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CWIL Grant Paper

### My Experience in Sevilla, Spain

Sitting on the plane on my way from Atlanta to Sevilla I knew that I would have an exciting two months ahead of me. In May of 2006 I headed off to the place I had studied abroad the previous year and the place I call my second home. Eager to improve my Spanish and learn more about the culture and people of the country I stepped off the plane onto Spanish soil and began my summer. I want to share with you two of my experiences: one about my internship and the other about the time I spent with a Spanish American family.

As I looked up at the huge doors opening to the grounds of Paz y Bien my stomach was one big knot. Paz y Bien, the place where I would be doing my internship, houses people with cognitive disabilities and allows them to make products in workshops for outside companies. In Spanish Paz y Bien means “Peace and Good” and I was feeling neither of these emotions at the time. Not only was I nervous because this was my first day on the job, but I also had to communicate with people in a language that I was not completely fluent in. I took a big breath and walked into the social work office to say hello to my fellow workers and everything began from there. Over the next few months I was able to supervise the workshops where the people with cognitive disabilities worked. I sat down with them every day and worked side by side with them while learning about each one of their families. We had many interesting conversations where they asked me about my family and life back in the States. We all had a good laugh at my Spanish when I would get stuck or when I used the wrong words which happened quite often. At the

end of my internship my Spanish had greatly improved and I had learned so much about what it means to be accepting of all people regardless of race, religion, or language abilities.

Almost every weekend I visited a family in a city called El Puerto de Santa Maria which is about an hour and a half south of Sevilla. The mother and wife in the family, Sue is my mother's best friend from college. She is American and studied abroad in Spain where she met Enrique who is now her husband. Enrique and Sue have two sons: Kevin and Quique. Through this family I was able to learn even more about the rich culture of Spain and its amazing people. Throughout the summer Sue taught me to cook Spanish food. We would spend hours in the kitchen talking and cooking and in typical traditional Spanish fashion we'd eat lunch at 5 in the afternoon and dinner at 11 at night. Sue once had a surprise party for Enrique's birthday and brought many of their friends over to the house. We spent hours and hours eating and dancing in their living room. It was so nice to see how everyone was unrushed and enjoyed each other's company. This Spanish American family taught me so much about what it means to appreciate everything that life gives you and never take one minute for granted. They loved each other and their friends and made my experience in Spain wonderful.

Someone once asked me what my favorite part of Spain was and I answered: the people. The people of Spain taught me what it means to embrace everyone and every moment in life. Sue, Enrique, Quique, Kevin, and the workers and social workers at Paz y Bien all showed me that Spain is about appreciating your surroundings and the people in it.