

Comments for Madrid – 50th Anniversary
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Madrid Program Participant 1968-69 and Graduate Assistant 1971-72
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Kathy, thank you for the lovely introduction. It is wonderful to be here and I am very honored to have this opportunity to be able to speak to all of you today.

I have always said that I believe my life to be a miracle, no more or less, considering where I started and to where it led. And Indiana University has played a significant role in that miracle-in-the-making. Let me explain. To be honest, I was not your typical undergraduate applicant for the Indiana program in Madrid at the Universidad Complutense. For starters, I am the product of two immigrant families and my upbringing was working class. Both of my parents were in the blue collar work force. My Dad was a carpenter, a handyman, a jack-of-all-trades really, and my Mom was a factory worker. But both believed in the power and privilege of education for my sister and me. I attended Cleveland State University for my first two years as an undergraduate, lived at home, commuted to downtown Cleveland, and worked 30 to 40 hours per week while taking a full-time load of coursework in order to be able to earn enough money to pay for my education. After taking a few Spanish classes, I knew that I wanted to go to Spain in my junior year. My parents did not understand my choice but told me to follow my dream, if it was what I truly wanted to do. So I worked really hard, applied to the IU program, got accepted, and thus began one of the most life-changing, challenging, and exciting experiences of my young life, that transformed me in a way that I could not have even imagined at the outset. I knew that I had to pack so much into that one year away – learning, growing, having incredible adventures, getting out of my comfort zone in so many ways, engaging with the world at large in a way that would not have been possible had I stayed in the US and not applied to the program. And please take note: IU took a chance on me by accepting me to the program....

There is one experience in particular that for me represents succinctly the potential and possibility of the junior year abroad and I would like to share it with all of you. Here goes... one week-end a group of four of us girls – young women – decided that we wanted to go to Santillana del Mar in northern Spain to see the

Caves at Altamira, which at that time – in the late 1960's -- were still open to the public. Upon arrival in Santillana del Mar we went directly to the tourist office to inquire how we could get to the cave entrance, then hopped in a taxicab and made our way out of town to where the caves are located. Upon arrival we knocked on the door of the cave guide's cabin and stated that we wished to see the caves. We paid the entrance fee, at the time probably only a few pesetas, and then waited for him while he fetched a few items: his cap, a kerosene lantern, and a blanket.

The group of us girls followed his shuffling footsteps and the play of the soft lantern light as we made our way deeper and deeper into the very dark, cool and slightly damp cave. Finally we arrived at a chamber in the cave network that was slightly larger with a higher ceiling. At that point the guide stopped, and then unfurled the blanket onto a mound of dirt in the center of the cave. He then pointed to it and told us to lie down on it. "Excuse me, what????!!!" I thought. Then he told us again, to all lie down on the blanket together, and to LOOK UP, for he had something to show us. So we did as we were told, all of us huddled together, and then the show began!

With the flickering light from his lantern he pointed out to us the drawings of bison and horses and antelopes and hands that had been traced thousands upon thousands of years ago. There was one drawing in particular that was pure magic. The guide demonstrated with the tilting of his lantern back and forth how the prehistoric artist had taken advantage of the contour of the rocky wall, so that with the shifting of light and shadow it appeared that a bison's chest was heaving, was panting with exertion and the animal's legs were running; it was a kinetic, three-dimensional representation of the prehistoric beast. Wow! I was mesmerized by the beauty of that moment. But also I gradually became aware of what it means to be human, to be part of a tribe or a clan, to have virtually the same experience as those cave dwellers of thousands of years ago, and to be swept up in the course of time and history and art and culture. And it dawned on me, lying on that blanket in that dark cave with my friends around me, for that moment, that I too was part of it. I was part of it and that changed me. That experience introduced me to a view of the world, the flow of time and history, that enabled me to "see" in an entirely different way.

And as they say, the rest is history. Because of the year in Spain, with the richness of experience and opportunity that was offered to me and I embraced fully – even ferociously -- , my young life literally opened up to new, previously inconceivable dimensions. It gave me a window on the infinite possibility that is a life of the mind, a pursuit of knowledge that ultimately defined my academic and intellectual path in the succeeding years. Indiana University took a chance on me for a second time – I was accepted to the graduate program in Spanish, earned the PhD, and went on to a truly wonderful and immensely fulfilling academic career as a university professor, which included, not incidentally, directing undergraduate foreign study programs both in Spain and in Mexico. And that day in the cave at Altamira gave me the courage and the example to LOOK UP, to always look up, to look beyond myself, and to experience fully the flow of life, of time, of history, of ideas. Thank you, Indiana University, it's been quite a ride, quite a life, a miraculous life to be sure. Not bad for a carpenter's daughter from Cleveland, Ohio, not bad at all.

Thank you.