

Hello, World

There is life outside your apartment.
I know it's hard to conceive.
But there's life outside your apartment.
And you're only gonna see it if you leave.

So goes the song from the musical *Avenue Q*, which my mother quotes when I call her.

College commencement speakers try to inspire graduates to enter the real world confidently, create their destiny, enjoy life. But how can you do any of those when you're thrown into a new city, you're single for the first time in years, and your friends are thousands of miles away?

Before graduating from Williams last year, I had a great group of girlfriends—we were sure of ourselves because we had one another. We wore pajamas to class to protest the 8:30 a.m. hour, dressed in '80s gear for parties, stayed up all night eating cookie dough and laughing, and talked about our latest crushes over brunch. Now I've gone from walking across the hall to see friends to traveling over oceans, from staying up till 3 a.m. on weeknights to dozing off during *The Daily Show*. Sometimes I even crave dining-hall egg salad.

I asked my friend Olga in London when we're going to meet for coffee after pulling an all-nighter. We knew the answer: Never.

In the first months after graduation, I lived with my family on Long Island. My laundry was done for me, and dinner was waiting when I got home from my job. High-school friends were nearby. But fighting with my parents over my messy room and sharing a bathroom with my brother soon got old.

When I got an internship in Washington, I left and moved into my first apartment. It was exciting

having an adult job, paying adult bills, making adult dinner. But within weeks it hit me: I was alone.

I knew a few people from college and work, but nothing like what I was used to. I spent weekend nights watching rented movies. I cried at sappy commercials, stared out the window, waited for the phone to ring. It felt like the grown-up thing to do—deal with your problems on your own.

Everyone, from old friends to people I just met, seemed to have their lives together. No matter how down and out they said they were, I could always find ways they had the upper hand. My parents suggested I join a Jewish group. My college friends and I reminisced via Instant Messenger about road trips and snowball fights. But I felt beyond help. Putting myself out there for others to judge seemed too hard.

I went from self-assured, talk-to-anyone-who'll-listen Kim to nervous, playing-with-my-hair Kim. "It's not worth it," I told my parents. "Nothing's going to change."

"If you think like that," my mother said, "nothing will."

This time I actually heard her.

One Saturday after a few months in D.C., I woke up and saw the clear sky out the window. Kids played in the schoolyard behind my building. I got dressed, took a deep breath and stepped outside. I didn't know where I was going—I just knew I had to get out.

People smiled. A baby in a stroller waved. A



cute guy ambled by. My coffee was rich and good. The sun warmed my face, and there were flowers on the trees. An oddly sort of perfect day.

Maybe my mother and that Broadway show were right. Maybe there is life beyond my apartment. It'll take time, but I'm going to find it.

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