**What’s It Like Being at Cambridge as an American Student?**

Deanie Vallone

**1** As a child I dreamt of being a blend of Hermione Granger and T. S. Eliot, a girl who found her true home studying at a mythical school in England. But much like winning the lottery or receiving an acceptance letter from Hogwarts, the idea of a Midwestern girl going to Oxbridge seemed like a pipe dream.

**2** Then came the Davies-Jackson Scholarship, a privately funded scholarship administered by the Council of Independent Colleges. The scholarship gives first-generation American students (i.e. the first in their family to go to university) the opportunity to study at St. John’s College, Cambridge. Selection for the scholarship focuses on writing ability, requiring several extensive essays. Candidates must also demonstrate high academic performance and independent thinking.

**3** Being a first-generation student, I placed a lot pressure on myself. Yet throughout my studies, I’ve never been alone. There was always a professor helping me edit my Cambridge application or friends cheering me on. Thus it was only fitting that my mother read me my Cambridge acceptance letter over the phone while I stood in a Florida airport. I had three good friends standing next to me to hear the news as soon as I got off the phone.

**4** Since that tumultuous moment over two years have passed in which I’ve lived in the UK. What surprised me the most is how easily I adjusted to the UK.

**5** Despite some significant differences — chips vs. crisps vs. fries, driving on the “wrong” side of the road, Marmite? — I was still living in a university town, surrounded by students (and a whole lot of Americans).

**6** The most exhilarating aspect of attending Cambridge was finding young people who were just as passionate as myself. This is not to say U.S. students aren’t highly motivated, but Cambridge collects them and puts them in one small town.

**Intimidating**

**7** I would be lying if I said it wasn’t intimidating. A lot of us students that arrive at Cambridge were at the top of our class. Suddenly we’re in a lecture hall crammed full of these star students. This kind of environment makes for tough competition, and failing to be the absolute best can be a difficult reality to face. Despite what appears to be a harsh environment, my fellow students have been nothing but encouraging and accepting.

**8** I believe this competitive but generous mentality stems from the fact that the majority of the students are in love with their work. None of us would be here if there wasn’t a fire driving us to hunt down obscure textbooks, or to attend morning lectures (despite having been at a club the night before).

**9** Though Cambridge is founded on academic work, it would not be the concrete entity it is without its traditions. Having attended one of the largest and perhaps most traditional colleges, I had the full experience. This was a carnival for my child self.

**10** Picture massive candlelit dining halls, billowing black gowns, glamorous balls, boat races, Latin prayers, and Christmas dinners with crackers (what a novelty!). Elements such as these made Cambridge a home, not just a glorified classroom.

**Living a dream**

**11** For so many, Oxbridge is a story in a newspaper, a Wikipedia article, even a pipe dream, as it used to be for me. Living this dream for two years has made me realize that despite its ancient eccentricities, Cambridge can be just a normal place. Some nights it is just down-to-earth students eating Super Noodles as they rush to type up an essay due the next morning — not terribly different from my undergraduate university in the U.S.

**12** My time at Cambridge has provided me so much more than a line on a CV. I discovered the Cambridge theatre scene and found my true calling. I travelled to countries I never thought I would. Through travel grants offered by St. John’s, I trained birds of prey in Ireland. I published a short story in a literary magazine, interviewed Neil Gaiman for an international film festival, finallyfigured out the Underground, and met extraordinary people. None of this would have been possible without the help of both the Davies-Jackson Scholarship and St. John’s College.

**13** This summer I will be returning home to the States. While I love the U.S., England has become my home these past years. I know now that I could live here the rest of my life, much like Mr. Eliot, and be entirely happy. I have become T. S. Granger or Hermione Eliot, the hybrid girl I always hoped I’d be. Though I have no immediate plans to come back to the UK, I know I will very soon. My life has been changed utterly by this place and I’m not about to let it go.

**对于一位美国学生来说，剑桥大学的生活是什么样子？**

蒂尼·瓦洛内

1 小时候我就梦想着能同时拥有赫敏·格兰杰和托马斯·艾略特两个人的经历，去英格兰某所神奇的学校读书，并且在那里找到自己真正的家园。不过对于一个美国中西部的小女生来说，去牛津剑桥学习就和中彩票或者收到霍格沃兹的录取通知一样，简直是痴人说梦。

2 直到后来有了戴维斯-杰克逊奖学金。这是一个由独立学院理事会监管的私立奖学金，旨在帮助第一代美国学生（即整个家庭中的第一位大学生）获得到剑桥大学圣约翰学院深造的机会。奖学金的遴选主要考查写作能力，候选人需要提供一定数量的有广度的文章，用以展现其学术功底和独立思考能力。

3 我就是一名第一代美国学生，可想而知我给了自己多大的压力。然而，在准备过程中，我从来都不是一个人孤军奋战。有教授为我修改申请剑桥的文书，有朋友们为我加油打气。所以我觉得母亲帮我念剑桥录取信的时机选得特别合适：当时我正站在佛罗里达机场，三位好友就陪在身旁。一挂掉电话，我就和他们分享了这个好消息。

4 现在距离那个激动的时刻已经过去两年了，这期间我一直住在英国。我几乎毫无障碍地适应了英国的生活，顺利得连我自己都感到惊讶。

5 尽管存在着一些显著的差异——例如纠结于薯片是叫作chips，crisps还是fries；在“错误”的一侧驾驶；一言难尽的马麦酱——我依旧住在大学城里，周围都是学生（其中很多都是美国人）。

6 在剑桥的日子里最让我兴奋的莫过于遇到了与我一样充满激情的同龄人。并不是说美国的学生缺乏积极性，而是剑桥大学将我的“同类们”聚集到了这方小小的天地里。

**紧张不安**

7 如果说我一点都不紧张，那肯定是撒谎。剑桥的学生大多成绩优异，突然之间，我发现自己和一大群尖子生挤在同一间教室里听课。这种环境下的竞争之激烈可想而知，发现自己并不能脱颖而出，这实在让人难以面对。然而，尽管这环境看似严酷，同学们给予我的却都是鼓励和包容。

8 在我看来，这种既求胜心切又宽容大气的心态源自绝大多数学生对于自己研究对象的热爱。若非心里有一把火一股劲，谁会去钻研难懂的课本，谁会一大早去听课（哪怕头天晚上在酒吧里厮混）？

9 虽然说剑桥大学立足于学术研究，但少了它的传统文化，剑桥就不再是剑桥了。就读于这所世界上最大也是最具传承之一的学府，我体验到了十足的传统氛围，仿佛置身于童年时代的嘉年华。

10 想象一下这样的画面：燃着蜡烛的巨大餐厅、随风翻卷的黑色长袍、魅力十足的舞会、赛艇比赛、用拉丁文咏颂的祷告，还有分发彩色拉炮的圣诞大餐（好一个新奇的惊喜！）。有了这些，剑桥大学不仅是一座学习的圣殿，更是我们的家园。

**梦想成真**

11 就像曾经的我，很多人眼里的牛津剑桥就是报纸上的一个故事，维基上的一篇文章，甚至一个遥不可及的梦。然而，在这个梦中天堂生活了两年之后，我意识到尽管有些古老的传统甚为怪异，剑桥大学其实也和普通的学校一样。在截止日期的前一晚，埋头苦干的学生们对付着随便吃几口，便飞奔赶去打印文章——这和我本科就读的美国大学没什么太大区别。

12 在剑桥读书的日子带给我的绝非简历上那简单几笔。剑桥如同我的人生剧场，在那里我找到了自己真正的事业，游历了从未想过会去的国家。靠圣约翰学院提供的旅游补助，我在爱尔兰训练过猛禽，在文学杂志上发表过一篇短篇小说，对尼尔·盖曼就国际电影节做过专访，也终于搞明白了英国的地铁，还遇到了很多卓越非凡的人。感谢戴维斯–杰克逊奖学金和圣约翰学院，是它们让这一切变为现实。

13 今年夏天我会回到家乡美国。我爱我的祖国，但过去这几年英国也成了我的家。现在我知道我能像艾略特先生一样在英国幸福地生活下去。终于，我实现了幼时的梦想，成了托马斯·格兰杰或者赫敏·艾略特，同时拥有他们两人的经历。虽然我近期不打算返回英国，但是在不久的将来我一定会这么做。英国已经彻底地改变了我的生活，我会沿着这条路继续走下去。