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### **Southern Hospitality**

When I first decided to embark on the journey from my “rough-around-the-edges” hometown of Detroit, Michigan all the way to the infamous and beautiful Seville, Spain, I never imagined that I was actually going to *live* one of my wildest dreams. During the summer of 2006, I traveled to northern Spain and stayed with a family in the city of Bilbao for one week. After that experience, I knew I *had* to return someday to the bustling, orange-scented streets of Spain. However, little did I know that the southern region of “*Andaluthia*” had a lot more in store for me than my previous experience did. This time, knowing that I would be living in Seville for about five months, I was looking forward to truly immersing myself intensely in the culture and becoming a part of everyday Spanish society.

The very first aspect of Seville that swept me off my feet was the “southern hospitality”. I guess this regional stereotype is typical of other places outside of the U.S. as well! My most memorable encounter with Seville’s warmth was during La Semana Santa (Holy Week). The sense of community during this time was not only incredible but also immeasurable. To witness thousands of people worldwide, packed like sardines, trying to inch their way through the narrow Spanish streets was quite overwhelming for a young American girl like myself. Although, the many breathtaking processions where hundreds of people march together through the heart of the city, representing their church and dedication to their Lord will forever leave a lasting impression in my heart.

In addition, another unforgettable experience awaited me, amidst the massive amounts of people coming from every direction. After watching one of the processions, I headed towards *mi casa* feeling very confident about my growing familiarity with Seville’s windy roads and hidden shortcuts. It began getting darker as I tried weaving my way through the everlasting crowds, repeating, “*Perdone por favor, perdone*”. Within minutes I could feel that insecure feeling of being lost forming inside my stomach as I slowly realized I was caught in a never-ending maze of people.

Suddenly as I stopped to take a breath in *La Plaza de Alfalfa*, a rush of silence poured through the thick crowd. Before I could ask, “*qué pasó?*” I glanced up and the ornate gold from the float of Jesus Christ sparkling in everyone’s eyes took my breath away. The float had stopped right in the middle of the plaza, the marching band stopped playing music, and

everyone's eyes widened at the sight of it all. Once the music started again, I continued on my wandering trek towards the next familiar street, repeating my favorite Spanish phrase in my head, "*poco a poco*". I happened to be stuck in between a couple that was trying to find a way out as well. After frantically explaining to them how I had been trying to find my way home for the past two hours, the husband grabbed my hand, pulled me forward, and looked back with a reassuring smile on his face.

Thanks to him, we reached an open alley and began swiftly walking together as I told them where I lived. They called me, "*Hija*" and told me to follow them and they would show me how to get home. I was so touched by their kindness. On the way home we found their two daughters who were walking in one of the holy processions and we walked along side them for a few minutes. The father gave me one of his daughter's tall candles and told me to pour its wax onto the balls of wax that the children typically make during *Semana Santa*. I couldn't believe it. One minute I had tears in my eyes from feeling completely lost and the next, not only was I being escorted home but I actually got to be a part of the parade as well. After the couple showed me my pathway home, they left me with a *besito* on each cheek and wished me luck with everything in the future. I felt so honored to have met them.

This experience also reminded me that no matter what goes wrong in the world, we must continue to have faith in humanity. At first, I arrived to Seville in a state of cultural shock but now; I will leave with the fond memories of the tenderness of *los sevillanos* and the city's true southern hospitality.