I sit with sweat pouring down my back, the windows open to the hazy Cairo sky lined with minarets aglow. An unplanned cluster of high-rise apartment buildings give way to each other’s mishaps with their conglomerate of architectural styling. Bringing together the old and new, the intertwined puzzle pieces become their own works of art. On the streets below, blinding fluorescents, flooded storefronts and a mix of rust and dust bombard my senses on a daily basis. Twenty-three million people and vehicles alike crowd this city’s pounding pavements where mad chaos reigns and the city’s organic beauty comes to life.

As I pass by the local baker in the morning and our next-door neighbor, the tailor, at night, their Arabic greetings and friendly smiles could nearly trick me into believing we live in the smallest of towns. Culturally rich and a haven for exploration, this city has been my home for nearly four years.

I decided to move to Cairo upon completing a few years at Tulsa Community College. Having been to Cairo as a tourist, it was an uninhibited itch for a short-term adventure that turned into a long-term stay. Upon arrival, my studies resumed at the American University in Cairo. Through my degree in Sociology, this city became my classroom, and it didn’t take long for me to fall in love with all of its quirks and it’s on-the-go nature.

In Cairo, I currently work as a staff writer for a lifestyle publication. With a bag of belongings dangling from my arm and a coffee mug snuggly secured in the other, I rush out the door in the morning because I’m usually running late. Lucky enough, time in Cairo is supremely relative. After hailing a cab that might or might not fall apart on the way to work, I arrive at the office in roughly 15 minutes. Lucky again, I live close to work. Away from that, other work includes volunteering at a downtown art collective, freelance writing for various international publications, as well as a personal narrative project that is turning me into a home-based hermit.

However, to say I’ve never had trouble adjusting to the Egyptian culture would be absurd. My attempts to learn one of the hardest languages in the world has been padded with a large amount of grace from those around me. Depending on public transportation and traffic, getting anywhere can turn into an adventure in a matter of minutes.

Cairo has become my home for now. It’s that feeling found when you are grabbing a cup of coffee at that quintessential place or hanging out with the dearest of friends. There’s freedom and excitement in knowing that, through bonding with your surroundings and connecting with individuals, you create your own home. It’s for this very reason that describing Cairo as something foreign has grown increasingly difficult for me.

When I have to answer the question “Where are you from?” it garners a range of responses from not knowing where Oklahoma is located to “Oh wow! I’ve never met anyone from Oklahoma before.” Curiosity follows, and I love having the opportunity to share about Woody Guthrie’s legendary folk movement and the many nights spent on Cherry Street.

Oklahoma’s story book clouds and rolling hills are nowhere to be found because Egypt’s natural environment comes from the sprawling deserts and bar-laden Sinai beaches; great for a break from the urban thrust. Back in the city, my go-to lunch date spot is a tucked away food stall on a tree-lined street that serves up the city’s best bowl of foul (a traditional bean dish). A few blocks away, a music venue hosts open mic nights where friends perform everything from stand-up comedy to contemporary Egyptian music. And while there is no Arnie’s or Soundpony, Cairo’s got Horreya (freedom).

Fortunately enough, Cairo has showered me with a lot of love and has been a major source of wisdom and growth for me as a young person living in what seems to be a completely different place. But at the end of the day, the world and its people are all the same—all human with something to share.

As I’m typing these words, I notice the Cairo sun slowly descending past the buildings. I’m reminded once again that while there's a large amount of land and ocean in between, all of our feet rest on the same soil.

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