

Alumni *reflect* on how school abroad *changed* them

In 1997, "Seventeen Magazine" wrote an article about the experiences of American ASL students growing up in the U.K. Now, the same group of alumni weigh the impact of ASL on their lives.

Eden Leavey /
Culture Editor: Print

More than 20 years have elapsed since pop culture-focused "Seventeen Magazine" published a story highlighting student experiences and divulging how ASL differs from the average American high school. Since then, those students have graduated and moved onto the next stage of their life: adulthood.

Alumni reflect upon the significance of the article published in "Seventeen Magazine" and the cultural impact of attending an American international school.

'Seventeen Magazine'

Émilie Dulles ('99), a student interviewed for the story, said she remembers the buzz among students when "Seventeen Magazine" first became available in London.

"It was very exciting because back then we didn't have social media, and getting 'Seventeen Magazine' every month was like a little tie to the U.S.," Dulles said.

Furthermore, Teyhou Smyth ('97), who was also interviewed, said the journalists covering the story hoped to capture students in the most authentic way, which they achieved by following throughout the school day.

"I remember them coming and taking pictures of us while we were at school and at classes, you know, going through our day," Smyth said. "They just wanted to catch what American students look like living in London."

Dulles said the story ultimately helped paint a picture of life outside of the U.S. for American students who had not been given the opportunity

to travel abroad.

"Having the feature with ASL was probably pretty eye-opening for some American teenagers who maybe had not had a chance to travel," Dulles said.

Influence of ASL

Claressinka Anderson ('97) said her experience at the school may differ from the typical ASL student as she was raised in the U.K.

"Most of the kids at ASL did not spend their entire childhoods in London, so their experience of it was, perhaps, a little different from mine," Anderson said. "I was born and grew up in London, so it very much felt like home to me, not a place in opposition to somewhere else."

Meanwhile, Dulles said she joined the school halfway through Grade 9 after living in New York City and Switzerland, which she remembers being a seamless transition on account of the inviting community.

"All the students were welcoming and friendly," Dulles said. "It was just such an amazing environment

because you have people from all over the world." Anderson also said the mixture of cultures to which she was exposed to through the school has ultimately strengthened her ability to interact with people from different backgrounds.

"Being in a community of third-culture children shapes you with a lot of openness towards the world," Anderson said. "It allowed me to be

able to comfortably navigate many different situations and cultures, and I'm very grateful for that."

Having ties to Iran, Smyth said she felt comfortable sharing aspects of her identity at school as it was honored in a way that it would not have been in a school based in the U.S.

"ASL was a great environment to really embrace your cultural identity," Smyth said. "I'm Persian, so I was always active in the Middle East Club, and ASL really made it a point to have and celebrate diversity of different cultures, which is

something I really admire and always love about the school."

Adult life

Dulles said the same traits and skills taught at the school to welcome diversity can be applied to achieving success in everyday life.

"ASL teaches some of that resilience and some flexibility, which has served me very well in my life," Dulles said. "I am now very happily married, and I have a creative business where I do graphic design and custom stationery."

Mindy Eiermann ('98) said the travel opportunities she obtained through the school also influenced her further education and career choices.

"Spring break of my senior year at ASL, I went on a two-week trip to China with a group of ASL teachers and students, and that experience

prompted me to learn Chinese and study abroad in Nanjing," Eiermann said.

Moreover, Eiermann said she sought the opportunity to live and work abroad in an attempt to emulate the encounters she had with international settings and diverse cultures at the school.

Philip Stransky ('98), who is also a student interviewed in the "Seventeen" article, said as an adult, the privilege he believes ASL students hold became more apparent, particularly the privilege of having connections to many international and multicultural people.

Furthermore, Dulles said not only did her interactions with other students shape her global perspective, but collaboration and building upon one another's ideas also strengthened her critical thinking skills.

"It's only looking back when I see the high school photos that I realize just how blessed I was to

“

ASL really made it a point to have and celebrate diversity of different cultures, which is something I really admire and always love about the school.

— Teyhou Smyth ('97)

”

I once was," Anderson said. "I carry all the parts of my life with me — the places I've lived, the people I've shared it with. I have friends all over the world and feel lucky to be reminded of their perspectives."

Consequently, Anderson said the concept of belonging is far more complex than a one-word answer, especially for those who have moved to different countries.

"It's far too easy to become ingrained in the narratives of where we live and become insular," Anderson said. "I feel that I don't really belong anywhere necessarily, and this is part of my identity — something I've made peace with."

In addition, Stransky said people may use identifiers to understand one another's similarities and differences, yet said he feels limited by a single word defining him. Therefore, Stransky said attending the school taught him how to adapt to different environments.

"I don't personally identify as anything, but I find that people — in an effort to communicate with you — like to put you in a bucket," Stransky said. "It's very easy for me to assimilate with any one of those buckets, whether it's English, French or American because I've been lucky enough to be around the people and live in the places."

Passing on tradition

Stransky, who lived in the Middle East as a child, said his family enjoys blending the many components of their identity together, particularly when carrying on traditions from the Middle East.

"We tend to celebrate or take part in all kinds of fun celebrations, from the food we eat to the words we use," Stransky said. "We might have Christmas, but not necessarily a Western Christmas, or Thanksgiving, but not eat an American Thanksgiving."

Anderson said she recognizes the discernible impact ASL has had on her life and the lives of her classmates, particularly in their understanding of identity. Anderson said she now hopes to raise her family to be proud of their Czech heritage and culture.

"I still identify strongly with my European roots," Anderson said. "My mother is Czech, and I grew up speaking it as a child. I carried on that tradition with my son, and while it may not be the most useful language, he speaks it fluently as well, and that means a lot to me."

Ultimately, Eiermann said despite living abroad, she still views herself as American, yet acknowledges the privilege she and her family have had being able to travel.

"I still identify as American — and the accent is a clear giveaway — but I am grateful to have had these diverse experiences living abroad and to offer the same to my daughter," Eiermann said.

To read the original 'Seventeen Magazine' article, scan here:

