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Moments

I was thrilled about the opportunity to study abroad for the basic reasons I imagine most people are: a complete change of scenery, to experience another culture firsthand, and to study something specific at a special university. My sense of excitement rose with each passing day as my departure date neared. What was I in for with my first trip overseas? Three weeks. Late summer in England. Medieval Studies program at the University of Cambridge. These details made patience a rather difficult thing to maintain and as my flight crossed the Atlantic. Little did I know (or could I have known), however, that my trip would be much more than an exciting vacation; I was embarking upon a period of twenty-one days that would truly change my life.

I certainly appreciate and enjoy aesthetic beauty but my time in Cambridge was about far more than appearances. A single picture simply cannot capture the profound realizations and intellectual discoveries that took place for me in the *midst* of that inspiring physical beauty. The classes, the landscape and architecture, and the emotions all helped me refocus my life and realize both the academic and personal goals I want to achieve; it was the depth of each of these aspects of my experience that contributed to that incredible realization. The way things just seemed to fall into place for me in Cambridge without any force on my part was an extremely comforting and welcome change from the confusion and disenchantment I was experiencing at home. There I was in England, surrounded by a city and countryside absolutely steeped in history, studying the Middle Ages with some of the best professors to whom I've ever had the pleasure of listening, and I realized the direction my future needed to take. At home I was a graduate student in English who had completed his B.A. double-minoring in philosophy and humanities with a vague desire to get a Ph.D. in *something*. I was gradually beginning to understand and develop my approach to my studies but was unsure of how, or in what way, I

would be best able to implement it. I wanted to do something more with my interests than simply follow them as though they were self-fulfilling prophecies. Much to my relief that uncertainty crumbled in Cambridge under the weight of a liberating sense of conviction, clarity, and unfaltering motivation. That place and time allowed me to rediscover that my inclination to study and preserve the past for its current and future value is more than just a passing fancy. In classes, in lectures, in the streets and buildings of Cambridge history was re-contextualized in my mind as something quite real and very much alive, a vast source of information about everything that makes us who we are now and what we will be. I want to dedicate my life to exploring just that.

The clarity of that epiphany and the subsequent peace of mind it fostered are best revealed by not only *what* I wrote but, more importantly, the *way* I wrote in Cambridge. My thoughts were effortless; words just came to me and I freely employed them to provide additional substance to the already rich surroundings of my developing narrative. The mental picture I have of my experience is vividly painted with and preserved by both those words and the hundreds of pictures I took of the places I frequented in the city. Nearly all of those images were of places that *meant* something to me: the view from the balcony outside my dorm room from which I could just see the towers of King's College Chapel, the alley through which I walked each day to the city, the field through which I jogged in the early mornings. They were a visual journey through what was going on in my mind rather than postcard images of the typical Cambridge landmarks. What was felt and thought at those very places supplies meaning to the photographs, ensuring that I'll never forget the beauty of the place *or* the beauty of what it inspired within me. Contemplating those pictures and reading those words instantly awaken my imagination, allowing my mind to again feel the astounding freshness and clarity with which it observed the world during those three weeks as though I'm still behind the camera at the

captured moment in time. I was aware of what I was experiencing as it unfolded and expressing it in writing to ensure preservation of those thoughts and images was unavoidable.

Looking back, I can say with absolute conviction that under no circumstances would I change a single detail, good or bad, if somehow given the opportunity because the resounding effects of my experience are intimately tied to the specific constitution of those three weeks. It's in that sense that I cannot justifiably elevate a single instance above my mental illustration of the *whole* picture; it's the beautiful collage of ideas, thoughts, feelings, and images that represents my experience in Cambridge that's most important because of the adjustment of perspective that took place there. The collection of images I have from that new viewpoint *is* the image of my three-week moment in Cambridge when my life turned a corner. Thinking of that time recalls much more than the city, my classes, and the people; rather, I'm reminded of how those things *felt*, of the thoughts and ideas they inspired and continue to inspire. My picture of Cambridge *is* a thousand words.