

Study abroad is without explanation, something you can't ever prepare yourself for. And now, as I am about to embark on my journey home, it has really hit me just how much of an impact it has made on my life. I have just started to become completely comfortable and feel as if Sevilla is my hometown. It will break my heart to leave such a beautiful city, but the memories and adventures I have had will stay with me forever.

One of the best parts of study is the experience of living with a family. My host mom is probably one of the craziest, most stubborn people I have ever met but I am going to miss her like crazy. My favorite memory of her happened during Semana Santa. Every year she goes to watch the Esperanza de Triana, which begins its epic march at three in the morning. The day of the event we went out for tapas for lunch and then stopped by a local sandwich shop to buy food for later that night. Of course, during Semana Santa people flock to see their favorite "paso" as it's called. Pepi, my host mom, insisted we arrive at her special spot on the sidewalk at ten o'clock pm. So, we sat in the chairs that we carried from home, huddled under a blanket, eating sandwiches and coca cola, at night, for six hours, three of which were spent chatting and three of which were spent watching a thousand members of the church solemnly pass by with candles. We sat next to her friends who had driven nine hours from northern Spain just to watch the Esperanza de Triana. The sidewalks were full of people patiently waiting hour after hour to see the Virgen Mary. It may be one of the strangest things I have ever done but when I watched the enormous, flower covered "paso" brilliantly glowing with hundreds of candles pass just inches from my face it took my breath away. I never expected to enjoy Semana Santa or to get very interested in it but having my host mom take me to her favorite spot and to be immersed in a crowd of Spaniards made me fully appreciate the importance of this weeklong festival. Pepi's face held such pure joy even though she has watched it every single year and I felt honored that she had been so adamant that I share this moment with her.

Every instant of my time here has been a learning experience and an opportunity to be fully immersed in a new culture. Even in my travels around Europe my favorite activity was just walking through the little neighborhoods and trying to get a glimpse of daily life. It fascinates me. In Sevilla people don't seem to have a care and live their lives surrounded by friends and family. It has encouraged me to change my lifestyle when I go home and focus more on the time I put in to other people. Studying abroad has taught me what is important in life and although I will miss Sevilla dearly, I know it has shaped me for the better.