

Becky

Lin

From Springfield to Argentina

Lessons in culture, personal expression, and
new ways of life

Julie



Kristin

Kelly



Kristin Gearhart

Hola, mi nombre es Kristin. Don't worry, there won't be anymore Spanish in this introduction just like there unfortunately wasn't much Spanish that came from my vocab while being in Argentina (a Spanish speaking country). A little about me: I am twenty-four, graduate mental health counseling student, from southeast Missouri, passionate about experiencing good music and dancing with friends, living in the moment, warm conversation that is meaningful and deep, and moving on to stop this from sounding like a dating add...I experienced several firsts on this trip.

Yeah! So if you're reading this, let me tell you a little bit more about those amazing firsts.

My firsts from this trip are: first International trip (Canada for some reason doesn't count to me, what do you think, does it count?) first commercial jet-plane ride, first taxi ride, first subway ride, first time to stay in a hostile, and first time to be in a country surrounded by people that don't speak English. I know what you're probably thinking, "Does this girl ever get out?" But I'm not ashamed; everyone starts somewhere. The important thing is to start.

The thing about me that I really want to leave you with is something that I live by and that is important to me, which is this phrase: break my need for the familiar. It was years ago that I attended a Carlos Whitaker concert that I heard that lyric in his song. The full lyric is: save us from these comforts, break us of our need for the familiar. It completely struck me because I was living too familiar of a life: familiar place, people, activities, thoughts, and goals. If you've ever played Boggle, the way a new game is started is to shake up all the pieces and let them land in new spots in order for new words to form. That's what that phrase sort of did for my life. I decided from that moment on that in times when I had the chance to shake things up and break my need for the familiar, I would take those chances. So, despite my anxiety to ride a jet-plane, the student loan to pay for the trip, and extra stress from stepping away from summer classes for a week, I chose to break away. I'm glad that I did though because

this trip ended up being the best time of my life. Iggy Azalea would agree: never turn down nothing – live fancy!



11th WAPCEPC Conference: Beyond The Frontiers...Experiencing Diversity

A reflection of my experience and inspirations as a counseling student attending my first international counseling conference.

“Beyond frontiers” is part of the title to the counseling conference held in Argentina that my group attended during this study-away trip. Think on that phrase for a moment, “beyond frontiers” and what it means to you. Before this conference and trip, it didn’t really mean much to me. I’m not sure about you, but the first image that comes to mind from reading this are men on horses riding the frontier looking for land to settle and make a home for their family. Perhaps I’m a bit silly to think that, but who really would give much deeper thought to that statement unless they actually experienced going beyond their own frontier? This is why my experience of going beyond my frontier of Missouri into an unfamiliar place like Buenos Aires, Argentina, caused me to reexamine what it means to go “beyond the frontiers.”

It was during this counseling conference that my eyes were opened to the unlimited possibilities in the counseling field. I had never before met people from other countries practicing counseling and I had never thought of living in a country outside of the US to practice counseling. So in this way, going beyond my frontiers opened my eyes to the many other parts of the world where I could live and work and be a part of projects and research that I hadn’t prior even realized was out there. This small-town Missouri girl, who went beyond her familiar frontier, saw a glimpse of what else is out there in the world and it was so inspiring. While continuing my program here at MSU, I now feel I have a new sense of commitment to my study and work because I too one day want to contribute something to this field like I saw so many others from different parts of the world do.

One of my fondest memories from the conference is when Bernie Neville, holistic therapist from Australia, bought me a coffee and had a conversation with me about his ideas of the “we” in regards to ecopsychology. I didn’t know who Bernie was before this conference, but I picked up and purchased his book while there and then shortly learned he was actually at the conference! I was shocked but then immediately curious to speak with him because his book that I picked up, “The Life of Things” seemed so deep and interesting. I knew he had to be like that, too. I was nervous to speak with him but my professor introduced us and I just went with it. I personally think that my prior goals in this study-away

course, working on emotional intelligence and specifically awareness in my case, allowed me to feel comfortable speaking with him. Even though I was completely intimidated, I simply opened myself up to the moment, remained completely present, and I was able to follow his thoughts, ask meaningful questions, and the outcome was an awesome conversation. Like I said, this was one of my fondest memories at the conference.

The entire vibe at the conference was that of warmth and acceptance. I think part of this was due to the fact that it's a person-centered counseling community and that's their way of being with people, but I think it was also due to the country of Argentina. This is the kind of place where people greet you with a hug and kiss on the cheek. Try that out, America! Part of this warmth and acceptance spilled over into a group activity meant to bond us together, despite our diversity. There were different colors of paints laid out and a blank white board for each person to paint their hand and then place on the board. This activity was opened in a group huddle, hands around shoulders, with the Argentine conference members singing a song in Spanish. When the activity began and people started to paint their hands, smiles and laughter became infectious and several special memories took place:





As you can see from the pictures, there were a lot of hands that contributed to this art piece, unifying us all within our diversity. This was a special experience.

A unique aspect that I learned that happens when going beyond the frontiers is the different language apart from my own that is encountered. Spanish is the prominent language in Argentina, meaning that I as an English speaker was a minority while there. It was in a break out session during the conference that the main speaker spoke Spanish and so for the rest of us English-speaking folks, there was an interpreter. It was in this moment that I felt like a true minority in Argentina. There were a handful of us huddled in the back corner of the room, hanging onto every word of the interpreter. I had never experienced that before. This helps me to look at those in America now that rely on interpreters with more patience and grace.

I'll conclude with one last picture. In this photo taken on the last day, you see flags of each country present at the conference by way of the members. To me this brings me back to my silly idea of the man on his horse, riding the frontier trying to settle a piece of land for his family. Each person at the conference is like that rider, coming from their own frontier, from their own piece of land and family. And when the conference ended, each rider went home; back to the lives they lead. This trip, this conference, this experience is over and I too have come back home. But the memories I keep with me inspire this rider to continue to explore and yet again, go beyond my frontiers.





Becky Saunders

I am a Communication graduate student who is passionate about history and travel. I love all things Argentina and have always dreamed of traveling to this interesting country. During my time as an undergrad, I studied political science and Spanish. I never expected to travel to China for an international business course and Guatemala for a Spanish-language immersion experience, but I am extremely thankful for such life-changing experiences. I also interned at the Missouri State Capitol where I met my best friend and husband, Johnathan Saunders. We are the parents of two cats with huge personalities: Winston

Kittyhill and Theodore Catavelt. In addition to my Communication degree, I also study Conflict and Dispute Resolution as well as work at the Center for Dispute Resolution. My work with the CDR's Family Group Conferencing program allowed me to present at the International PCE Conference in Buenos Aires. This was an amazing experience and personal accomplishment I could never have dreamed of.

The Rich Culture of Buenos Aires

By Becky Saunders

For years I had dreamed of going to Argentina. Something about the language, geography, people, culture, and history drew me to this place in South America. When I found out MSU's Counseling Department would be going to Buenos Aires, I knew that was my chance to finally fulfill this dream. Although I had never taken a counseling class, I soon found my niche in the group as the "Argentina expert" (I never thought of myself this way, but did appreciate having that niche). The trip never felt real until we arrived in Argentina, but even then it was surreal.



Upon entering the airport, we were greeted by a huge Lionel Messi poster declaring that "You can't miss Buenos Aires!" Argentina had just finished second place in the World Cup and Messi was their star player. I knew he

was a fútbol superstar, but I had no idea just how popular he really was. The rest of the trip was filled with fan-girl exclamations from me every time I would see anything with Messi on it. I'm sure this got old considering he was plastered on everything from billboards to bags of coffee.

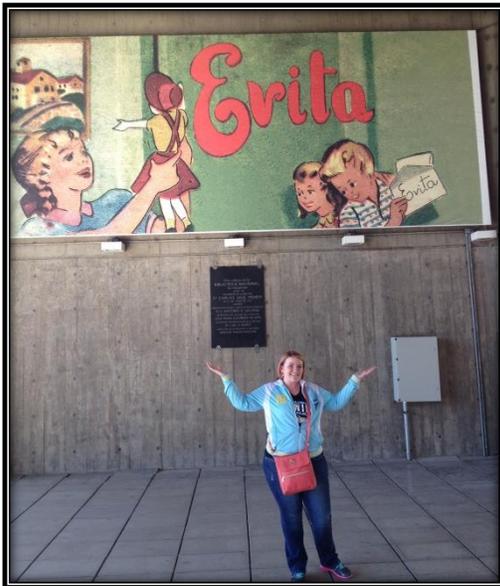


Speaking of fútbol (or soccer, as we Americans like to call it), the Argentine culture is

saturated with this sport. On our first day in the city we took a five hour bike tour to learn about the city's architecture. During that ride I saw kids

and adults alike playing soccer in the parks and plazas. All the sport stores were filled with soccer merchandise featuring teams from all around the world. In the United States it's difficult to find a sport store that carries U.S. soccer merchandise, much less international products. In Argentina, it's equally difficult to find anything other than soccer merchandise regardless of which club you might support. My knowledge of the sport gave me an easy way to connect with others. I was even congratulated by a street vendor on how well the U.S. performed in the World Cup.

The bike tour was a great way to start our time in the city. We were able to see many famous sites like the Palacio del Congreso Nacional Argentina (National Congress), the Teatro Colón (world-famous opera theater), the Ateneo bookstore, the Obelisco de Buenos Aires (Obelisk monument), and the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library). The National Library was very special to me because it was built in the former location of Juan and Evita Perón's palace. It was the site where Evita died in 1952. She was such an



and her story piqued my interest in the country. In a way, she was the reason I was there and for that I was grateful. During our tour we saw so many buildings with intricate architectural designs inspired by European countries. While describing these buildings, one of our tour guides described the Argentine people as "Italians who speak Spanish and wish they were French." I would agree that

the Argentine accent has an Italian sound to it. I have never been to Europe, so I will just take everyone's word that the city is very European. There were pizza cafes on every street which could be viewed as Italian. Strangely, the most common



chain was the Kentucky Pizzeria. Pizza was definitely not something we associated with Kentucky so this got our attention.

Our bike tour allowed me to experience enough of the historical sites I had longed to see that I was able to truly experience the culture for the rest of our stay. We were able to share in a common custom of the Argentine people towards the end of our bike ride. We drank yerba maté, an herbal tea, together. The tea is packed into a small, rounded cup (the maté), hot water is poured into the cup and drunk from a special straw, or bombilla. After the individual drinks all of their tea, they pour more hot water into the maté and pass it on to the next person. Maté cups and the tea leaves can be purchased anywhere in the city. Poor Michelle first spoiled a maté while curing her gourd and then broke a ceramic maté shortly after buying it. I think she decided it just wasn't meant to be.

Another popular drink is Argentina's most famous wine – Malbec. This red wine could be purchased at any meal,



many times in place of water. Water was never free and needed to be ordered con or



sin gas (with or without carbonation). Eating and drinking was a very social time and, for the most part, the servers left you alone. If

you are in a hurry don't sit down at a restaurant because the server is not in a hurry. Dinners are served late which was something we all had to get used to. You are supposed to have a snack around 6:00pm and then eat dinner between 8:00 and 10:00pm. The shops may close early but the restaurants always seem to be open.

The food, in my opinion, was excellent. We enjoyed juicy steaks with glasses of wine. Empanadas were a staple everywhere we went. Our first taste was from a convenient store, but we soon learned to buy them fresh from street vendors or in restaurants. Ham and cheese, chicken, and beef were the common choices. For breakfast, sweetened croissants, fried churros, or toast with dulce de leche was accompanied by a hot cup of café con leche. When it came to sweets, dulce de leche was the flavor of choice. Heladerías (ice cream shops) were everywhere. This is when I knew I was supposed to live in Argentina.



Being late and eating ice cream are two things I can totally relate to. For reasons unknown, cinnamon gum was nowhere to be found (or cinnamon-flavored anything for that matter).

There are so many things to say about the culture of Argentina than I can put onto paper. I know I will be processing the impact of this trip for years to come. I love that strangers and friends are greeted warmly with a “Buen día!” and a light cheek-to-cheek kiss on the right side. The locals are happy to listen to your broken Spanish and even want to practice their broken English with you. The bustling city makes it seem like everyone is in a hurry, but that’s not the case. Relationships are important and

people don’t rush through their interactions with each other. Everyone has a dog (or two) and it looks like the owners are dragging them through the streets. The dogs are in less of a hurry than the people! We all agreed that the dogs seemed to behave differently than the dogs in America. They were timid and all were very obedient. I found the money situation to be pretty confusing but that did not stop me from shopping from all the street markets around the city. I never did figure out just how many Argentine pesos equaled a U.S. dollar. Furthermore, I never really figured out the



relationships are important and people don’t rush through their interactions with each other. Everyone has a dog (or two) and it looks like the owners are dragging them through the streets. The dogs are in less of a hurry than the people! We all agreed that the dogs seemed to behave differently than the dogs in America. They were timid and all were very obedient. I found the money situation to be pretty confusing but that did not stop me from shopping from all the street markets around the city. I never did figure out just how many Argentine pesos equaled a U.S. dollar. Furthermore, I never really figured out the

whole "blue dollar" situation either. Did I save money with the blue dollar? Did I ever even use the blue dollar value? A shout out to Dr. Jef is in order here for bravely trying to be our blue dollar bank guy. I hope he didn't lose too much money.

Traveling to Argentina was a dream of mine and, now that I have gone, it feels like I dreamed even being there this summer. The Wednesday night where I experienced the dramatic, beloved tango of Argentina will forever be an amazing memory for me. While watching, my eyes filled with tears and I told myself, "Becky, you finally made it to Argentina." Yes, I made it to Argentina and I couldn't ask for a better group to share the experience with. Jef, Michelle, Kristin, Lin, Julie, and Kelly (and Pablo, our adopted group member) you will always be a part of my dream come true.



Julie Wrocklage

I am a graduate student in mental health counseling. I love traveling and experiencing different cultures. This trip helped me define three qualities I want to cultivate in myself:

- 1) compassion
- 2) integrity
- 3) discipline

Life on the Delta

Julie Wrocklage



In reflecting on the eight days we were in Argentina, I've realized that there were particular experiences on the trip that served to cultivate my mind, my body, and my spirit. Presenting at the conference brought to life the academic aspect of myself, the part of me that had spent hours researching in preparation for my presentation. At the social event, I felt free and able to express myself through conversation with the Argentine people and dancing with our group. Finally, boating on the delta in Tigre nurtured my spirit and brought out my love for simplicity, nature, and solitude. Here I want to share about our experience visiting the Parana

Delta in Tigre.

After six days in Buenos Aires, the capital and largest city of Argentina, we took a train to the nearby town of Tigre. Tigre has been described as the Venice of South America, with its tangled web of streams, inlets, and islands. In Tigre, we met up with Fernando and Thomas, our tour guides for the boating adventure. We could have chosen from a number of different boat rides, but found that doing this



one allowed for a unique experience. We got into two zodiacs and this began our exploration of the Parana Delta. The water was muddy and shallow most of the time, but there were some areas where it was more open, and you'd see larger boats there. We saw houses along the sides of the rivers we traveled through, and restaurants too. As we went along,

Fernando shared that the people in Tigre live simply, enjoying the water, the sun, the wine, and the people. Not too many people on the delta spend their nights watching television. They are out experiencing their life! People live right on the water, the kids are taken to school in a boat, mail is delivered by boat, and there is a boat ambulance, police, etc. Instead of roads, you have rivers, canals and streams. This way of life is so different and that is what fascinates me. It seems bizarre that this small community exists so close to the big-city life in Buenos Aires. About halfway through our boat ride, we stopped at Fernando's house, and enjoyed steak, potatoes, and malbec wine. It was so refreshing to be in nature and enjoy each other. I would love to go back and stay on the delta!

This experience made me feel like it is possible to live simply and mindfully, that I can cultivate the kind of life that I want. Conversation with Fernando inspired me to follow my passions and live life in the present moment! I want to create space in my go-go-go way of life for solitude and contemplation, spend less time with technology, and more time with people.



Kelly Donaldson

I am a graduate student in Student Affairs in Higher Education. I joined some of my peers on a study away trip to Buenos Aires, Argentina this summer. During the year, I work as an Assistant Hall Director in Residence Life, Housing and Dining Services. One of my goals this year was to travel more. In the past five years, travel and the opportunity for new opportunities and cultures, in and out of the United States, have become high priorities for me, and this trip was the realization that I do love travel, and will jump at the opportunity to go to a new place.

It was an affirmation of my values. I took StrengthsQuest, which identifies your top strengths across 35 of the most common personality traits. My top 5: Positivity, Developer, Ideation, Input and Woo. I feel it's important to share these; they've become a big part of how I view myself and these words were on my mind a lot during our trip. Some of my hobbies include: travelling (day trips work just fine during the year), crafting, watching reruns of Seinfeld, reading, biking and other outdoor activities, swimming and spending time with friends. I laugh easily and love to make conversation with new people or old friends. I am looking forward to starting my second and last year at Missouri State University.

Speaking Spanish in Argentina:

A lesson of losing your fear and finding your self in language.

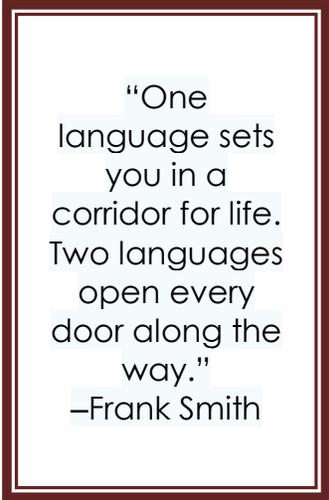
"To have another language is to possess a second soul."
—Charlemagne

I can't talk about my experience in Argentina without talking about language. I had some previous experience living in a spanish-speaking country when I lived in Mexico for ten months two years ago. I taught English. My best friend there was another 20-something who spoke fluent Spanish and had studied in college. I took four years of Spanish in high school, where I did what I had to get the grade but I didn't engage with the language. While I was in Mexico, most people knew me as the English teacher and wanted to practice English with me, instead of speak Spanish to me. Since I did still

live in a non-tourist area, I did speak Spanish in restaurants or anytime we went somewhere and had to buy something but it is amazing how you can skate by without engaging with anyone. All my close friends spoke mainly English with me. I got really good at speaking English to non-English speakers.

So when I came to Argentina, I was pretty modest about my Spanish skills, and still am. I am by no means fluent, and my vocabulary didn't change much in a ten day trip. But one thing made all the difference and took me completely by surprise: I lost my fear.

At one point while living in Mexico, I reflected on the experience of learning a language with my boyfriend: "I feel like a child, just observing everything, and some day I'll just wake up and start talking all the time like little kids." Learning a language, as an adult, is similar, save for one significant change: our self-consciousness. As adults, we know what it feels like to be wrong and be embarrassed and I don't like it. We often shy away from situations where we'll be caught off-guard and not able to speak eloquently or even at all. We place a lot of importance on our oratory ability: think about some of the people who consider heroes; most of them we're considered great orators and speech-givers. In our world that values extroversion, speaking ability is a highly valued skill and oft-considered signs of intelligence, personality and connection with others. What happens when you are suddenly living in a world in which you lose your ability to connect with others or express yourself in words. Who are you? Who are they? What do they like to do? What are you hiking right now? Who knows.



"One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way."
-Frank Smith

After my year in Mexico, I worked at a non-profit where I was occasionally asked to translate (poorly) for our Spanish-speaking clients. I was so nervous the first few times, until I realized I could help a little bit. If nothing else, these women were so grateful that someone could understand SOMETHING, and I started to build a connection with our clients and gained some confidence in putting myself out there and not caring if I was wrong. It wasn't until our recent trip to Argentina that I realized what was happening that year.

Upon arriving in Buenos Aires, we got in our taxi and all fell silent. Our driver didn't speak English and only two of us in the car knew any Spanish. I asked our driver, ¿sabe donde vamos señor? Roughly translated: do you

know where we are going? (We were in a second car following our other taxi). Our driver responded and a fire started inside me: HE UNDERSTOOD ME. I CAN SPEAK!!! I started asking questions about Buenos Aires and the rest of us in the car were asking me to ask questions of our driver. It wasn't a long or deep conversation, but I was already feeling different.

For the next ten days, I was known as the most proficient Spanish-speaker in our group. However, two days in, I realized how much hiding behind my friend has hindered me from putting myself out there in Mexico, and from that point, I really tried to help others have a chance to practice or translate as well. It's always nice to be needed, but more than that, I wanted to share the giddiness and childlike awe I felt at being able to connect with someone in another language. It's been said that speaking another language is having two would inhibit one body, and I have never felt this to be so true as during my trip to Argentina.

As the week went on, I realized how much connecting with others through another language meant to me. A feeling I had never been able to eradicate, or come to terms with, was the isolation I felt in Mexico. I am someone who really enjoys connections with strangers. I am often the person to start a conversation with someone on the bus, or in the market. This personality trait (often referred to as WOO: Winning Others Over), has become a big part of how I define myself. My trip to Argentina helped solidify that for me.

It also gave me a window into another world. I found myself trying to tell my friends back home what I was experiencing at the conference and on the trip, and English words didn't seem to do it justice. Even now, as I write this, I think of how much I want to just start speaking in Spanish. It's amazing the words and sentences and stories that just spouted out of my mouth, once I lost my fear and gained confidence. There was nothing standing in the way of me expressing myself or making new friends in a strange place. I have so far to go in my Spanish education and ability, but losing my fear of being wrong meant finding another soul inside myself and feeling a connection to a world where I was once (and in many regards, still am) a stranger. Yet, when I am able to speak with someone, to see their appreciation for my efforts, and to reiterate that back to them as we find the words together-that feeling will stay with me for a long time. I found my voice in Argentina, and I will carry it with me for the rest of my life.



Lin Wang

Hi, my name is Lin. I come from China and I'm getting my master's degree in Social Work. I've been living in Springfield for 3 years. I call this place my second home. I'm a pretty laid back person, but passionate at the same time. I love traveling and learning about different cultures and people. I work at Brick City Gallery as a graduate assistant. I love my job! When I'm not working or studying, I enjoy reading, writing, good conversations, Bible studies, music, art and being in nature. I'm really glad that I went to Argentina with those awesome friends! It was a blast, and I learned so much from this experience.

Finding the Self Beyond Culture

This summer for me seemed to be all about traveling. Not long before I went on this trip to Argentina, I was visiting my home country China. It had been too long since I was home. The trips back and forth to different countries triggered some deep emotions in me. Some of them are hard to articulate.

One of my goals for our trip to Argentina was to explore my cultural identity. Argentina of course didn't disappoint me! I felt totally welcomed into this culture- with hugs and kisses from the locals, with their enthusiasm and passion for life. The flowers on the street, the exquisite design of the buildings, the smell of burning incense and all kinds of colorful handcrafts laid on the ground for sale... these are some unique ways how everyday people in Argentina express and visualize their love of beauty. Speaking of how they appreciate and enjoy life, the combination of fine wine and tango says it all!



Well, this is Argentine culture. What about my culture? The day before we landed in Argentina, Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, was visiting Argentina to promote the collaboration between two countries. The big screen at the city square in Buenos Aires was showing videos of Chinese culture as we walked by. Two different cultures joined hands at the city square for a better future of collaboration. A sense of peace dawned on me as I stood there watching the familiar landscapes of China on the screen. It's interesting to say that my Chinese culture became more familiar to me in Argentina. Sometimes, the best way to understand something is to see the opposite of that thing. Argentine culture, in many ways, is quite the opposite of Chinese culture. An example would be an encounter with a vendor at the market. The older gentleman accused me for being too shy. He hugged me, kissed me on the cheek, and insisted that I should use my hand to touch the handcrafts that interest me. That moment, I suddenly realized how reserved and



disciplined I am raised in traditional Chinese culture. Those Argentinian people like to express, to touch, to approach boldly and to embrace whatever comes. My cultural awareness definitely improved through this trip. Not only did I see the influence that my Chinese upbringing and American cultural adjustment on me, but also I was able to connect the deep passion in me as a genuine human and the passionate Argentine culture.



The conference was a blast of cultural diversity. So many people from different countries joined this event and it was so much fun to see all the connections beyond language, ethnicity and culture. To me, I felt like we all somehow stepped out of our cultural framework that restricted our communication in order to reach out to one another. And this is beautiful. I made friends with a Japanese guy named Kazo. As many of you might know, it's kind of true that many Chinese people and Japanese people hate each other because of the bloody history we had. It's been taught somehow to the younger generation in both countries that we don't get along. It has become part of our culture. However,

Kazo and I were able to be friends with each other the first time we met. He is a Japanese Buddhist, and I am a Chinese Christian. So many cultural differences, but we communicated beyond that. We communicated with our true self. I'm pretty sure that this is how all the different people at the conference connected with one another.

Finally, I want to say that my deepest identity as a Christian revealed more to myself through this trip. There are times of confusion, chaos, exhaustion and insecurity, and there are times of enlightenment, clarity, excitement and pleasure. The trip was filled with one awesome experience after another. It was so colorful and stimulating to a point where I felt greedy for endless experiences with a restless soul. It didn't take long before I discovered that only when I'm resting in my faith, my whole being is complete, and my soul is restful. The pure joy of being close to God is what fulfills me the most. This trip to Argentina definitely helped me to reach another goal- spiritual growth. I truly thank God for this wonderful opportunity.

