Before I went to Madrid, friends offered their stories of time spent abroad. One described the drizzling Oxford rain and basement apartment where he discovered, in spite of his formerly tidy atheism, a new religious faith. Another crossed a treacherous language barrier by holding dinner parties. This friend provided guests with endless plates of wobbling shakshuka in exchange for their patience with her carefully conjugated verbs.

As for the threat that digitization poses for print presses, Andreou said, “We are past the moment in the life of the industry where digitization is the fetish that it was. The last five to 10 years have shown us that print remains the dominant and preferred technology for books. Digital is an additional outlet, in the way audio is. It’s a different means of consumption, but it’s by no means attained the primacy that everyone expected it to do. We do make all our books available as eBooks, because that’s simply what a responsible publisher does now.”

Recalling his decision to leave Knopf to lead a preeminent academic publisher, Andreou said he looked forward to the opportunity to focus more on “books about ideas,” given a trade-publishing climate where the place for “serious nonfiction is shrinking—outside of certain perennial categories, like Civil War history, where the appetite tends to be endless.” He added that many of the writers with whom he started out at Knopf (as senior editor since 2003) wouldn’t be feasible trade authors any longer—“not because there isn’t an audience for them, but because the overhead structure of trade publishers makes it impossible to give the kind of attention to those books that is required to extract [their] full sales potential.”

By developing a laser-like focus on a target audience and realistic promotion opportunities for each title HUP chooses to publish, Andreou said, he hopes to avoid one of what he deems the biggest dangers in academic publishing: turning the press into a mere extension of the academic process by which scholars publish work to gain tenure. “A publisher has to publish for someone, so if it becomes too teleological in relation to the academic world, it will lose the vitality that any publisher should hope for,” he explained. “Academic publishers have to bear in mind what most publishers do, which is that the answer to most things is ‘No.’ And the ‘Yeses’ have to have good reasons for them. They have to be the exception.”

~OSET BABÜR

THE UNDERGRADUATE

Language Learner

by ISA FLORES-JONES ’19

ON THE FIRST NIGHT, my host mother refused my cooking, as she would all subsequent offers, with a smile.

“Eres genial,” she said, and opened her fridge to reveal rows of thick, well-wrapped Spanish tortillas, two half melons, a bottle of orange juice. She introduced my roommate and me to her home through the evidence of the way past guests had mistreated it. Here was the hot-water kettle in which one student had made powdered mac-and-cheese; this was the fridge left wide open, letting produce go to slime; and here, the oven where guests let their brownies turn to charcoal overnight. She let us sit with this image: the heat swelling through the kitchen like an enormous, pregnant balloon. I tried to explain that I’d be careful; but no, I’d already misunderstood.

“El horno,” she said, “no funciona.” The oven didn’t work. And, to my second question, there’d be no guests allowed. Although at that point in the semester I had none to invite over, in any case.

My host mother’s stories fit well with the other kind of story I’d heard before going abroad. Academic advisers (and the Internet) had warned me away from certain programs, describing those packages as a kind of “study-cruise”: all the benefits of regular U.S. collegiate debauchery plus the added attraction of cultural imperial-
ism. Madrileno had a word for the kinds of students who tended to subscribe. Guiris were the internationals who bumped up the price of rent in the formerly Senegalese and Moroccan neighborhoods of La Latina and Lavapiés; guiris, the sorority sisters who sprawled out in the Parque de Buen Retiro without sunscreen, only to be duly surprised at how they’d been burned. To a Harvard student considering study abroad, stories like these are probably more terrifying than anything else, carrying with them implications of unseriousness, wasted opportunity, and—more than anything—the loss of implicit context.

When I came to Harvard I had little of this so-called context. Harvard itself was unknown, accompanied by a new vocabulary of anxieties and social mores, that played out against a background of brick buildings and a freshman dining hall that felt like a castle.

Before Madrid there was only one kind of tortilla in my life, the flat, Mexican kind my grandmother made with flour and lard and salt on a hot stove. Meant to be wrapped around beans or chile verde, these tortillas could be eaten with egg or not—but they were always meant to be shared. When family asked why I wanted to speak Spanish on the Iberian peninsula as opposed to Chile or Mexico or even Argentina, I named this missing context: all I knew about the country, I had gotten from that one tapas restaurant down Kirkland Street, and maybe from watching the movie Volver. On the other hand, I had lived in Mexico, and while it was true that I’d never seen Chile, Argentina, or for that matter any of South America, I’d never known Europe, and did not know when I’d get another chance to do so.

There are risks in going abroad. While still studying at the Law School’s library I had anticipated one of them: the difficulty of communication. Despite my grandmother’s attempted tutelage, I never learned Spanish. On the other side of my course notes, I practiced: leeré, leeremos, leerán. I will read, we will read, they will read. One of my favorite authors had written about teaching herself Italian, that my mediocre Spanish disqualified my enrolling in any of the Universidad Complutense’s literature courses. Instead, there were the departments of anthropology, sociology, and economics; subjects, apparently, where words were not important. This was a blow. I had wanted to find other people struggling, if not exactly with the Spanish language, then with the words themselves. I understood why a scholar who had dedicated years to studying the inflection of Lorca’s phrases might not want my broken clauses in class, but I missed this critical way of relating to language; I missed conversation with friends about books; I missed the books themselves.

Guiltily, I read more English. From David Sedaris came the assurance that life would have been worse had I been a Francophile: in Parisian language classes you might get pencils chucked at your face. The worst thing I’d been hit with in Spain was a broken oven, and even that might be fixable. Possibly, my host mother had said when I asked, and then, Vale, vamos a ver. Maybe. OK. We’ll see.

And there are risks beyond an inability to select preferred classes or fulfill academic requirements. You might sacrifice the possibility of developing career-altering mentorships, or be passing up one of those courses that appear, like certain corpse-smelling flowers, only once every half-decade.

Four years is a short time, and choosing to stay at Harvard for all of it might feel necessary for anyone who wants to achieve an extracurricular title that merits capital letters. Going abroad, even for one semester, can prevent a student from gaining such responsibilities in any of the many clubs, political groups, or arts organizations that occupy our collective Google calendars. A perceived tradeoff between extracurricular advancement and leaving school is so well observed that The Harvard Crimson has

I wanted to find other people struggling, if not with Spanish, then with words themselves.
covered it at least twice. In an article from 2003, the decision is posed as a ruthless either/or, with the negative ruling already decided in the title: a matter of “Leaving” vs. “Leadership.”

Because the undergraduates who go abroad are so few, I wonder whether anyone has tried to advertise the application as a highly competitive process. The Office of International Education estimates that close to 50 students will be abroad this fall term, with perhaps slightly more than 100 leaving in the spring. That number fluctuates slightly, but it is far from the 60 percent cited on the College’s study-abroad page, a percentage that suggests many Harvard students are well-stamped polyglots with friends on every continent. The difference in these two numbers comes from the broad definition of “international experience,” which a study-abroad adviser once told me might include everything from brief research field-trips to international internships to the marginal number of students who take courses abroad during term time itself. And then there is the fact that for the students who come to Harvard from outside the United States (roughly 10 percent to 12 percent in recent classes), Cambridge itself is the study-abroad experience, and home is just home, albeit far away.

At the housing office next to the university, they listened to my oven talk with a great deal of patience. By that time, I’d made Spanish friends: art students who met at the Plaza del Dos de Mayo to trade jokes in rapid-fire Castellano, punctuating their speech with expressions whose crudeness I would realize only a continent later, when I tried to repeat them in Mexico City. I was confusedly gratified that these Spaniards, with their quick lisps, would invite me to join them at their homes and in the bookshops of the city, where we picked up different titles but read them together.

If my notion of fluency was to speak in a different intonation and put the clauses in the right places, then I had done it before, at Harvard. But maybe fluency was something else. Gulping at comprehension, I tried again.

Impeded by confused syntax, by books we had or had not read, by the food we’d eaten as kids, in Madrid we nevertheless knew some things that were easily said but less easily explained: at 10 p.m. we’d meet somewhere near Malasaña. A bus ride to Córdoba was only four hours long. In January, the Palacio Real wore a cap of snow like a tiny diploma; yes, the tasty bocadillos were only a few euros; and if you went to hear flamenco in the Plaza Real, you didn’t have to worry about company. A million Spanish grandfathers would go along. You might be lonely, but you would never be alone.

In my last month in the city, I moved to an empty apartment near the Quevedo metro stop. There was a balcony that overlooked a sea of open windows; a washing machine; and, most important of all, an oven. And, incredibly, they would come: Lisa from the Netherlands, whom I’d met in the anthropology class I’d taken by accident; Maria, who discovered that we both liked novelist Julio Cortázar; Lucia, who’d stopped me at the housing office next to the university, they listened to my oven talk with a great deal of patience. “Leadership.”

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow Isa Flores-Jones ’19 is still unpacking her bags.

SPORTS

A Hard Road

The early season holds no easy wins for Harvard football.

In hoping to rebound from an uncharacteristically mediocre 5-5 record in 2017, coach Tim Murphy put forth a multi-pronged plan for the 2018 Harvard football season, the Crimson’s 145th. Its major elements: First, bolster his offensive and defensive lines. “We have a saying here: ‘It’s what’s up front that counts,’” declared Murphy as he entered his twenty-fifth season on the Crimson sideline. Second, get the ball as often as possible into the hands of senior All-Ivy wideout and kick returner Justice Shelton-Mosley, whose production had dropped to a paltry 3.6 receptions a game in ’17. Third, bank on the continuing maturity of quarterback Jake Smith, who was coming off a promising freshman year.

But as that eminent pugilist Mike Tyson once observed, “Everybody has a plan—until they are punched in the mouth.” By the fourth week of the 2018 season, Murphy’s squad had taken several hard punches. Harvard had a 2-2 record (1-1 in Ivy League play), but a two-game losing streak. The inconsistent Smith seemingly had regressed and had been supplanted by senior Tom Stewart. Senior Charlie Booker III, an All-