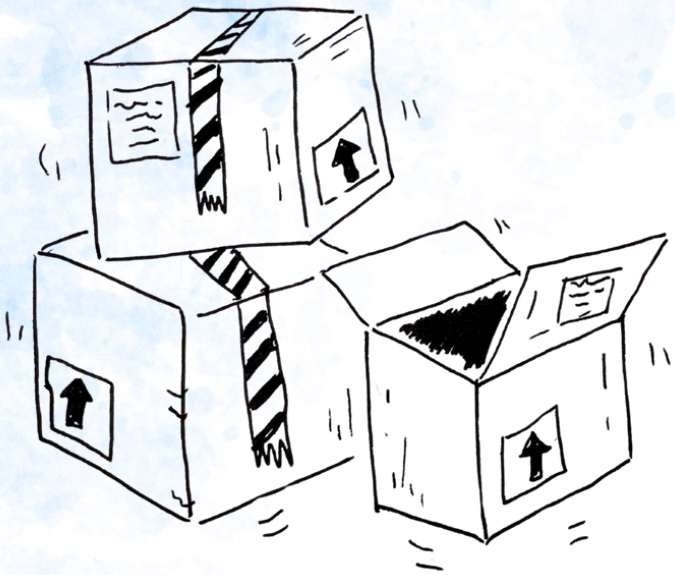
THE EXCHANGE JOURNAL



The July Edition

15/07/26



FLIGHTS & FAREWELLS

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Well, here we are. The end is nigh! What a wonderful year we've had at The Exchange Journal.

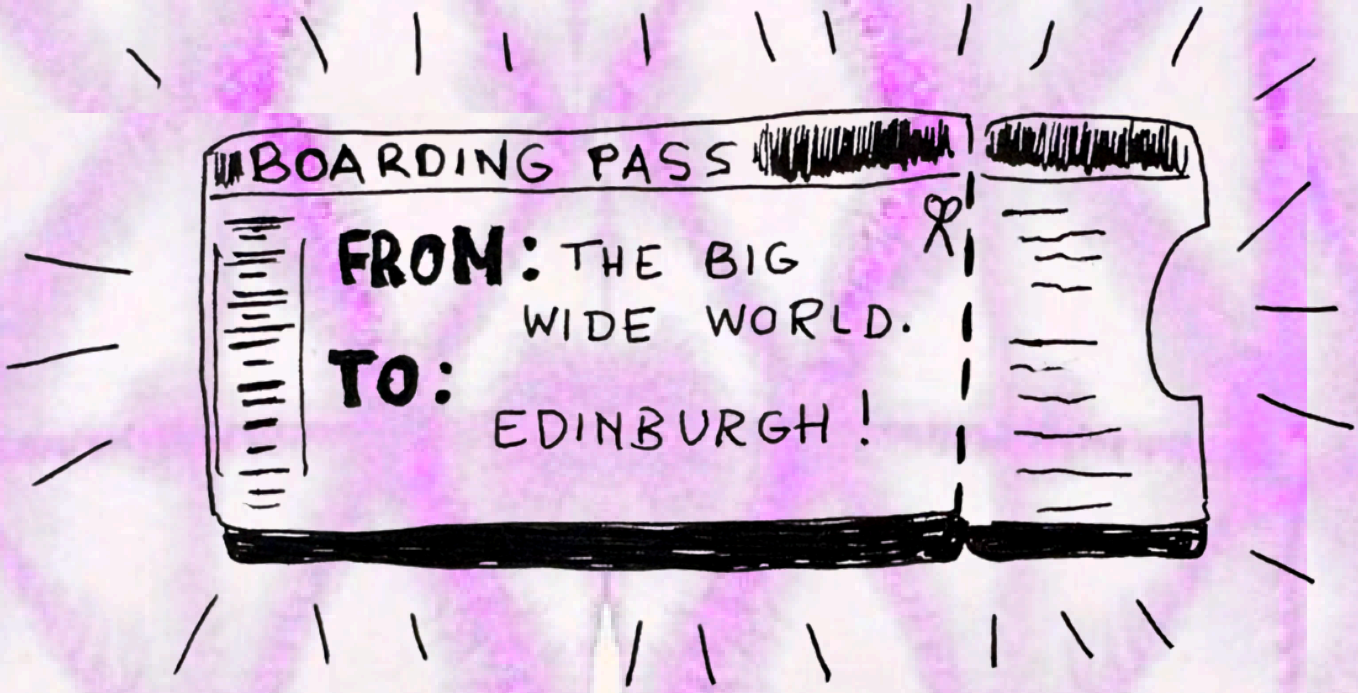
Welcome to our final edition from the 2025/26 team.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed. From taking a moment to pause in The West End, to reflecting on how feelings can change in Counting Down the Days, to a final poem of goodbye, this edition brings together nostalgia, regrets, and ultimately acceptance, in one final collection.

And now, a note to you, dear reader. If you're a second-year student looking forward to setting off on this incredible journey, good luck and have fun! I hope our journal this year has inspired you and gives you confidence as you begin your own adventure. If you've returned from your year abroad and picked up this edition to reminisce, I hope it brings comfort and brings back a flood of happy memories. And to those who have finished, or are just about to finish - congratulations. You did it! We are so proud of everything you have accomplished this year and honoured that so many of you chose to share your experiences with us.

Good luck to the new editorial team, who will soon be revealed.

For one final time, thank you for reading, writing, and sharing this journey with us. Please join us as we spread our wings and share our Flights and Farewells.



The West End



The West End is steep. To walk up the street, I climb up a hill, and the sun on my face turns to sweat on my skin. The incline burns my calves, the UV burns my cheeks. These days, I'm not so good at remembering to wear SPF.

My feet hurt in my thinning shoes. They are falling apart, the soles tearing themselves away from their bodies. I've worn these almost every day for a year. Maybe it's time to let them go. I know this will be difficult. I have become quite attached to them.

As I walk, I listen to an album I used to love. It reminds me of how much things have changed. I am a chronic Google Maps user, but today, intuition guides my route. I haven't seen the city from this angle before. I stop and watch for a while.

I don't normally do that. I've got things to do. Exam notes and emails and a life to pack up and a room to clean out. But today, I make time.



Eloise Longstaff
Brisbane, Australia

“Memory is a Malleable Thing”

Brooke Coryell
Edinburgh, Scotland - on exchange from Viriginia Commonwealth University, USA

Memory is a malleable thing. You can ball it up in your hands and hold it, like a vast sheet, without seeing its full extent. You can find comfort in knowing that it is there in your grasp, but when you unravel its shape, you can discover moth-eaten holes interrupting delicate and beloved patterns.

An extraordinary person once gifted me a book. A collection of stories by one of his favourite authors. He signed a note with his name in the front cover and pointed out a story - the last one in the series.



“An extraordinary person once gifted me a book”

By the time I had to leave, the book was one of the few things I could fit in my luggage. I lingered longer than my flatmates. All of my friends had flocked back to their homes for the holiday season, leaving me to stubbornly enjoy my last few days of Scotland. Sitting in the emptiness, fulfilling every last day of the lease. There were several trips back and forth to charity shops. The dishes left, the towels, the blankets. I kept as much as I could, but I had only brought two bags and I wouldn’t be back in my home country for a couple of days

It wasn't until I was several miles and several months removed that I had finally sat down to read it. The time apart lending me the courage to unpack the cluttersome itch of feeling. Though, when I read it, I began to doubt how ready I was to face the reality of what I had lived.

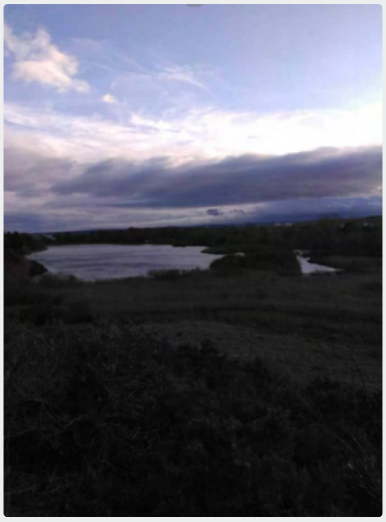
It was a story of an ordinary man, who had been suddenly possessed by some form of alien intelligence that puppeted his limbs for years. It used his body in its own pursuit for knowledge of the time he was living in, and, when it had finished, left him with a confusion of his former consciousness. The story is told as he tries, from fragments, to learn of the life his body lived without him.

“It wasn’t until I was several miles and several months removed that I had finally sat down to read it”



His symptoms are like a case study of my own. How unnaturally I fill the roles I once inhabited with ease. A newfound sense of confusion leading sleepless investigations into my psyche, judging myself for continuing to enact them like a dedicated performer. I cautiously piloted my body through hours of monotony.









Deep from the ground came a carnal rumbling, a vibration of discomfort that the people who surrounded me never seemed to notice. I panicked that it would strike a rift down to the center of the earth and swallow me whole. I heard it in classes and at work, but it was strongest in the moments in bed, right before sleep came to lift me away.

I was sure that this story was a warning from my old friend. That I had to follow the clues in pictures I printed or notes I had taken in class. I studied them with the perspective of a hired private eye, trying to determine the identity of some unknown puppeteer. Though there was something missing from the photos, now neatly scrapbooked and chronologically ordered, or the school notes, written with a steady hand and even margins. There was something messy and untamed, something resembling the shifting noises from underground.

Then the answers came as quickly as a heartbeat. A glowing reminder of those days abroad. Not the day to day reminiscence, but a feeling that could be embodied entirely, before quickly fading. I followed that staccato arrhythmia to chase the possessor of my soul, and recognized this glow as the very same will-of-the-wisps that led me to Scotland in the first place. This was the random urge for something outside of the realm of what I knew to be possible. A brief point in time where I am standing holding hands with the person I want to be. But if I were taken over by my truest self, then who is the self that is observing this phenomenon? Who is this outsider? Why is it that the self I have embodied the longest now feels like it belongs less and less?

“Why is it that the self I have embodied the longest now feels like it belongs less and less?”

When I was abroad, I would take walks by myself in Holyrood Park. I would rise with the sun as it woke me through my window, to enjoy the most silent moments of the day. From the bridge behind Arthur's seat you can see the rolling moors. The wind would dance with the grasses in the most hypnotizing way. The heather would part in a line, as if some invisible person was running through it.

An explanation as simple as wind. As simple as connecting with a version of myself in Edinburgh, a version I was never allowed to occupy yet always hungry for. But when you observe it from that vantage point, no words come to mind. No investigations to break the mystique. Because, upon seeing it, you understand that there is something else you couldn’t explain. Something in the feeling you get that radiates out from your vision, prismatically splitting the world in its dazzling way. And its aftershock would continue to upend my life for months, as if it were telling me not to forget that there is so much more than this. It is the voice to my insatiable hunger for life and the ceaseless expansion of what is truly possible.

FEEL MY WINGS

Anna Dussaillant Di Cesare
Dunedin, New Zealand

It's strange how little all those houses are from up here.
I look out at the rolling green hills, the shimmering ocean, the blue sky.
This little peninsula at the end of the world.
My home away from home.

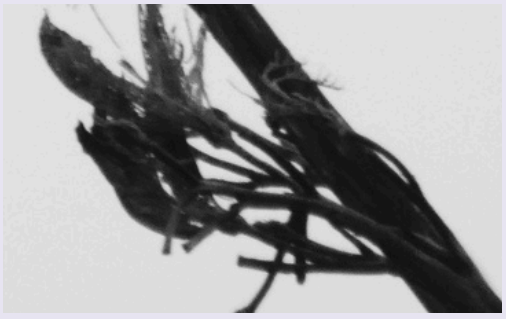


I close my eyes and remember the countless sunsets in the sand.
Watching the orange-pink glow descend upon the surfers on their last waves.
The sea lions basking in the last of the light.
The seagulls gliding above, dancing across the sky.



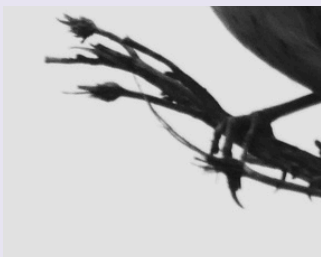
A brief but beautiful year.
To think how afraid I was.
How terrified of the great unknown.
All those times I felt alone.

Every time my sense of self was challenged.
Perhaps the things I believed about myself to be true.
Weren't true at all.
But because those things didn't define me.

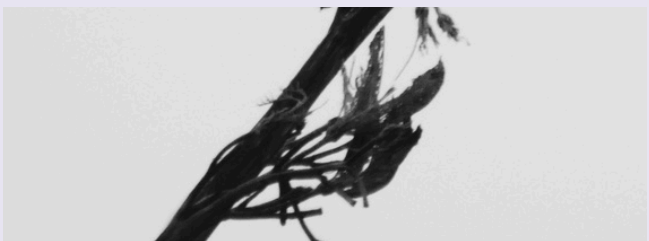




I built a life that was loud and bright.
And now I have no regrets.



I know I can.
I can fly.
And I'm ready for the next flight.





time to say goodbye?

AISLINN MCSHARRY
AUGSBURG, GERMANY



Goodbye to the thick long coats and hopeful glances at thin rays of sun worn through study season in Edinburgh – the Bavarian summer semester (running until the middle of July!) is my new normal. We've survived the stifling heat wave, we go to classes in flowy summer skirts and tiny tops, we go swimming after classes, drifting down winding rivers to combat essay-induced stress.

Saying goodbye seems, for now, utterly unfathomable. I still have two more months here, and – ignoring the "study" part of "study abroad" – I envision spending the rest of this time exclusively swimming, hiking, and drinking lovely Bavarian beer. And then, at the end of August on those last long, drawn-out, burnt-orange days, presumably tear-stained and ever so slightly sunburnt, I'll take a train to the cheapest nearby airport, and heavy-heartedly say goodbye to my lovely year abroad home.

The thing that keeps me sane: I've already said so many goodbyes. Horrible goodbyes, tear trickles smearing my view, knowing that things will not be the same as they have been. Goodbye to some of the first and best friends I ever made here, goodbye to the friend whose ability to ski backwards saved our skiing trip, and even goodbye to that mixed smell of coffee and rain in the *Alte Cafete*, a staple through autumn and winter.





And so, my new mantra: There will never be the right time to say goodbye. There will always be something else I wanted to do, another new restaurant or coffee shop I wanted to try, a new nearby day trip not done, another stone unturned...

And then there's the goodbyes I said over a year ago now: the long-distance boyfriend who lives a fourteen-hour Flixbus away, my bubbly Edinburgh flatmate, with whom I'd chatter for hours and hours, our kitchen illuminated by night lights of buildings on the other side of The Meadows, too lost in conversation to bother turning our own lights on.

I'll try to carry this perspective back with me, but I already anticipate daydreams of Augsburg – the beer festivals, the forest near my flat, the day trips to Munich – much like how I sometimes drift back to Edinburgh now: the rain-soaked Gothic architecture, the cherry blossom in spring...









Counting Down The Days...

ZOE LOVE
HEIDELBERG, GERMANY



On the 31.08.26, the first entry of my diary in Heidelberg reads:
Spending the first weeks of my year abroad counting down the weeks till I could leave again is not how I was told it would go

I am hating life and want to go home.

Just one day later, I wrote:

Feeling very overwhelmed and upset – got on the wrong bus and felt like an idiot

There's something about struggling to navigate in a new city that swells into a horrific sense of unbearable inadequacy. I sat on the bus realising I was veering further and further off course, and it felt like an omen for my life spiralling further out of control.

Then the classes began:

I was panicking after it, as I felt like I understood nothing and I'm so anxious to study in German. I had to ring mum straight after class.

I sat on a bench outside my seminar room in tears that could only be stopped by a parent's voice. Repeating over and over "it's just 10 more months" became necessary to manage the dread of living here.

But already by the second week, I was noticing a shift

First day of week two of classes! It actually somehow wasn't that bad.

The that is doing a lot of work. It still felt impossible to be studying in German and it didn't last without interruption:

I don't know why I don't like being here so much.
Everything just feels harder, I think.

But between these days, I was slowly and quietly beginning to find my place.

After a seminar presentation I'd been dreading, I wrote:

The moments before were so terrible, but once we started, it actually went quite well – I was so happy!

Realising my teachers, classmates, and honestly the whole of Germany wasn't out to get me did so much for my mindset: I really could succeed here.

After going home for Christmas, I wasn't sure I wanted to return but once back, I noticed almost immediately

Life is better. It was warm enough to wear a lighter coat, and I saw a beautiful orange cat.

All it took was a coat and a cat to realise that joy had started returning to the small things!

After a long exam season and, luckily, an even longer semester break spent travelling, I came back to Heidelberg in April, and I met the city differently:

It was nice and sunny, and it was so nice sitting outside and catching up.

This was the first day of my second semester. I had found my footing, friends and rhythm of life now.

It took me longer than most to fall in love with my year abroad destination, but now that I have, my diary has basically become an ode to Heidelberg!

Today was a lovely day. Had a negroni at the Neckarwiese so life is good...
I'm so grateful for life here at the moment... I only have 3 weekends left in Heidelberg. Planning to spend them very, very well.

The diary that once counted down the days in desperation to leave now counts down the dwindling days I have left. I didn't know a year could turn the same action inside out; counting down then and now couldn't be more different. Somewhere between the wrong bus and the orange cat and the negroni in the sun, this city has become increasingly difficult to say farewell to.
I'm not sure exactly when it happened.
My diary doesn't say.

Some pictures of Heidelberg taken on my Grandad's old film camera:





The things you know

Molly Moloney - Washington D.C.



Saying goodbye makes me think about saying hello.

You cuddle and cry and wave farewell in the same place you once tentatively introduced yourself and made an awkward comment about the weather or the quality of someone's English when, in fact, they had attended English language schools all their life and "my dad is English, actually."



You leave people you now cannot imagine your life without, when just months ago you were strangers never bound to meet. You think of the impact these people have made on your life and you realise how much you have changed.



You know to be confident. If you believe it, everyone else will too.

You know to be kind. Everyone is as nervous as you.

You know that most people don't really hate the English. Just a few.

You know to appreciate every moment. You know how soon the moment is gone.

You wish you had written more things down.

You realise that even though you must return to your small corner of the world, the world seems so much wider to you now.

You begin to wonder what going home really means.



You know that in America a regular time to eat dinner is around 5pm, but in France or Spain the table isn't set until 9.

You know that Americans are only pretending to disapprove of alcohol, and actually drink just as much as the rest of us.

You know the Germans are the best at planning travel, and the Spanish throw the best party.

You know that national pride is complicated, but everyone thinks their food is the best.

You know that to tell someone they're attractive in Spanish you say they're like a train, but in French they're like a truck or a plane.

You know you'll never learn Dutch, but most of the best insults involve some reference to terrible disease.

You know it's time to leave.
You know you'll never forget the things you have learned.

Endings, of course, are just their own type of beginning.

The beginning of three hour phone calls. Of weekend train trips. Of teary reunions and packed out plans because not a second is to be wasted.

Soon it will be time to pack up your things and leave your small corner once more. Kiss the dog and tell your brother be good.

You know you must say goodbye.

But now you know to say goodbye is to say hello.









WHEREVER YOU GO...

Livvie Wharmby

You may have noticed I've been seemingly absent from the journal this year. What I once considered one of my greatest strengths, my use of words, seemed to disappear. Perhaps being submerged in another language left me quieter than I'd expected. I wasn't quite voiceless, but I was wordless. A glottal stop shaped gobstopper lodged in my throat. Diaries discontinued, conversations broken down to the bare bones. Why couldn't I say what I wanted to, what I needed to?

Since being abroad, I've realised that I am relearning so many things. Relearning how to enjoy reading and writing. How to speak confidently. How to exist comfortably by myself. With myself. Perhaps it has taken the entire year abroad. By the time this is published, I'll have been away from September until July. But I think I'm finally getting there. I hope this serves as my swan song.









I'm not even sure what the message of this piece is, to be quite honest. I think mostly I want to talk to you, if you're about to embark on your year abroad, and tell you that it's going to be okay. I learnt the hard way that, "Wherever you go, there you are." It's true. I know the cliches of a year abroad complete reinvention. My advice would be not to expect your year abroad to be an escape. You're probably not going to lose your accent, nor change your humour. You won't suddenly reinvent your fashion. Your body isn't going to drastically change. You won't escape your past, or your memories. Wherever you go, there you will be. You are still you. But how wonderful! The person that people have always known and loved is still there, adapting so heroically to all these new experiences. And you'll meet so many new people who will get to know and embrace that person, too. Maybe you'll even learn to embrace yourself again.

I could throw a million phrases at you. This too shall pass. Feel the fear and do it anyway. Your hard work is going to pay off. You've probably heard them all before. But the final thing I'll say is this. It is going to be scary, marvellous, terrible, unbelievable, nerve-racking, and beautiful. Hopefully, you'll have some pretty wonderful memories to hold onto. More importantly, you're going to come out the other side and still be yourself. Only now you'll know just how much that person is capable of. And one day, almost without noticing, the words will find you again

...THERE YOU ARE.

Goodbye

Emma Noro
Venice, Italy



Off we go again
We've travelled far
We've travelled wide
And now it's time
To say goodbye

Off we go again
Those people we met
We must take them
with us
Until it's time
To see them again

Off we go again
It may pain our heart
To leave that place
That welcomed us so
kindly
Like we were home

But now it's time,
It's time to say
goodbye













UNTIL NEXT TIME...

THE EXCHANGE JOURNAL

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