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Homesickness Abroad: Managing Anxiety

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: Today we talk with Sarah Grace Barr, who participated in the FYA program in London and vlogged about her experience. We discuss homesickness, asking for help while abroad, and Sarah Grace's fun way of connecting with her friends and family from afar. Let's go to our conversation now.

H: Hey Sarah Grace, how are you doing today?

Sarah Grace (SG): I'm good, thank you! How are you?

H: I'm doing well, I'm really excited to talk to you today. To start us off can you introduce yourself?

SG: Yes my name is Sarah Grace Barr, I'm a sophomore here at FSU and this is actually my first year on campus because last year I did the first year abroad program with FSU in London and I'm majoring in Criminology and Psychology.

Z: Fun! That's awesome. So today we just wanted to talk to you about your study abroad experience so we wanted to ask you what are you most interested in sharing with our listeners today about your study abroad experience and journey?

SG: Yeah so I thought today I would kind of talk about homesickness because I know that a lot of people get homesick especially when you're going across the world for a long period of time, I know that can be really scary and it's something that I definitely dealt with so I thought I'd talk about that. And then talk about this kind of quirky way that I found of coping with that and how it actually helped other people too.

H: So you've already mentioned homesickness which might kind of be the answer to this next question but when you first learned about the First Year Abroad program, was it something that you immediately wanted to do?

SG: No! Not at all. Honestly, I first heard about and I was like that's an awesome opportunity for people who aren't me, you know? And it was amazing and I totally wanted to do it but something was holding me back. And college was already kind of this scary idea for me because like I said I'm such a homebody and I get so homesick so easily, and I'm also an out of state student so I was like it's already terrifying enough going to a different state for college but then like going across the world, like absolutely not.

Z: Absolutely and you talked about like that something was holding you back and that that was your homesickness or potential for homesickness I guess so can you talk about like how you managed that and any anxiety you had when you arrived abroad? Both at the beginning of your program and then after you know having gone home over the holidays and then coming back to your program, just all of that, how you manage your homesickness.

SG: Yes so like I said originally, I was like absolutely not I'm not going abroad there's no way but eventually I was just kind of laying in bed one night honestly and I just kind of had this idea and I heard this quote

somewhere but it's something I kind of live by now and it's one day you're going to be like sitting there on your deathbed and you're going to be thinking about your life and what you did and what you didn't do and I was like this is such a unique opportunity that Florida State offers for kids to go abroad like for their first year college and I know that one day if I don't do it I'm going to look back and I'm going to say like what an awesome opportunity that I missed out on because I was too scared. So I decided to go and it was definitely scary at first honestly, I'm not going to lie. But my mom came with me and she helped me move in which was really, really nice but honestly I was so nervous about leaving my family back at home but I don't think I thought about the fact that when I went abroad I really just created this whole new family and everybody over there including my roommate and all staff members and all my friends and everybody who I met in the city, they just became this whole new part of my life and I still have my family at home but now I have a family in Atlanta and I also have a family in London which I think was amazing. And the people there were really, really helpful because every once in awhile I did get homesick I had those days where I'm like "Oh I'm kind of sad," you know, "I'm missing my family, missing my dog," but everybody there was so supportive and they just helped me along the way and they encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and say you know you're here for a reason so you might as well embrace it. When I went home after Christmas break, I had a really fun time reuniting with all my high school friends and seeing my family again and it became a little even more intimidating than it was the first time to go back to London, just because all of those things I was thinking about when I was homesick kind of came to life when I went home and then I had to leave that again and it was definitely scarier and the homesickness was worse for me second semester. So I actually reached out to one of the people who work at FSU London now is like, "Hey I'm really struggling with this. This is something that's really hard for me and I'm getting a lot of anxiety about it," and right away they were just so helpful it was the best thing ever. They were like, "Hey we know this person who's a psychiatrist you can talk to and they can help you," and then they were always there to talk to me as well and all my friends were there for me and it was just such an easy process and it wasn't scary at all and I definitely wouldn't have been able to talk about it if I didn't feel so comfortable at the study center with everybody who I met so that was really, really amazing.

H: That's such an awesome story that speaks volumes to the study center staff which is available in all of our study center locations but this is something that we're so grateful that you're sharing this story on this episode because we want to talk about these things, we want to talk about that there are, that sometimes it can be hard going abroad that sometimes mental health can be something that we need to manage while we're abroad and that we have people abroad they can help you with those things and so making sure that our study center staff is available and capable and equipped to help you find the help that you need is awesome. So I just want to say I'm really grateful that you shared that and I hope that the other people will be like okay like it's possible, like I can go abroad, there are people that can help me even if I feel this anxiety or this homesickness or anything like that.

SG: Yes definitely.

Z: And I think that speaks to your bravery as well to ask for that assistance and you know being even willing to talk to us about it today that's really awesome. I think that that's a very common experience that students have and so just sharing your story I think is really helpful as well.

SG: Aw, oh my gosh, thank you. Yeah it was so easy. I mean it was really just easy with the people who work there, they made me feel so at home.

H: Awesome, let's talk about some of the other ways that you took in your experience abroad but also you've kind of mentioned maybe helped you manage some of these feelings of homesickness and anxiety, so talk a little bit about that like what was you mentioned earlier you had a quirky way of managing it, so can you tell us a little bit about that?

SG: Yes so as soon as I got there I was having these amazing experiences like going on weekend trips and going on trips with my friends, going on school trips seeing shows on the West End, all this amazing stuff but something that was always kind of bothering me was that my family and my friends back home couldn't really experience it with me. You know you always have pictures and stuff like that and you have the stories you can tell but it just wasn't really enough for me. So I started vlogging, which is you know like videotaping and YouTubing and all of that, and that really, really helped because I was able to kind of record and broadcast all of my amazing things I was doing and then I also got to share it with my family so they got to see literally everything that happened. And that was definitely, probably the best decision that I ever made because I go back with all of my London friends even now, now that we're back in Tallahassee, and we watch those and we laugh about them and kind of go back and look at all of our memories. And I know that people who are looking into studying abroad with FSU also watch them which I just am so thankful for that they can see like the beauty in this program.

Z: That's so awesome, I mean I think it's cool that that sort of developed over time and that you've been able to be sort of an ambassador for us in a way through your vlogging and really reach out to others and that you said like that other people have you know been influenced by your videos is really, really cool.

SG: Yeah I'm just glad that people like them. I know I think they're really entertaining but I'm also glad that they have a practical use as well.

Z: Yeah exactly, and that's something is that something that you're still doing now then? Like have you carried that back from your time abroad into your current life and like how has that impacted your own life and others?

SG: Yes, so I definitely carried it on even when I got back to Florida State because I realized that you have all these cool experiences that you get to live, especially in this part of my life right now as a college student, so I loved sharing all those with my family and just kind of the world and saying like this is my life isn't, aren't I like so lucky to be doing all this stuff? So I definitely still do it, I actually work for YouTube now and they do pay me to make my videos which I think is really special 'cause I don't do it for that of course, but it's kind of nice to be recognized like that I guess.

Z: Yeah that's so cool.

SG: But yeah I love it. I think it's awesome.

H: Is blogging something you had any experience with before you got to London or was it something that you just kind of thought to do once you got there?

SG: Um I had a YouTube account I guess. I went on this mission trip to the Dominican Republic when I was a sophomore in high school and I made one of those little GoPro videos you know with music in the background but I wasn't really talking to the camera and explaining what I was doing and where I was and the history behind it and everything like that so it's definitely something new and it was kind of awkward

at first honestly, but I'm so glad that I did it because looking back at those videos just really brings the experience to life again which is so special.

Z: Yeah that's so cool, it's so multifaceted that you have you know, it's helping you to overcome homesickness, it's connecting you to your family, but it's also connecting you to your friends even now, and then it's also documenting your time there so there's just so many things, and now you're getting paid by YouTube so I mean it just keeps getting better it sounds like.

SG: Right, exactly.

H: That's awesome. Well to wrap us up, before we go we have to ask you this question. And I have a feeling it's probably something you have shared on your YouTube channel, perhaps but we wanna definitely get your answer on the podcast too, and that is what advice do you have for students who are considering studying abroad?

SG: I would say, "Y'all, do it!" I know it's scary. I know that sometimes going abroad, or going anywhere, doing anything that's out of your comfort zone can seem really intimidating but going abroad and taking that leap of faith and just kind of going for it, even though I was scared was the best decision I've ever made and I don't know where I would be if I hadn't studied abroad. But think about all the cool stories you get to tell your kids, or your friends, or your family. And think about all of the amazing experiences and knowledge that you're going to gain from doing it. And honestly it may not be easy but I would just say you just have to kind of go for it.

H: That is awesome advice to wrap up this episode. Thank you so much Sarah Grace for sharing your time and sharing your story and we're just really grateful that you shared it with us.

H: Before we disembark, we want to talk about the Spring Video Contest!

Like Sarah Grace, you too can make a video to highlight your own study abroad experience for our Spring Video Contest. Anyone who is studying abroad during the Spring 2021 semester is invited to enter for a chance to be featured on our social media and win up to \$50!

Z: We're looking for videos that highlight culture, historical sites, the FSU study abroad experience, and the friendships you're making along the way. Be sure to read all the rules, eligibility, and requirements on our blog, nolesabroad.international.fsu.edu. You can also check out our YouTube channel for inspiration. Entries are due on March 1st - we look forward to watching your submissions!

H: Thanks again to Sarah Grace for talking with us today and thanks for listening!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.