

The Library

As I approached the front desk of the *Escuela Politécnica*'s library, I was sure *everyone*'s eyes were on me. Me, the light-haired, light-eyed *extranjera* with the broken, accented Spanish and wardrobe un-Spanish enough to make anyone stare. Couldn't I be in America for just a moment while I talked to the bald, glasses-wearing librarian, and then I could be in Spain again afterward?

I tried to chase all the English out of my head as I neared the busy-looking man. What was I even supposed to say to get his attention? Excuse me? No, that'd be *excuseme* in Spanish, which somehow I'd hardly heard here in Seville. Mind dry of ideas, I finally mustered an "hola?" and he looked up. He smiled warmly and replied in light, clear Spanish with, "Hi, how's it going? What can I help you with?" Well, I had seen someone else get a card from the library that let them log onto the school computers. Logging onto the computers meant, of course (drum roll, please)...internet! I wanted dearly to hear from friends and family back home, to know again that I wasn't the only person in the world who couldn't speak perfect Spanish. But to do that, of course, I still had to figure out what on Earth to say to this kind man.

Collecting as much Spanish as I could, I tried to explain the purpose of my visit to the patient *señor*. I told him that I had a temporary ID card bearing the logo of the University of Seville across the front, but nothing a computer could read as proof of my student status at the Spanish university for the semester. Was there a way he could trade my sad ID card for one that would grant me access to the infinite stretches of the World Wide Web?

He turned out to be a chatty fellow, and took heart at my unsure attempts to speak Spanish. "A lot of Americans only come and speak English, you know. But you really have to get out and practice the language if you want to learn it. I bet since you're here speaking Spanish instead of speaking English with a group of Americans, your language will improve much more drastically than theirs will by the time you go home. When do you go home, anyway? How long have you already been here?"

And so began my first conversation with Javier, the librarian who gave me a glimpse of hope that I *could* communicate with a non-English speaker and that maybe I wasn't such an alien after all, no matter how much I or the seeming majority of Spaniards may have thought. I began to look forward to going to the library and talking with him. He suggested movies from the library's collection that I could check out to practice my Spanish; he filled me in on social customs to keep in mind while out and about; he talked to me about the weather and the coming heat of summer (small talking like a true Spaniard, if I ever saw one!); he advised me which days to stay in town for both *Semana Santa* and *Feria*, as well as which days to get out of town for a break from the festivities; he recommended still more places I could travel to before heading home; and he shared with me his current endeavor of taking local English classes. Before long, I had developed a delightful rapport with Javier, a friendship I still look back on as a crucial first step toward my assimilation into Spanish life.