

Megan Copley

To: mystory@ciee.org

Re: Follow-up Scholarship Essay for the Jennifer Ritzmann Scholarship

What better way to express how this program has allowed me to interact with culture, nature, language, and academics than to include some entries from my journal while abroad.

Interaction with host culture:

In Costa Rica one hears the phrase "*pura vida*", meaning the 'pure life' or 'cool', all the time. It means life is about the pure things that are at the root of love, joy, and livelihood. Therefore, an emphasis is on family, religion, and caring for the land or livestock that makes a home possible. While in Costa Rica I experienced this term to the fullest, and particularly through my homestay experience. I ate natural and fresh food from the farm. My host mom, Nery, was determined to fatten me up with mango, plantain, banana, beans and rice, eggs, fresh milk, and coffee from their land. On their farm I saw all three sons helping out and their wives bringing bread over or tending the garden. The entire family was around every day. I also saw the family's dedication to religion through hosting missionaries, helping at the church, and helping those most in need. Life was much more simple in Costa Rica because of '*pura vida*.'

Enhancement of language skills:

The small size of Monteverde and the homestay made language acquisition easy, as you were always able to find places to use it and Costa Ricans were excited to speak Spanish. I am proud of myself for starting to learn Spanish in this way and will continue using Spanish when I return to the states because it will allow me to reach out to more people in environmental education, particularly living in San Diego.

Understanding of cultural and social issues:

In Monteverde and Costa Rica the biggest issues are centered on how ecotourism is affecting their economy and way of life. It has brought about higher social standards for health, education, and job markets, but has placed a great demand on their environmental resources. Subsequently this has created a larger dichotomy between the rich and poor, the Costa Ricans and the non-Costa Ricans, making it harder for native Costa Ricans to establish new residences in their own country.

How program related to future academic and/or career goals:

I feel like I have a broader perspective on conservation and the different modes used at larger and smaller scales. My view of conservation has been expanded from the marine realm and is much broader. The larger knowledge base has strengthened my understanding of biodiversity and how one is able to protect it. Without a doubt this will help in my pursuit of environmental education and conservation because my morals and values for this line of work are strengthened.

On a side note...thank you all for your financial support in this tremendous Costa Rican educational experience.