

OP/ED

A Yankee in Queen Elizabeth's court

Kindergarten was the greatest adventure of my life before I went to London this summer. You see, I'm not exactly a world traveler; I've rarely left the East Coast for any extended period of time. But in July, I participated in JMU's second Advanced Shakespeare Institute (ASIZ), which is a mouthful for Shakespeare camp.

The classes I took were fun, yet challenging. I highly recommend them to sadomasochists and the criminally insane. But, I think less than half of my fellow members of the 24 ASIZ students fell into those categories.

I studied Shakespeare's London, and his stage London class involved learning the history of the city, as well as visiting nearly every church in England. We also visited sites such as Parliament ("Look kids, Big Ben . . .") and Westminster Abbey. One girl's mother warned us not to visit Westminster Abbey because "there are dead people in there."

Stage class was great. We worked with actors like Patrick Spottiswoode, who played the interrupted scholar in Al Pacino's self-indulgent "Looking for Richard," another guy who played one of the knife-wielding twins in *Octopussy* and other past members of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

A lot of the learning I did happened outside of class. I continually noticed all of the striking differences between American and British culture.

The first thing you need to know in England is British people talk funny. They speak some sort of bastardized English, with a funny accent and lots of crazy vocabulary, like *cross*, *naff*, *knackered*, *well wicked* and *poofers*. I got used to "English," but I had a lot of trouble crossing the streets because the British don't drive on the right side of the road. To avoid the embarrassment of always looking the wrong way, I relied on their "Zebra" crosswalks, which

are a lot like crosswalks in the United States, except in London, pedestrians have the right of way. If you get lost, you can always ask a police officer for direction. By amazing coincidence, every cop in London is named Bobby. Walking the streets of London all day sure made me *knackered*. So I also enjoyed their *well wicked* mass transit system. Early on in the trip, our professor assigned a bus scavenger hunt to familiarize us with the transit system. Unfortunately, that day, most of the buses weren't running due to a Gay Pride Parade.

Breeze Reader's View

— Gabriel Uhr

I think most of London marched in that parade. I learned why there were so many marchers later from an unofficial census, which stated that approximately 100 percent of London's population is gay, or technically, *poofers* (not that there's anything wrong with that).

When not about town, the ASIZ lived in the Madison House, known affectionately as Mad House. Mad House sits on Gower Street, which is a great central location to live in London (right by KFC, and pretty close to a McDonald's). My biggest worry at Mad House was that a young, red-headed boy named Oliver might become quite *cross* with me for playing with his toys.

From hanging out with the other members of the ASIZ, I learned that 24 Americans are, on average, louder than a Rolling Stones concert. A case in point was when my friend Jason Martin led an inebriated chorus of the "Star Spangled Banner" on the Fourth of July in Leicester (pro-

nounced Lie-ces-cesiter) Square. There were a lot of people there, but I don't think they were celebrating Independence Day because I didn't see any fireworks.

If you can't find the Americans (probably because they're stuffing themselves with KFC and McDonald's) you can always spot them because they'll be wearing blue jeans and sneakers. I was no exception, and I was even worse because I sported my New York Yankees cap. If you understand "English" then you might've heard a native say, "*Mind that naff American in his Yanks cap.*"

One of the easier aspects of British culture to adapt to was frequenting pubs (pronounced poobs). Pubs are a lot like bars except that beer is served at room temperature and no one dances to Puff Daddy.

Americans have to adjust to warm beer because nothing is cold in London. In fact, British people don't believe in ice. I don't know if their disbelief is a scientific problem or an existential dilemma. Basically, British people don't believe in convenience. An American might not believe it possible, but an entire nation is able to function without one 7-Eleven.

In all, my time in London was a revelation. The ASIZ program was *well wicked*; I highly recommend JMU's London study programs. Before I left for college, I didn't know that the world is bigger than Northern Virginia. Before I left for London, I didn't know that the world is bigger than the United States of America.

Tune in next time when I discuss my further adventures while traveling through Europe. Highlights include the complex physics of packing, Paris pickpockets, German spies and Amsterdam's abundance of . . . windmills.

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