A Serendipitous Crossroads

J. R. R. Tolkien once eloquently penned the verse "Not all those who wander are lost."

That beautiful sentiment must resonate with everyone at I-House for we are all travellers of sorts and it is here, under this grandiose building with its bald dome, glinting off the glorious California sun, that we have chanced upon each other and made incredible friends and fine memories.

We are travellers from all over. Every dinner conversation that began with slightly awkward small talk and nervous laughter, every coffee hour exchange that came about impatiently waiting in line for snacks that taste brilliant but can't for the life of me remember what they're called, every small smile and midnight conversation I have had as I bumped into someone in the corridor late at night was a little journey - a journey into someone else's world, to learn about their background, to wonder in their culture, to enjoy their experiences vicariously. Every person at I-House represents a wealth of stories and every person here is a page-turner.

With every story, comes great conversation. Between world class academics and compulsive travellers, it's only natural. What has struck me most about the people at I-House is their ability to always strike up clever, witty, knowledgeable conversation, turning dinner into a two hour long event, till we're shooed away by dining hall assistants brandishing squirt bottles. We've had chats about the perplexity of American football and why for a rather footless game, it's named so. We've had passionate debates about Polish politics, nuclear warfare and Eritrean polygamy. We've had involved explorations into Kant philosophy, 90s children television and how long you got your tamagotchi to survive before it was inevitably poetically digitally buried.

And from these exchanges, I grew - I learnt of countries I've never heard of, countries I thought I'd made up my mind about, countries I will probably explore on my travels in the future. And I also found friends, people who may not always speak the same language but spoke the same interest. Some of my fondest memories of I-House are the times I spent with interesting people, either
sprawled in the centre of the corridor with a hoard of junk food or sitting on a rooftop, warm *boba* in hand, looking out into a gloriously lit San Francisco cityscape, talking about nothing and everything. In those conversations, I found that even though we may be from very different places separated by oceans, mountains and occasional llamas, read different books growing up and listened to wildly different styles of music during our rebellious teenage phases, we are in fact very similar - that stripped of all our geographical and cultural differences, good people are good people everywhere and it just takes a smile and a bit of laughter to find them.

As a traveller myself with a future of possibilities ahead, I'm glad to have docked here at I-House even if only for a brief time in my journey because it meant I got to find good people, eat wondrous cookies, learn an awful lot and feel ready to sail off and *Explore. Dream. Discover.*