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## Defined Memories

As I looked out the back window, my expression was peaceful. I waved softly, looking at the group of people standing on the curb. There were seven of them. I did not stop looking until their bodies grew farther out into the distance, and until, all of a sudden, they were gone. I slowly turned myself around, took in one long breath, and stared outside the window. As I rested my chin on my hand against the door, I could feel him staring at me, instead of the road. His piercing eyes looked into the mirror above the dash. "This is it, ya?" he whispered in a deep brogue. I could begin to feel my throat close in while a rush of water filled my dark brown eyes. It was a feeling all too familiar, and one I had not experienced since last September. I did not want to say it. He could not make me admit that this was over. Like a book, the past nine months came to the final page. No, I would not let such words leave my mouth. I remember staring outside the window more intensely. Every experience, every face of every person I had met, all of the good times, along with the hardships, came to my mind. I did not notice the emerald pitch on the other side of the glass window, nor did I care how bright the sun was shining that Friday morning. All I saw were the memories. I hesitantly whispered back to the taxi driver, "This is it."

The dictionary gives thirteen various definitions for the word memory. The eighth definition of the word memory is, "a person, thing, event... remembered." I studied abroad in Maynooth, Ireland for a period of nine months. I met more people than I did in my high school graduating class. Among all of those wonderful people, Roberta Hines was the woman who had the largest influence on me. I can tell you the best place to get garlic

cheese chips or where you can feed seals on the pier, but the best thing about Ireland was the meaning of a cup of tea. I traveled to more than sixteen counties throughout Ireland. In County Kildare, I shared Thanksgiving dinner with fellow Saint Mary's women who were my family that day. These are the memories. They are in my brain, in my photo album of over five hundred pictures, but most importantly they are in my heart.

Before I met Roberta in September 2009, I heard many things about her. She would be our “mom” and advisor while living in Ireland. If we had any problems, concerns, or questions, she was our first contact. She is a Saint Mary's graduate as well. She studied abroad in Ireland during her sophomore year, met an Irish lad, and fell in love. Roberta now lives in Ireland with her husband and three children. Before going to Ireland, I also knew that Roberta would be teaching us a class once a week about the history of Ireland. We would travel together as a group while Roberta guided the way each Saturday morning.

However, the one aspect of Roberta that I didn't know was that I would grow to appreciate the person she was. I had never before had the opportunity to know such a strong, deeply caring woman who had taken the traditions and values she learned during her time at Saint Mary's out into the real world. The most vivid memory I have with Roberta is when we discussed my decision about staying for the entire year in Ireland. It was the beginning of November, and her office was freezing. I sat in front of her and looked at the pictures scattered on her shelf against the pale, concrete wall. Her children were beautiful, with their similar strands of ginger hair, just like Roberta had. Roberta started the conversation with a joke to make me laugh and of course, feel comfortable. I did feel comfortable with her, just not about my decision. We talked for a half hour, listing the pros and cons. It came to a point where I wanted her to just decide for me. Unfortunately

for me at the time, a major aspect to studying abroad is making those hard decisions on your own two feet. Roberta confided in me that I would be okay. “Just like Karen Chambers has said, everything works out in Ireland,” Roberta replied. Looking at Roberta's life, it is clear that she has made a lot of leaps of faith. I don't think she has stopped doing so ever since she made her decision to attend Saint Mary's. I wanted that confidence in myself, just like I could vividly see it on Roberta's face every time we met.

Over time, I have realized that Roberta has the heart of an Irish woman. Irish women are extremely generous and caring, and focus on the important aspects of life. Family is very sentimental to the Irish. Their culture is centered around love and how the material things in this world do not matter when you have family. There was Roberta's life, framed on a shelf behind her. She took those leaps of faith not only for herself, but also for her future selves. I was envious. Then there was the side to Roberta that brought out her American beliefs. Hard work and determination get you to where you want to be. Confidence can blossom in you when you jump. It was that moment when I concluded; I will never be fully Irish. I am American. However, by knowing Roberta and the Saint Mary's woman she is, I too can act upon both cultures in my life. Nevertheless, I walked out of her office, confident in my decision to stay until June. Roberta Hines is a person who has left a large impact on my life, and our meeting on that cold November day is a memory I cannot forget.

The smooth taste of a warm cup of tea is the other memory I miss the most. Tea was the thing that was always present during some of my fondest moments in Ireland. I enjoy mine with milk and only a spoonful of sugar. A sip brings back the smell of my apartment room, where I would sit watching movies in my favorite sheep slippers that I purchased in

Dublin. I admit, while studying abroad, I found that sometimes I felt homesick. It is hard to be away from your family for so long and not feel a little sadness. Tea, however, always cheered me up. It comforted me in a way my mom would when I was having a bad day. It did the job. When you are able to find various quirks to make you feel better in a situation, there is nothing in life you cannot handle. Studying abroad in Ireland taught me that.

Tea also was the thing you used to become closer to your Irish housemates. I sat with Laura, Edel, Stephen, and Barry in the kitchen, and we had conversations as if we had known each other our entire lives, all over a cup of tea, of course. Tea was the thing that tasted better with a chicken roll from Claufield's, and tea was what I stocked up on at the grocery store. I grew to love it, and I now love the memories I can associate with tea.

Thanksgiving was a special event and is one of my most vivid memories from studying abroad. Although it was the first time in nineteen years that I would not be spending a holiday with my family, I will never regret it. The Saint Mary's students in Ireland were fortunate enough to celebrate Thanksgiving dinner in an Irish castle called Castletown. I still clearly see the candlelit room, small yet cozy. The round tables were covered with white lace cloths and the decorative menus were placed on top the sparkling silverware. It was a beautiful night filled with outstanding food and enjoyable company. The chef carved the turkey in front of us, and the dessert tray was mouthwatering. I felt more at ease and at home than any other night in Ireland. In fact, I remember taking a moment to sit back and take in everything around me. Not only was I so thankful to be sharing a holiday with some of my closest friends, but I was also thankful that I decided to study abroad. That night was a memory I will always be able to picture. It was an event in Ireland that assured me I had made the right choice.

Never before in my entire life have I wanted to grab hold of every memory that comes and never let them go, than I have with Ireland. It is interesting how anything in life can turn around, and that I am now finding myself to be homesick for Ireland. Writing and speaking about those specific memories helps in a comforting way, and I am able to look back on the best nine months of my life thus far. Although I was thousands of miles away, I now feel more connected to Saint Mary's than ever. I am developing into the person I want to be. My Ireland friends are what I cherish the most and are very helpful in helping me reflect on all of the memories. They were the ones standing on the curb that early morning when my trip abroad had come to an end. Although we made so many memories abroad, I know there are more to come here.

My face was bright red and washed with tears by the end of that taxi ride to the airport. However, it wasn't just sadness causing the water to fall. Deep down, I was happy and grateful. I lived my experience in Ireland to the fullest and I will carry the memories made forward. This *is* it, so on to the next chapter.