

The missing suitcases – a metaphor of my life at UD

Every avid airplane-traveler's worst nightmare is to have their suitcases go missing. The fear of your most valuable belongings being lost, the fear of having to haphazardly buy all of the necessities you might need in order to survive your vacation. My "vacation" is suppose to last for 4 years. As stated in the majority of the major airlines' policy, they are responsible for your luggage once it's checked in, and will replaced the costs of your belongings if by chance it would get lost. Not so bad, you might think; getting some cash to replace your old ragged clothes with some new ones. In theory, this might sound wonderful, but in reality, as a jetlagged Swedish girl all alone in a foreign country, it is not idealistic.

As an international student based overseas in Europe, getting to UD by airplane is a no-brainer; so like every eager freshman I filled up my two suitcases with everything I might possibly need to survive my 4 years at the University. I had everything planned out; everything from how I was going to get to the airport to where I was going to stay my first night in the US. After spending a great amount of time flying across the Atlantic I finally arrived in Philadelphia; only to find that my suitcases were not there. At the time, this seemed like my worst nightmare, but I survived. Sure, I may not have been looking all that fashionable walking around in an oversized UD t-shirt I was given for free during my first day, but at least I had *something* to wear. Sure, the people who saw me in the communal bathrooms using only complimentary sample-sized toiletries from the airport may not have gotten the best first impression of me; but they learnt not to make assumptions to quickly once I told them my story. Sure, the stores of Main Street may not have

provided the greatest selection of everyday essentials; but they were my savior until I befriended Americans who were willing to help an international student out by driving them to the closest Target. Loosing my suitcases made me see the US and its mindset for what it really was; not judgmental but instead open-minded, not narcissistic but instead widely generous, and definitely not conceited but instead extremely supportive. I realized that I entered this university, this state, even this country, with an already made-up presumption of how the US functioned, much based on my annoyance caused by the missing suitcases. The response I got from people during this mild crisis completely blew my mind, and my presumptions, away. I learned that people and things aren't always what they seem, and that first impressions are not to be trusted. The girl who commented on my XXL t-shirt; later helped me carry bag after bag of groceries to my dorm, and the girl who stared me down for using a perfume sample out of a magazine; later offered me a toothbrush and toothpaste. Individuality is embraced, people's struggles are aided and a community-sense is what's being strived for; the only egoistic ideal in the American mindset was the one set by my presumptuous expectations.

“Missing” became a key-word for my first week at the University of Delaware. Besides the suitcases, I realized that my name was missing from many of my professor's class lists, I realized that my roommate who was suppose to move in on the same day as me was nowhere to be found, and I realized that the Swedish flag was missing from the majestic International flag display in Trabant Student Center. Somehow, all of these puzzle-pieces that represented my life at UD were missing, and I really didn't understand why. Eventually, everything worked out: on the updated class lists my name appeared, my roommate moved in two days later, and I was promised a Swedish flag in Trabant for the Spring semester, but the initial question still remained.

In hindsight, I think I'm grateful that the suitcases went missing. Why? The situation I was put in forced me to get out of my comfort zone, to ask for help, to make new friends. Isn't that what freshman year is suppose to be all about? The suitcases also became a scapegoat for all of my worries; instead of worrying about finding the location of my first class, I could worry about finding a place that sold towels so I could actually take a shower. They became a visual representation of everything that was wrong in my life, making me believe that any problem henceforth being a piece of cake.

Did I ever retrieve my suitcases you may wonder? Eventually I did. By that time, I had come to terms with all of this "missing" parts of my life. My suitcases may have been missing, my name may have been missing, my flag may have been missing and even my roommate may have been missing, but at least *I* was here. The puzzle-pieces of my life were lost, so I created an entire new puzzle. I stopped trying to fill in the blanks that represented my expectations of the US, and instead just drew a whole new picture. The missing suitcases were a metaphor for myself; a 19-year-old international student all alone in a foreign country. I was just like the suitcases: undetermined, uncharted, *missing*. I had to come to terms with the fact that the suitcases, and I, maybe would never really be found. But once the suitcases were returned and restored, so was I, and I got to a major realization: The suitcases, and myself, may have been missing, but they were never truly lost.