

Note to District 7690 Piedmont North Carolina Rotarians:

Because The Rotary Foundation scholarships are awarded quite far in advance of the time they are used, occasionally local scholars find that their life circumstances change and they must resign their scholarship. When Marie Connelly of South Carolina attended the Zone Scholars Orientation last January, she had not received a scholarship. Funds were available through District 7690 to provide her with an award. As you read the account of her experience in Salamanca, Spain, received on October 26, 2005, I hope you will find this investment in our "Out of District" scholar has been well placed. I'm proud of her.

- Phil Morris, 2005-2006 District Governor



**Marie Allison Connelly**  
**2005-2006 Rotary Cultural**  
**Scholar**

### **Hello my fellow friends in Rotary!**

I want to start off with both a thank you and an apology:

Thank you all for your generosity in supporting the Scholarship Foundation so students like me can travel abroad and immerse in other cultures with the Cultural Scholarship. I also apologize for not writing sooner! I what

seems like over a million stories to share, and every time I sit down to write you, I become overwhelmed with deciding what to say, but now as my second month here comes to a close, I am going to try to summarize for you some of my most significant experiences. Please feel free to respond with any thoughts, opinions or advice you have to share! Be prepared – this is going to be a long email and may take a few sittings to get through it all!

(If you would like to see the few photos I have had the chance to post **click on the photo to the left . . .**

### **Marie Allison Connelly** **2005-2006 Rotary Cultural Scholar**

#### **SUMMARY:**

In a few words, I have improved my Spanish immensely, learned an experienced a lot, traveled quite a bit, overcome cultural differences, battled a few colds and attempted to overcome my fears by facing them here at the University of Salamanca's Cursos Internacionales program as I study Spanish. My program is a subsidiary within the university comprised of students from all over the world, and as a result I have friends all over the place. On the contrary it takes a lot of effort to make friends with Spaniards because I have none in my classes. There are many different study abroad groups from the States here, and the Americans studying with these programs tend to travel as an English speaking herd that usually causes the Spaniards to shy away. While I have some American friends here, I have done all I can to defy these stereotypes and to make friends with Spaniards. I have a lot of "intercambios" where I meet

with a native speaker who speaks some English, to help each other with our conversation skills in Spanish and English. I have also enrolled in a Sevillianas dance class, which is one of two well know dances of Spain and it is similar, but not as rhythmically difficult as Flamenco.

I've made friends with a couple of Spanish girls here and they help me with the colloquial language. When I opened my bank account at the Santander Bank I met a girl named Maria with whom I have become good friends. We usually get together a few times during the week for window-shopping and conversation. This weekend I'm going to Cabo de Gata in Almería for a three-day hiking/ backpacking/ kayaking adventure with the main university's outdoors group. This should be yet another great opportunity for me to practice some Spanish with natives! My program has four general levels (A (highest), B, C, D (lowest)) and numbers to subdivide each general level. After the results of my exam, I was placed in level C, and soon realized it was too easy so I transferred to level B. After a month in this class I took the placement exam again and I was placed in the highest level possible! I am going to take the DELE exam November 18, which is an internationally recognized certification of my Spanish abilities. This will be useful if I later pursue a job where I need to prove my competency.

### **ADJUSTMENTS:**

It's been a challenge adjusting to the Spanish food clock. We generally eat dinner around 10, and lunch around 2 (I usually eat around 3 because of class). I must say that all in all the food here is terrific, especially the food my host mother prepares! We usually eat a variety of potatoes, rice, beef, fish (yes I have been known to eat fish here!!), chicken,

pasta, paella and all sorts of other goodies. I have tried everything that has been put in front of me, and I have liked almost all of it. Seafood and fish are popular in Spain, particularly near the sea. Usually the fish and seafood are served whole, which completely disgusts me. I can't stand looking at the dead eyes of these creatures thinking that the day before he was happily swimming in his home. The carnicerías gross me out too. I walk by a few every day and they've got entire legs of beef, including the hooves, hanging from the ceiling. The smell of blood and salt preservatives makes my stomach churn. I know where meat comes from, but I don't like to think about it. Even though all this bothers me I am still trying to overcome my aversion by encountering the food and making myself try things I normally wouldn't eat.

I have also made a concerted effort to face and overcome anything that I have previously feared or disliked (as long as it doesn't compromise my morals) to negative sentiments. In doing so I have become more laid back and easy going. I can now sleep in almost any conditions (lights, noise, etc), where before I had trouble if it was not pitch dark and silent. I have also become more decisive while simultaneously becoming more patient. All in all this approach has been great!

### **TRAVEL**

I try to take advantage of every weekend by traveling around Spain and even some of Portugal! I have rented a car three times and shared with other people from all over the world. Sometimes our only common language is Spanish, which makes for great practice. My first trip was in a rental car with four friends from Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Italy, and our most comfortable common language was Spanish so we spent the

majority of the weekend speaking Spanish and gesturing a lot. We hit Ávila, Segovia, and Toledo in a weekend, and as always, I got some fantastic photos.

My second big trip was with the girl from Italy in another rental car to the Comunidad de Galicia where we visited Vigo, Santiago de Compostella, and La Coruña. We had a slight accident in a roundabout in Santiago where another man hit us. Initially it was quite an ordeal because he was screaming at us in rapid Spanish we couldn't understand, and he refused to complete his part of our obligatory paperwork from EuropCar, which would have left us responsible for all the damages had we not called the police. Luckily the police took control of the situation, completed our paperwork, and demonstrated that it was clearly the other guy's fault. His insurance paid for the damages to our car, so we didn't have to pay for anything other than the rental. I also got to keep the side bumper as a memoir!

I took a weekend trip to Cuenca by myself to explore this mountainside town. On the train ride back I befriended a Romanian who has been working in Spain for years. She invited me to stay with her on my next trip!

The Latin American Heads of State had a Summit (Cumbre) in Salamanca a few weeks ago where they used our University for the meetings. As a result we had a long break without classes, so my friend Kristen and I rented a car again and took a trip to Portugal where we visited Porto, Fatima, and Lisboa. The Europeans are aggressive drivers but they are quite vigilant and don't seem to have road rage. I have adopted a good many of their customs, and as a result I believe I am a much better driver. Watch out America!!

This past weekend I met up with a Colombian friend in Zaragoza who speaks no English. I spent an entire weekend with him and his friends speaking in Spanish, which helped me tremendously.

### **RELATIONS WITH HOST FAMILY:**

Because Salamanca is full of international students, many families here allow boarders to bring in some extra money. You will find the occasional family who participates in the 'host family' program because they have a love for exposing others to their culture, but the majority of the families here treat the students as a business, and don't attempt to develop a relationship with them. I feel like the foreign students would benefit more from sharing an apartment with Spanish students than with a family because from my experiences the students are more willing to give the foreign students the time they need to practice and learn, where the families tend to finish your sentences for you if you aren't able to explain your thoughts fast enough.

I believe my family is better than most because they allow me to do what I please given I don't disturb them, they feed me, provide me with linens and a comfortable bed, and they even have two cute kids (Boy, Raul, 5 and girl, Virginia, 3). Amidst this I still had a hard time adjusting. When I wouldn't understand Virginia's Spanish kid-talk, she would get angry with me and call me "tonta americana (stupid American)" or when I come home from school she will sometimes greet me with her hands and legs attempting to block my passage through the hallway saying "María, NO PASA!" I'll respond and tell her that I've got to pass in order to get to my room and to eat. Then I'll pick her up gently and move her out of my way. As soon as I set her down she'll violently throw herself on the ground and start crying, trying to

make it seem like I knocked her down. I was worried at first that the mother thought I was malicious, but I soon realized that she is a drama queen with a dislike for anyone who has the potential to take away her center stage. I have made efforts to befriend the children by playing with them. One day Virginia saw me putting on makeup and she asked if I would "paint her" so with her mom's permission I gave her a makeover. She then wanted to return the favor, and when she was done I looked like I could work for the circus, but we both had a great time. Now she and Raul will both ask me to play with them and sometimes we'll assemble puzzles or read books together.

#### **ROTARY AND VOLUNTEERING:**

I have met with my wonderful host counselor on a number of occasions and I have attended one Rotary meeting here in Salamanca where I gave a brief introduction of myself with the rest of this year's scholars. I will give my formal presentation towards the end of my stay when I my Spanish will at its peak. I hope to travel to other clubs around Salamanca, perhaps in Zamora, Valladolid, Ciudad Rodrigo, and Bejar but if not all, most of the clubs meet during the week, and it is difficult for me to travel during the week because I fall behind in classes. I have been shy about getting in touch with the clubs to give my presentation because I was afraid that with my level of Spanish I would not make a good impression on our clubs and on the states. I gave my Rotary presentation for one of my classes, and it went well which gave me courage I needed to contact the other clubs. I will surmount my fear before the end of this week when I contact the clubs in my area. My Rotary experiences have demonstrated the brotherhood and geniality of the membership, which speaks volumes for Rotary's potential of actualizing all of its

missions. You can read below more details about my experiences with Rotary.

I have been interested in finding a volunteering niche since I arrived, but I have yet to have any luck. Because I'm here for such a short period of time the big national organizations like Cruz Rojo (Red Cross) won't let me volunteer. I've essentially abandoned this idea, and instead one of the Rotary Scholarship Recipients from Canada and I are going to go tomorrow to ask about volunteering at a local children's center. If you have any advice, please let me know!

#### **A FEW JOURNAL ENTRIES OF INTEREST:**

##### ***Thursday, August 25, 2005 – Day of Delays and Really Cool People***

Today is the day! I think I've got it all together and I am ready to head out for España with nearly 150 pounds of luggage (of course most of it is in books!). My first flight was from Columbia to Newark then from Newark to Madrid all on the wonderfully expedient Continental Airlines. The Columbia flight, which was an extraordinarily small, 19-row airbus, was deterred while flying over the Raleigh-Durham airspace. Air-traffic Control made us circle the airspace for an hour and a half as they rerouted the runways. In doing so, our plane nearly ran out of gas, and we had to make an emergency stopover in Washington-Dulles to refuel. By the time we arrived in Newark, I had missed my Spain flight by at least an hour, but in the meantime I made some great friends on the plane!

My riding partner happened to be a Catholic Rotarian who lives in Columbus, Ohio and was in Columbia for the day. Because of the travel his work requires, he isn't able to spend much hands-on time with his Rotary Club, so he hadn't ever actually met a scholar. We had some

great philosophical, ontological, and theological discussions about where the world is going, and what we as individuals can do to change its direction. The conversation was very empowering. My new friend, Mr. Mike Guirlinger, told me that he was having a horrible day and the flight delay was making things worse, but after talking to me, his problems seemed to fade and his outlook improved. We exchanged contact information and he said that if I needed anything while I was in Spain, to not hesitate to contact him, and he would obligingly help me out. He even offered to share a \$100 if I needed it! I love Rotary!

Hoping my plane hadn't yet departed, I rushed to the International section of the airport, only to be disappointed. My next step was to wait in line at the help desk to reschedule my flight and have hotel reservations made. The wait was a bit laborious, as is expected with this customer-oriented airline, but once I got to the counter, my assistant processed everything smoothly and hooked me up with a hotel in Newark, as well as dinner and breakfast vouchers. As I was about to collect my bags and head to the hotel, I saw this woman from the plane crying as she spoke with the Continental clerk and tried to manage her two young children. My heart went out to her and I asked her if I could help. Not wanting to accept any charity, she refused at first, but when I asked if we could have dinner together she agreed. I asked her daughter, the oldest named Katrina, if she knew how to play cards, as she was extremely bored after the four hour plane ride, and all the waiting in the airport, and the younger boy was fussy. She said yes, so I bought a deck of cards at the newsstand and we started playing Go Fish as her mom tried to soothe Man-Man, the boy. After fussing with the McDonald's employees, having a drink poured all over me, Man-man throwing up, not being able to

contact the hotel via the courtesy airport phones we finally made it to the hotel.

The concierge put Melissa and me in adjacent rooms, so after I dropped my stuff off, I joined her and her kids in their room. I tended to the oldest while she bathed Man-man; I then did the same for man-man while she bathed Katrina. I lent Katrina my t-shirt to sleep in because Melissa washed her clothes in the sink and they had to dry overnight. I borrowed Melissa's cell phone to call home and tell them about my itinerary changes, and also to call Ben Edwards to see if I could hang out with him tomorrow. After Katrina and I played around on my computer for a bit, I left to hit the sack. Melissa told me she's call first thing in the morning before she left to catch her flight at noon. After coming back to my room I realized I could access the internet for free, so I played around for a little bit and eventually went to bed.

### ***Thursday, September 1, 2005 – First day of Classes and a Rotary Miracle***

Classes began today. As I'm struggling to overcome my jetlag I have not yet established a regular sleeping schedule. Luckily I was able to fall asleep shortly after 12 last night, but I woke up around 4 with a sore, dry throat, sweating in the stagnant heat. I got up, changed my shirt and laid back down hoping to fall back asleep. That plan failed so I picked up a TIME magazine and read until I was wide-awake. It was obvious I wasn't going to be able to fall asleep anytime soon, so I pulled out my 501 Spanish Verbs book and started learning. Before I knew it the clock had ticked past 630 and I decided I must get some sleep. I'm not really sure if I slept at all between 630 and 8, but shortly after I laid down it was time to get up again.

So I trudge my way to class, half awake barely making it to the Cursos Internacionales Building by 9am, when I discover that the place I'm supposed to be is on the other side of the *más antigua* part of the city! I truck it across the city, knowing I need to be as close to 9 as possible because I'm taking my placement exam. After going to the wrong place a few more times I finally made my way to the testing room (15 minutes late). We had an 80 multiple-choice test that started out easy, but when I got to the subjunctive and all those crazy prepositions and conjunctions I can never keep straight, my mind went blank. The test proctor also called time when I had 20 or so questions left to answer. Then our oral interviews began. AHHH!! My proctor reviewed my gridded answers and asked me simple questions about where I'm from, etc. I didn't think the interview was overbearing, but I still managed to stumble over simple things. I suppose that happens when I'm put on the spot in a second language after getting only a third of a full night's rest.

Needless to say, I left my exam a little frustrated. My next step was to talk to the Cursos Internacionales secretary about my tuition payment to ensure the funds were forwarded from Rotary, and to make sure my home stay expenses were covered, as Maria is becoming a bit anxious to get her money. I spoke with the secretary in English, who was Norwegian, and very impolite. Maybe it's because she speaks English as a second language, but it seemed to me that she didn't have any desire to help me. Regardless, she informed me that Rotary had not paid the tuition yet as the bill has not been sent from USAL, and that Rotary was only obliged to pay for my tuition, not my home stay. DANGIT! I was looking forward to having that extra 1500 Euros, but looks like I'll have to use that to pay Maria. I suppose I can't be greedy, but it's

still a disappointment! The combination of being sick, not getting enough sleep, being on my period, not being able to communicate as effectively as I'm accustomed to, and not having anyone to hang out with yet made the little problems of this morning seem like a total disaster. I left USAL at my wits end to meet my host counselor, Emilio Gonzalez-Coria in hopes of getting my check.

On my walk back across the old town, I said a prayer that things would go smoothly. Apparently God liked my request because he responded in my favor! I immediately met with Sr. Gonzalez, and we spoke small talk about ourselves for a bit. He started to speak at a higher level than I could understand at the moment, so I told him that because I was under the weather, I wasn't able to understand very well. He then took it upon himself to take me to one of his Rotarian friends who is a doctor. This physician saw me in his office almost immediately after we arrived, examined me and gave me a prescription for a three-day antibiotic. He then sat and spoke with Sr. Gonzalez-Coria for a while about some legal business. It was interesting to listen to their conversation and see what I could gather!

Sr. Gonzalez-Coria and I then proceeded to the bank where another of his Rotarian friends was the Bank Director. This fellow hooked me up with a free bank account to deposit my 2275 Euros, and I will also receive a free debit card in about a week! Glorious! It took a while to establish my account because the guy inputting my data had a few setbacks. We eventually got things taken care of, and the Bank Director, Sr. Gonzalez-Coria, and I went out for a break at a café in Plaza Mayor. The entire time the men made sure I walked between them, which made me feel quite regal, as I'm pranced around this city with a prestigious man

on either side. Again, needless to say this situation absolutely brightened my sour mood. On top of the positives, The Bank Director, Francisco gave me a number of gifts including three shirts, a jacket, and an umbrella all sporting his bank logo. I almost mistook the moment for Christmas morning!

My newfound friends also accompanied me to the pharmacy to have my prescription filled, and they assured me that I would feel leagues better in three days. They also told me that if I needed ANYTHING to not hesitate to contact either of them. I have both of their cell phone numbers in my phone – and to them anything includes financial problems, difficulties with the university, or even problems with my host family. Even with my shaky language skills, I felt completely reassured. The more I interact with Rotary, the more I enjoy the camaraderie, networking, and mission of their work. I am going to visit their club this upcoming Thursday, September 8, 2005. I'm supposed to meet Sr. Gonzalez-Coria in his office around 8:30 so we can walk together!

By this point I was exhausted, physical and mentally, so I came back, ate lunch with my family and laid down for a nap after tossing back a few Aleve. I slept until Virginia's screams woke me an hour so later. I was irritated at this point mostly because I am not used to having to deal with children, I'm used to having my

own quiet space, and for goodness sake – I DON'T FEEL GOOD. I think the princess in me is starting to surface.

I did a little reading, and waited until it was time to trudge back to USAL to check my class placement, get my ID card, and grab my books. While in line for my ID card, this cute older Chinese man started talking to me in broken Spanish. I enjoyed getting to know this new friend, Pablo, whom I actually have a few classes with. I also spoke with the French girl behind me named Sophie. After collecting our new treasures, we walked to the plaza mayor, grabbed some warm drinks, and practiced our Spanish. It was quite a workout in the mental gym. After finishing our drinks we strolled to the public library to view the photography exposition, but it had been taken down by the time we got there. However we did meet a young girl from Switzerland who also spoke French and English. These two went off and I came back home to rest my weary self and get ready for a great *cena*. I am sure all will go well with my adjustment. I simply have to stay patient, and realize that I'm not going to be the best, my Spanish is not going to be perfect, and that it's okay for me to make mistakes because that is the only way I will be able to learn.

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End of this installment.