

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

# Do not ever judge an Aussie by his accent

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Asia Mariuzzo writes about a friendship with an Australian boy in Reading, in what appears to be an attraction of opposites.

If someone ever asked me what was the best thing that happened to me during my Erasmus in Reading, I would definitely answer that I have been blessed with genuine and sincere friendship. During those five months in the UK, I got to know many people from all over the world and each one of them taught me something, sometimes by confirming or denying stereotypes, but most of the times they surprised me with unexpected peculiarities that I now cherish as a secret treasure.

This story is about my Australian friend Michael, my best friend in Reading and one of the dearest life-mates I have ever had. Fun fact: my friendship with Michael is not actually the main reason why I decided to dedicate to him this account. In fact, I am telling about him because with his mocking voice, his funny stereotypes about other nationalities and his essential moral values, he showed me how wrong it is to judge a book from its cover. In a mutual and unavoidable way, with my loud voice, my typically Italian attitude and my crystal-clear opinions, I taught him that thinking outside the box – and rules – can be really fun.

Michael and I got to know each other during the first day of classes. We were both waiting outside the professor's office to have our learning agreement confirmed and he came to me asking about the timetable. He thought I was Turkish, because of my naturally black hair and my olive skin – I figured out that 'white' people do not consider me 'white', another fun fact. Actually, before studying abroad, I did not even know what Englishspeakers mean with the adjective 'white'. Of course, the use of the label has some racist root, but when Michael made me aware of our skins' different colour, he really made me laugh. It is crazy and curious how stereotypes about the others and ourselves influence the way we stare at the world.

I think Michael and I felt a special feeling and complicity since the very beginning of our relationship. We used to take any chance to spend some time together because we both realized how much we could learn from each other.

Not mentioning the fact that we were attending the same module on European political integration: I was not very fluent in English yet and he knew nothing about the European Union. I can totally say we are a fun duo. Many Italian friends of mine have spent some time in Australia, but I had never met a native-Aussie before. Michael as well has met many Italian immigrants in his home country, but he never got as close to any of them as he did with me.

After we discovered that we were living in the same student hall, on the same floor – my room was number one, his room number four – we shared each other’s number and set for going to class together. I warned him – I’m Italian, I’ll be late –. Ever since, every morning I used to knock on his door, singing out loud ‘good morning pretty princess’ – this because he turned out to be the laggard one, no matter what. As a response, he started to call me ‘grandma Asia’ every time I was walking along the common corridor, because of the slippers I used to wear.

We fast turned out to be more siblings than friends. We are so different, sometimes I thought we came from parallel worlds – and we probably do. But discovering our souls day by day, it let both of us grow up together. I would have never thought to be so close to an ‘upperclass’, religious and apparently innocent Aussie guy – he did not even have the Aussie accent! Definitely, our friendship has been an unusual and exceptional one also for him: one of the first things he told me was that ‘tattooed, cranky and sassy girls are not my type’. Then here I am! And this is how we ended up being besties during the most amazing adventure of our life.

Michael and I share so many special memories. So many breakfasts, brunches and lunches; so many parties – and afterparties – and even a couple of sunrises, that we managed to watch after a night out. Last summer, I also hosted him at my place for a weekend. It was during the celebration of Redentore in Venice, so I was really glad and proud to show him around my city during the most colourful period of the year. Still, the dearest memory I cherish is about one night in Reading: I do not actually remember when it was or what we were doing, probably just hanging out in someone’s room, watching *Modern Family* as usual. What got me emotional and made that night unforgettable is what we said to each other: we realized together that every single choice we made before led us to that exact moment. Without choosing to go to university, to go study abroad and to do it in Reading, we would have never met and never had the chance to find such a great friend in each other.

This is what any study abroad experience is all about: freaking out because of leaving home and all the things we know so well, but also and above all, letting life surprise us, strangers bumping into it and becoming dear lifetime friends. It does not matter where you are, but whom you are sharing your experience with. And that is why everyone should live abroad for a while, because the world is full of stunning different-from-us people; we just need to be open-minded enough to see the good friends in them.