

## FIRST REPORT FORM

Your name: MARIE ALLISON CONNELLY

Your scholarship award type ( check one):  Academic-Year  Multi-Year  Cultural

Your award year/start date: 2005-2006, August 2005

Study Institution: UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA, CURSOS INTERNACIONALES

Your current mailing address: CAMINO DE LAS AGUAS, 67, 2A  
37003 SALAMANCA, SPAIN

Your current telephone and fax numbers: mobil (from US) 011-34-697-428-700

Your current e-mail address: [marieconnelly@gmail.com](mailto:marieconnelly@gmail.com)

Name and address of the person supervising your study or training program at your assigned institution:

Emilio Gonzalez-Coria Gomez (Host Counselor)  
Paseo Canalejas 56 Avd., 37005, Salamanca, España

**Please answer the questions below using all the space you need (the boxes will expand as you write). You should send copies of this report to your scholarship coordinator at The Rotary Foundation and host and sponsor district governors and counselors. The report should be written in the language of your Sponsor country and in the language of your Host Country.**

1. Provide information about your study program, including your adaptation and progress with your studies.

Please see below

2. Describe what steps you and your sponsor Rotarians took to prepare for your experience abroad. How did this preparation help you to meet the challenges of living and studying in your host country?

Please see below

3. How have you been involved in Rotary since you arrived in your host country? Please describe the ambassadorial activities in which you have participated.

Please see below

4. What are your first impressions of your host country and the people in your community? Please describe culturally significant locations you have visited and opportunities you have had to share your culture.

Please see below

Please submit quality photographs portraying your experiences in ambassadorial or academic situations, if available. Along with the first report, Academic-Year Scholars must also submit to the Foundation copies of tuition receipts and complete the Confirmation of Costs Form located in the Scholar Handbook.

**Photographs can be accessed at <http://community.webshots.com/user/marieaconnelly2>**

**First Report**  
**Marie Allison Connelly**  
**Rotary Cultural Scholar, Salamanca, Spain**

**SUMMARY:**

My basic schedule has been class during the week, travel on the weekends, and all of my free time is packed with lounging in the awesome parks, making and hanging out with new friends and going out leaving only a little time left for sleep. The night life here is incredible. The bars don't have regulations telling them when they have to close, so they are usually open until 7 am or so when the last person leaves. Of course I only know about this from hearsay.

In a few words, I have improved my Spanish immensely, learned and experienced a lot, traveled quite a bit (which includes playing on the French Riviera with Anne), overcome cultural differences, battled a few colds, seen a bull fight, received a marriage proposal, learned how to Salsa, seen movies in Spanish, gone on a few dates, 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 María with whom I have become good friends. We usually get together a few times during the week for window shopping and conversation. We're hoping to catch a musical before the end of the month, and possibly a visit to the circus while it's in town!

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.

**PREPARATIONS:**

My sponsor counselor, Sally Thomas, helped me tremendously by offering a slew of advice on various aspects of the scholarship process. Although she studied in Australia she was still able to gear me in the right direction with my visa application process, which in itself was a bear because I had to drive to Miami without an appointment a month before leaving, not knowing if the paperwork would come through

in time. She also offered useful advice on what to bring, the type of mindset I need to have when entering a new culture (open and without prejudices). I also met with the District Governor of 7770 before leaving, and he told me that if I ever need anything to call, and to never stop smiling.

### **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, octopus, pig feet, and all types of crustaceans 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 *carnecerías* 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 making myself try things I normally wouldn't eat.

For the longest time I tried to conceal my American-ness and assimilate as a 'Spaniard'. Since I have a semi-Mediterranean physique, I after to speak at first because I was afraid that my accent would give me away, and I didn't want to change anyone's impression by opening my mouth. While it is wonderful to try to adapt to a new culture, and it's not smart to flamboyantly advertise I'm American because of the anti-American sentiment, it is still important to have an identity of my own. I have gotten over this problem and since then I have found it much easier to communicate with Spaniards. They have always got questions about things from politics to religion to English words, some of which I can answer others I can't, but in all it's fun to share these perspectives.

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) and in doing so I have become more laid back. 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 will try almost any type of food, as long as it's not looking at me when I'm trying to eat it (I still need to work on this!), and I have no fear talking to anyone (I don't think that's really any different than beforehand). 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.

**Galicia:** 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 Compostela, 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!

**Cuenca:** I took a weekend trip to Cuenca by myself to explore this mountainside town. I did a bit of hiking/exploring. There was one mountain I really wanted to climb, but I was scared to do it alone as there was no definitive trail, I didn't have much food/water with me, and no one knew where I was. There's always a next time. This town appears to be etched out of the mountain. Everything is rustic, the houses are made of the same stone of the mountain, and there's a natural feel about the place. I enjoyed the escape. Cuenca was made famous for its *Casas Colgadas* (Hanging Houses) that emanate from the cliffs and housed the Spanish Royalty during the summers of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. 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!

**Portugal:** 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. I have a bunch of stories from this trip, but I'm about typed out. If you're interested in hearing them, shoot me an individual email and I'll share! 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!!

**Zaragoza:** A few weekends back 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. My friend, Cesar, lives with a family, with whom I fell in love. They continuously asked me questions about "How do you say this word" and they took me on a personal tour of the city while Cesar took care of some stuff for his business. One afternoon I ate dinner with a group of Cesar's employees and friends, including his roommates, no one could stop commenting on my teeth. I thought it was the most bizarre compliment for people to be some enchanted by someone's teeth, but such is life.

On my Sunday in Zaragoza, Cesar and I went to the *Parque de Piedra*, where there's both a Romanesque monastery and a natural park. We spent a brief moment in the monastery, and passed the rest of the afternoon scoping out the beauty of the natural park, from the waterfalls, to the caves, to hiking through the variable terrain.

**Hiking in Almería:** Two weekends ago I went with the backpacking group from the University of Salamanca to the south for a long weekend of hiking in *El Parque Natural de Cabo de Gata*. A few things were quite magnificent about this experience, the

first being that I was the only American on the trip with a bunch of Spanish people, so I finally was able to have a true immersion experience where I spoke in nothing but Spanish for four days, and I learned a ton of the colloquial language. This unique park is situated on the Mediterranean Sea with a desert climate and is comprised primarily of dormant volcanoes. We spent every day climbing these black rock mountains that had an excess of loose black rocks. Every few hours we came upon a black sand beach where we rested, munched on snacks, swam, and tanned. It was a combination I've never experienced before!

American style backpacking where you camp in the wilderness and carry all your supplies with you is prohibited in Spain because the climate is very dry and when you have campers, you have campfires, which easily become uncontrollable forest fires. We spent about 8 hours each day in the mountains and stayed in an established campground where we could shower, eat in the restaurant, etc. I can't imagine how heavy my pack would have been if I had to truck enough water to last 4 days, as we encountered no fresh water sources during the hike. In some ways I wished we could've been more isolated, but I was also thankful that we didn't have to haul a load of water with us!

A few of us brought dehydrated food with us, which we opted to eat instead of paying for the restaurant. I must say that Mountain House was a hit! My friends cracked me with their hype about how tasty my food was. We all ate in the restaurant the last night, and the Mountain House fans claimed that it was even better than the restaurant's food. During this dinner I tested my limits again by eating a fried crustacean in its entirety, including its eyes. Yes I know, this took some guts!

*Fin de Semana Pasada en Sierra de Francia* – No I didn't go to France, I just visited a park in Salamanca's province with a similar name! I spent all day Sunday with one of my friends, Alba from the Almería trip, and four of her Spanish friends hiking the mountains and hanging out in a small mountain village of La Alberca. It was fun being with friends who had cars. As always is the case in the mountains, the views were beautiful and the atmosphere was tranquil. I think I could live there happily ever after. This upcoming weekend I'm probably going to go to the *Picos de Europa* Mountains in Asturias with the backpacking group to do some more hiking. I'll let ya'll know how it goes!

#### **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've begun to realize that she likely felt threatened that I might steal her attention, which caused her to dislike me from the start. On top of this, she is pretty moody, and if you say *Hola* to her on a bad day she'll scream "NOOOOO!" I just let it roll off now with a little laugh, because in reality it is funny. 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. Other times I'll be at my desk and Virginia will come in, crawl into my lap and say "*Veo veo algo...*" which is essentially the Spanish version of *I Spy*. When she's bored with that she'll ask me to show her some photos on the computer. Sometimes I'll let the kids sit on my feet or climb on my back and I'll carry them around the flat as their *caballa*. I wish you guys could see these kids because they are absolutely precious.

María and I talk much more than when I first arrived, and I feel like we're beginning to develop a bit of a friendship. She doesn't have much time to spare chatting because her day is filled with tending to the children and her daily chores, but I enjoy the few occasions we're able to spend getting to know each other better.

### **PRECIOUS MOMENTS:**

The Spanish I learn, the better I can appreciate the daily comedy at the dinner/lunch table. These kids do some of the most hilarious things, and it can be incredibly difficult not to laugh. One day Virginia grabbed her bottom and said "Mammi, mi culo está lleno de caga" (My butt is full of poop). María proceeded to pop her on the head and tell her to use the bathroom. The kids have discovered shame yet, so they freely use the bathroom with the door open and they don't mind if I share the space with them. I was brushing my teeth after lunch when Virginia finished pooping, and she turned to me and said "María podrías limpiarme?" (Could you clean me please?) I had to get the other María to take care of that one, because cleaning bums just isn't on my agenda quite yet.

Another day Virginia was making a mess of herself shoveling yogurt into her mouth when her mom popped her on the head as asked "Eres una perrita" (are you a little dog?). Virginia's face fell sullen, and she started to eat like she was part of civilization. It was hard for me not to laugh at this one. This same day Raul asked María some nonsense question and she responded "Mamá no habla chino, habla español, pues háblala en español." (Momma doesn't speak Chinese, she speaks Spanish, so talk to her in Spanish). This definitely tickled my funny bone, probably more because I could understand what she was saying than because of the comical value.

### **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. My Canadian friend and I have made plans to speak at other clubs in the area including Bejar, Zamora, both clubs in Salamanca, and Madrid. If all works out members of these clubs will let us stay in one of their houses, and they will help us finance the travel. This will be a great opportunity to meet more Spaniards, to see some of the smaller cities around Salamanca, and to do some networking.

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. I thought I had stumbled upon a lucky volunteer find when I spoke with the director of Caritas about volunteering for an AIDS taskforce and was invited to a training session this past Saturday. When I arrived I was informed that I would have to stay from 10-5, with a break for lunch, and at the end of the day 5 would be selected to volunteer from our training group of nearly 70. After spending a fleeting moment thinking about the probability of them selecting me, I decided to spend my Saturday doing something else.

I recently received an email from an American woman who is responsible for coordinating a mission in Honduras that sends young teenagers from poor families to Spain to formalize their juvenile education in an attempt to aid them in overcoming their social plight in Honduras. The students are studying on scholarships that cover room, board, tuition, and travel expenses, but the expenses of daily consumables like soap, shampoo, etc are not included. Since these children come from poor families, the families aren't able to provide them with what they need, so the students and their organization are turning to us for help.

One girl in particular named Dina has received special attention because of the abject poverty in which her family lives, and this opportunity she has been given to overcome it. She is currently in need of a few simple things: hair ties, a book bag, some warm clothes, and toiletries. Originally the sponsoring American organization was going to ship her monthly care packages, but when they discovered it cost \$40/ 5 lbs they began to seek other alternatives. With the aid of Salamantian Rotarians, we have opened a free bank account here where an American doctor who has 'adopted' Dina can wire money us to purchase and delivery her supplies. Much more cost effective than the previous idea!

While Dina's situation has received special attention, there are at least 20 other Hondurans in similar conditions. One of the other scholars, Natalia, and I are meeting with all the other *becarios* to formulate an idea of how we can realize a permanent project that will provide monthly packages to these students with the basics, and supply them with specific needs when they make such requests. Our current idea is to ask all of our Rotary Clubs, from NC, SC, Canada, Japan, and Chicago, to make monthly donations of something small like \$30 to this account where the Rotary Scholars will then be responsible for meeting the needs of the Hondurans. If all goes as planned, we could have a four continent support system for these children. Wish us luck as we've only got 3 weeks left!

## **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. My Canadian friend and I have spoken at three different clubs: Zamora, Salamanca, and Salamanca Plaza Mayor. We initially planned to visit more, but with our schedules we weren't able. This will be a great opportunity to meet more Spaniards, to see some of the smaller cities around Salamanca, and to do some networking.

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 had essentially abandoned this idea, until one of the Rotary Scholarship Recipients from Canada and I had stumbled upon a lucky volunteer find when I spoke with the director of Caritas about volunteering for an AIDS taskforce and was invited to a Saturday training session. When I arrived I was informed that I would have to stay from 10-5, with a break for lunch, and at the end of the day a mere 5 would be selected to volunteer from our training group of nearly 70. After spending a fleeting moment thinking about the probability of them selecting me, I decided to spend my Saturday doing something else.

I recently received an email from an American woman who is responsible for coordinating a mission in Honduras that sends young teenagers from poor families to Spain to formalize their juvenile education in an attempt to aid them in overcoming their social plight in Honduras. The students are studying on scholarships that cover room, board, tuition, and travel expenses, but the expenses of daily consumables like soap, shampoo, etc are not included. Since these children come from poor families, the families aren't able to provide them with what they need, so the students and their organization are turning to us for help.

One girl in particular named Dina has received special attention because of the abject poverty in which her family lives, and this opportunity she has been given to overcome it. She is currently in need of a few simple things: hair ties, a book bag, some warm clothes (which she has none and the Salamanca winters can be pretty harsh), and toiletries. Originally the sponsoring American organization was going to ship her monthly care packages, but when they discovered it cost \$40/ 5 lbs they began to seek other alternatives. With the aid of Salamantian Rotarians, we have opened a free bank account here where an American doctor who has 'adopted' Dina can wire money us to purchase and delivery her supplies. Much more cost effective than the previous idea!

While Dina's situation has received special attention, there are at least 50 other Hondurans in similar conditions. One of the other scholars, Natalia, and I are meeting with all the other *becarios* to formulate an idea of how we can realize a permanent project that will provide monthly packages to these students with the basics, and supply them with specific needs when they make such requests. Our current idea is to ask all of our Rotary Clubs, from NC, SC, Canada, Japan, Chicago, to make monthly donations of something small like \$30 to this account where the Rotary Scholars will then be responsible for meeting the needs of the Hondurans. If all goes as planned, we could

have a four continent support system for these children. Wish us luck as we've only got a short time left!

## **SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES**

I am Catholic, and I am steadfast in my convictions. I believe the church is a strong source of religious and spiritual knowledge and support, and I feel an obligation to help people rectify their misunderstandings of my faith, and to spread the wonderful messages I have embraced.

Every day that passes I am confronted with someone else who shocks me his or her lack of faith or ignorance about Christianity. Just last week I met a girl who attends a Christian college who told me that Catholics aren't Christians because we honor Mary and because we supposedly don't have an intimate relationship with God or Jesus. WOAH! I had to take a deep breath, a step back and say a prayer before I could even begin with that one. Man. She was receptive, but it still blew me away!

Another time a one of my classes went out for tapas and wine, and one of the Italian guys was talking with my Spanish professor about how he only goes to church one time a year. I chimed in with "for Easter, right?" Instead of agreeing, they both turned to me with befuddled looks and asked "Christmas is more important than Easter, why would we go for Easter?" I was so astounded by this that I was rendered speechless. I had plenty to say in response, but nothing came out of my mouth.

During Franco's rule, he and the Catholic Church were bit too intimate for most people's comfort. He was dictator who enforced the Catholic faith and other undesirable things (not to say the faith is undesirable) upon the people. When he died 1975, a lot of Spaniards rebelled against him and in turn against the church because they wanted nothing to do with anything Franco stood for. If you examine the suffering many Spaniards endured under Franco, you can understand their lack of desire to pursue and practice the catholic faith. Unfortunately 30 years later, the Spanish children of today are unknowingly suffering because the lack of spiritual and religious formation of their parents. **As a generalization** I have noticed that the parents here have a lot of affection for their children. Everywhere you go you see parents walking beside their children hold hands and laughing together. This in itself is a beautiful thing, but the relationships are missing a depth that I believe practicing Christian families have. Because these parents don't understand the disciplinary love of Jesus, they are horrible disciplinarians. Instead of enforcing a punishment on a child, or following through with a threat when a child misbehaves, the parents choose to adorn and spoil their children with showers of hugs and kisses. As a result the children throw uncontrollable public temper tantrums and are difficult to control (If a parent can't control his own child, who can?)

At least once a month in one of my classes we have to give a presentation, and it never fails that someone presents a controversial issue. The first presentation was about the different types of "marriages" in Spain, including homosexual "marriage". The presenter asked our opinions on the matter, and I was the lone ranger in the class who disagreed whole heartedly with the idea. I only spoke up with my opinion after people started bashing the church saying that it was "too conservative" and not "open minded." At this point I tried my best to explain to the class (in Spanish) the value of human sexuality within the confines of marriage, the church's definition of marriage, and how based on these principles, it is impossible for homosexuals to be joined together in Holy

Matrimony. In legal matrimony, yes, but holy matrimony, no. Oh boy did that start a fire. I got the a lot of "umfs" and "whatever" eyerolls, and a few people tried to come back with arguments, but no one really had anything substantial. IT still really frustrated me because I didn't feel like I was truly able to give the church her due justice, and I felt like I was beating my head against a brick wall. Hopefully I planted a seed in at least one person's heart that in time will grow.

The second discussion we had Thursday about the Terri Schiavo issue. Every was pretty much in accord with the husband, not thinking he was in the wrong, and thinking that it was okay to pull the plug. While the church teaches that we do not have to "succumb" to extraordinary medical means, we still need to provide our patients with the basic needs of life, food and water. I explained that she was starved and thirsted to death. I also iterated that according to one of my friends who suffered from thirst for weeks after losing both is legs in an explosion in Vietnam that thirst was the most painful, agonizing experience he had experienced (including having his legs blown off and being beaten in concentration camps). Some people then tried to argue that it was costly to keep people like her alive, and that she wasn't really living because she couldn't think for herself. In response I asked "with this in mind, why don't we kill the mentally disabled who are dependant on others because they are costly and can't think for themselves." The retort was that these people were different, but when asked why, they couldn't explain. This argument was more civil than the one on homosexual marriage, but I was still the sole fighter with my perspective. I just hope and pray that again this planted some seeds.

The Spanish also have this word called "hostia" that the Spaniards use with quite frequency, which is essentially swearing on the host. I think that the word has subtly crept up into the colloquial language that the majority of the people who say it don't even realize how awful of an insult it is.

There vignettes are just an inkling of the frustrating yet eye opening religious/spiritual encounters I have experienced thus far. I am writing to ask for your prayers for these people who don't seem to understand the value of a life guided by morals instead of one guided by spontaneous whim. I also ask for you to pray for me so that, God willing, I will be provided with opportunities to have more civil, one-on-one conversations with some of these people as it is almost always more effective when you are talking in this manner.

Thank you guys for listening! I went to daily mass Thursday in tears because I was so distraught over the spiritual plights of these people. I look in their eyes and see good souls, but they are so misguided. I talked to the priest afterwards about my sentiments and he offered me a lot of encouragement and even gave me a prayer book.

#### **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 me and Melissa 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.

**Photographs are accessible at <http://community.webshots.com/user/marieaconnelly2>**