



TOP: The Maranto family packs up all of their household belongings May 26. After moving out of Great Cambourne, England, they stayed in an apartment in Cambridge, England. “I needed to be out of the house for movers and that was hard to do with COVID,” Maranto said. (Photo courtesy of Alexandra Maranto)

ABOVE: A moving truck arrives at Maranto’s home in St. Louis Aug. 17. Her household goods were shipped across the Atlantic and arrived a month after she landed. (Photo courtesy of Alexandra Maranto)

RIGHT: Maranto says goodbye to her neighbor’s dogs on a walk around Great Cambourne June 16. This was her last time visiting Great Cambourne before she left Britain. “I didn’t get to say goodbye to a lot of people because there were restrictions,” Maranto said. “It was really difficult.” (Photo courtesy of Alexandra Maranto)



MARANTO MOVES CONTINENTS

Junior Alexandra Maranto relocates internationally during pandemic

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Junior Alexandra Maranto doesn’t like to settle down. She has never lived in the same place for more than five years at one time and has lived in four different countries. Her father, Michael Maranto, is a civilian working for the U.S. Department of Defense, and after living in St. Louis for five years, the Maranto family decided it was time to relocate.

Alexandra and her family moved to a village in the U.K. called Great Cambourne in 2016 after Michael received a job at a Royal Air Force Base. They knew they would be returning to St. Louis eventually due to a Joint Travel Regulation preventing personnel from being assigned overseas for more than five years. After four years in England, the Maranto family decided to return to St. Louis in time for Alexandra to start her junior year. They did not anticipate having to move internationally during a global pandemic.

“It was hard to move because of COVID-19,” Alexandra said. “I didn’t really get to say goodbye to my friends in England in the way that I wanted to, [and] it wasn’t until a week before we left that I was even sure that I was going to be able to.”

Because of the pandemic, the Maranto family was unsure if they would even get the chance to move. In the early stages of COVID-19, the U.S. Secretary of Defense stated that no one working for the Department of Defense was allowed to relocate. After collaborating with a military office that specializes in permanent change of station, the Maranto family was able to get an exception to this policy and leave England as scheduled June 21.

“When we got on this plane that was meant to take hundreds of people across the Atlantic, everyone had their own aisle,” Michael said. “We were required to wear masks the entire time; [however], on the flight from Chicago to St. Louis, they made no attempt at all to space out people, and a lot of people took their masks off.”

After arriving in St. Louis, the Department of Defense required the Maranto family to quarantine for 14 days. They had to stay in a hotel until Aug. 17 because their household belongings were shipped separately from England and did not arrive until then.

"It's one thing to be quarantined with your family and be able to go outside for walks," Alexandra said, "but it's another thing to be in a single hotel room and not be able to leave. We were all stressed from the move so that was a very tense time."

Post quarantine, Alexandra finally reconnected with junior Anna Cochran, who had been looking forward to Alexandra's return ever since she left. When Cochran met Alexandra for the first time in four years, she realized that their friendship dynamic hadn't changed.

"I had brought my dog, and she had never met him," Cochran said. "She was 100 percent more excited to see my dog than me. I think that [my pets] are the only reason she's friends with me, honestly. Right now, we're kind of just trading jokes with each other, but I look forward to having a more genuine conversation with her in the future."

Alexandra is grateful that she had friends in St. Louis to return to but is also sad to leave her friends in England. Ashish Lobo, one of her friends in the U.K., was sad to see her leave but recognizes that he will likely see her again.

"She's always there for you, she's honest and she's also really funny to be with," Lobo said. "It's sad that she moved, but I think at the end of the day, social media lets you talk to someone across the globe. You're still friends with them even if they leave."

Readjusting to life in St. Louis has been challenging for Alexandra. She has had to start her junior year online, which has brought various complications.

"It's definitely weird to be on Zoom," Alexandra said.

"There's part of me that says 'I recognize these people' but there's another part of me that says 'I have no clue who these people are.' There's [also] been some complications with vocabulary that my friends won't leave me alone about."

Alexandra looks forward to finishing her last two years of high school and

reconnecting with the people she left behind. Despite the challenges moving internationally and the COVID-19 pandemic have brought, Alexandra remains optimistic about her goals for her future in the U.S.

"Right now, I'm just trying to focus on keeping my grades up and staying active," Alexandra said. "I'm not necessarily sure what I want to do with my life at this point, so [I'm] keeping my options open and just trying to enjoy life as much as I can under the COVID situation." □

There's only so well moving could have gone. I'm glad to be back, but [COVID-19] was difficult to move in.

ALEXANDRA MARANTO | JUNIOR



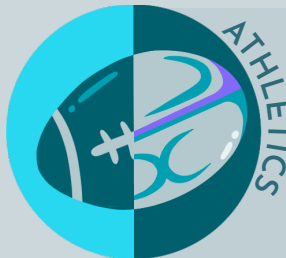
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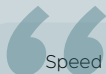
Differences between the US and the UK, according to Alexandra



They insert a lot of U's in words like 'honor' and 'color'. They also use a lot of double L's in words like 'canceled'. There's also a lot of words that mean completely different things. Elevators are called lifts and underwear is called pants."



I played rugby, which is like American football but with a lot less stoppage in play and it is faster paced. There is also netball, which is kind of like basketball and ultimate frisbee combined. You can't move with the ball and only certain people can score."



Speed limits are so much lower in the United States. Driving in general has also been challenging because in England, they drive on the left side of the road while the U.S. drives on the right. I've freaked out a few times while driving in the U.S."



They divide education into four key stages, which are just grades they group together. After key stage three, you prepare for GCSEs, which are big exams after year 11. You end up making life decisions at 16, which can be daunting."



illustration by | GRACE HU & DANIELLE ZHANG