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Love Knows NO BORDERS

BY DALLAS DAWIS  DESIGN & ILLUSTRATION EMERALD KLAUER

Hoping to see the world and experience a new culture, students jet off to every corner of the world to study abroad. When love is involved in the experience, relationships can become complicated. Is there hope for love when couples live thousands of miles apart?

International Fling

Sara Kinderknecht, senior in apparel design, experienced a European fling that seemed to be straight out of a romance movie during her semester abroad in Florence, Italy. Kinderknecht was out for a night of fun when she met Sam Reifsnyder, an Italian bartender at a local pub. They talked and shared a couple of drinks, exchanging numbers at the end of the night. “After meeting out for drinks with a group a couple more times, he asked me out on our first date,” Kinderknecht says.

They hiked up to Piazzale Michelangelo to share aperitivo, an Italian tradition of drinks and snacks before dinner. “It all sounded very romantic and it was going really well, getting to know each other over a glass of wine and enjoying the Florentine sunset over the city, until it started to downpour,” Kinderknecht says.

It was not long before Reifsnyder invited her to his parent’s house in the Tuscan countryside to meet his mom, who is American. “I was the first girl that he had ever brought home, so I was pretty nervous, but also very flattered and jumped at the opportunity,” Kinderknecht says. “His mom [lives] in a very small village in the Arezzo mountain area of Tuscany. The small village was built into the hillside under a castle that overlooked the small valley town of Stia. One of the coolest parts of our visit was that this area was actually known for three different castles that were in visual range from each other.”

Dating someone from a different culture gave Kinderknecht the unique opportunity to experience cultural differences on a personal level. “I think one of the most important lessons that he taught me as far as the Italian lifestyle and culture was that Italians don’t live to work, they work to live,” Kinderknecht says. “It was also very interesting to have a romance with someone who does not consider his native tongue the same as yours. I was able to practice and learn more Italian during my time spent with him.”

Though Reifsnyder, an environmental engineering student at the University of Florence, hopes to move to the U.S. in the future, the two did not continue their romance. However, they remain in contact. “Sam and his roommates are planning a coast-to-coast trip once they all graduate, so I am looking forward to the day when I get to show him around the States,” Kinderknecht says.

Love Down Under

Michele Fredregill, Iowa State alumna and communications specialist at the Iowa State University Foundation, studied abroad in Australia her junior year of college in the spring of 2010. However, she did not meet her Australian boyfriend while she was there. Daniel Aggromito, who was interning at Rolls-Royce in Indianapolis the spring of 2011, took a trip to Ames for VEISHEA with a coworker, who happened to be friends with Fredregill.

Fredregill was asked to meet Aggromito so she could relate to him about Australia, as he was a little homesick. After hitting it off that weekend, the two continued to talk and Fredregill asked Aggromito to join her and her friends at the Lake of the Ozarks for a weekend.

“We don’t go days without speaking, [and] we try to keep up on the same level that we would if we were in the same town.”
The romance continued, though they did not have an official title to their relationship. Fredregill spent that summer in Minnesota, and the two would travel to see each other every couple of weeks. In July, one of Fredregill’s friends was getting married, so she invited Aggromito to go with her to the wedding. At the hotel before the wedding, Fredregill says, “He popped out this gift-wrapped box for me.” Inside was a silver necklace he bought from Joseph’s. “He bought me a necklace to go with my dress for the wedding and we weren’t dating at the time, so I just remember thinking, ‘Wow, either he’s trying to buy my affection, or it’s love,’” she joked. That very night, he asked her to be his girlfriend.

Aggromito had to return to his hometown of Melbourne, Australia, when his visa expired, but returned to the U.S. a month later to apply for a position with Rolls-Royce. When that opportunity fell through, he returned home and flew back to Iowa twice more before Fredregill went to visit him for two months beginning in November 2012. “I stayed with Daniel and his family,” Fredregill says. “They are lovely people, and I had a great time.” She saw the major influence their Italian roots had on the family. As Aggromito’s parents both moved to Australia at a very young age, they are no strangers to having family across the world.

After returning to the U.S., Fredregill accepted a full-time position with the Iowa State University Foundation, and Aggromito went back to grad school in Australia for aerospace engineering.

Though they cannot physically be in each other’s lives, they do their best to be there for each other. Aggromito says the hardest part of their long-distance relationship is “missing out on life events and being a part of her everyday life.” To remedy this difficulty, the two make sure to talk every day about their typical daily events. “What keeps us close is that we talk about the day-to-day stuff,” Fredregill says. “We don’t go days without speaking, [and] we try to keep up on the same level that we would if we were in the same town.”

On Fredregill’s first day at the foundation, Aggromito sent her flowers to congratulate her. “He has quite a presence because he feels guilty that he can’t be here, I think,” she says. “[Daniel] is on a first name basis with the florists. He tries to be involved in my life in any way that he can. He sends letters, pictures and flowers, and we communicate a lot. We both are really into communication, and if you’re going to be in a successful long-distance relationship, you need to be in constant communication.”

Aggromito also keeps a journal tracking their relationship from the very beginning. “We have had a very adventurous relationship,” he says, “and I believe this is the girl I will marry someday. I wanted to write about us so we can look back on it later in life.”

“It’s just more special when you can share it with someone.”

Katie Thompson and Jordan Heiderman are a couple of American college students currently separated by approximately 5,000 miles. Thompson, junior in apparel design at Iowa State, is studying at Accademia Italiana in Florence, Italy, this semester while Heiderman is at Indiana University. “He is actually the one who convinced me to [study abroad],” Thompson says. “He told me that I needed to do it, so that’s how I decided to come.” Heiderman says that he knew “she would regret it the rest of her life if she did not go.”

The couple, who had been introduced by a mutual friend, had been dating a little over a year when Thompson crossed the Atlantic to pursue international fashion and explore Europe. Heiderman had been attending Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs, Iowa, until this semester, so they were a close two-and-a-half-hour drive apart from seeing each other every weekend.

Transitioning to a whole new routine and form of communication was difficult to get used to. “Obviously I miss him, but the hardest thing is the time difference,” Thompson says. “We have a set schedule for when we talk. It gets annoying to have to plan every day.” Skype and a free texting app have become their new forms of communication.

When Valentine’s Day rolled around this semester, Thompson and Heiderman could not celebrate together like they normally would have. Instead, Thompson took pictures at different landmarks in Florence with signs that read “Will you be my Valentine, Jordan?” to show her affection. “We have always done cute things like that. After weekend visits, the next week I would find cute notes written on a day of my planner or find a sticky note in my car saying, ‘Have a good week,’” Thompson says. “So since I was over here it was just a way to show him that I really miss him.”

While being apart for so long can become a strain, the pair has been committed to making it a positive experience. “[Our relationship] has actually gotten better,” Thompson says. “We realize how much we mean to each other, and it makes me appreciate him a lot more. Everything I do here I [think], ‘Oh, Jordan would love to see this.’ It’s just more special when you can share it with someone.”