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A Letter to My Imperfect Self

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Scandinavia Will Always Be In My Heart

Red, yellow and blue, I see you. Oh, wait! Can't forget about the color white as well. Simple colors, flowing along simple lines, to craft simple designs. These simplicities come together to form simple flags that represent simple lives. Everything was so simple during those 3½ months of living a carefree Scandinavian life. However, the memories of those 115 days in Copenhagen are not so simple now.

March 25, 2017 was the day I bought my evocative object. My "Scandinavian Explorer" keychain was my first ever international souvenir. Within an hour of arriving in Oslo, Norway, I desperately wanted an item that will absorb all my memories in Norway. Even though I knew my presence in Oslo would only last 20 hours compared to the impending 115 days I would have in Copenhagen in a few months, I could not wait until late-August to possess an object that will memorialize the moment I accomplished my worldly dream.

I remember the souvenir shop. Small, cozy and full of trolls, a pseudo-symbol of Norway only bought by tourists. When scoping the shop, I focused my search for an item that did not just represent Norway, but all the Scandinavian countries. There I found the keychain. Simple and straight to the point. Five individual items placed onto one silver loop. A white heart with the proclamation of "Scandinavian Explorer" centered above a smaller red heart. Surrounded by the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish flags. Equality, freedom, home.

The keychain possesses the memories of my time exploring parts of Scandinavia, literally and figuratively. In Oslo I explored the sights, sounds, and vibrant atmosphere of the Norwegian capital city. At a train station right outside of Malmo, Sweden, I explored how immigration officers monitor the trains between Denmark and Sweden for refugees to comply with European Union protocol. In Copenhagen, I explored the structures of social democracy in my Sociology class, explored the world of LGBT barhopping, and discovered the wilderness of Bornholm by hiking for 5 days during Fall Break with my European friends. All these memories are relived through that tiny keychain.

However, the keychain also produces a sense of mourning. Although I had the best 3 ½ months of my life in three of the four Scandinavian countries, I knew returning is not feasible. Foremost, finding a job in Scandinavia is challenging for fellow European Union citizens, let alone an American. Additionally, it is difficult to develop friendship with Danes, Finnish, Norwegian, or Swedish people as they are most comfortable around their childhood friends and only develop meaningful relationships with foreigners who speak their language. Even when you have got a handle of one of these Scandinavian languages, it takes years for these individuals to enter into the social circles of the native population. Loneliness is an added complication, even among the Scandinavian populace. I've experienced enough loneliness in my short life and do not want to add more. Altogether, I realize that Scandinavia may not be attainable for me.

Ultimately, my little evocative object channels a sense of mourning and memories. Positive memories that always brighten my day, but a reminder that Scandinavia is outside of my grasp. There is, however, always the belief that "if there is a will, there is a way." You never know. Nonetheless, Scandinavia will always be in my heart.