-esteem as I felt that Asians were looked down upon in western countries. In a way, this made me shy away from people other than Asians. (This is why you tend to see Asians grouping with one another only)

This whole point of view change drastically when I start to step out of my comfort zone and meet people; I made friends from different parts of the world. My Russian flat mates were incredibly nice to me and the people from my church (St Andrews Baptist Church) were very welcoming towards international students. I felt really touched by their hospitality. I still do even to this day after four years, having stayed in Scotland.

Although I still feel alone sometimes, and am not used to socialising in a different country, I'm really thankful to God. I thank Him that I came overseas. The experiences of all the different cultures I have seen have made me grow a lot.

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