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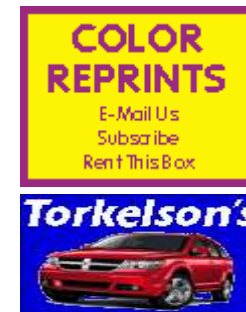
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An American in Paris...and Rome, London, Spain, & Ireland

By: Meghan Powers, News writer

June 18, 2008

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It's every young American student's dream to spend a semester in Europe. Drinking coffee in a cafe on the streets of Paris, visiting the land of their ancestors or seeing the columns of the Parthenon are in the dreams of most 20 somethings.



Carissa Kelly of Hawkeye stands next to the Mediterranean Sea near Nerja, Spain. She spent last semester in Europe studying.

What's not in the fantasy, however, is having to visit the U.S. Embassy hours before their flight takes off for home.

Hawkeye native Carissa Kelly's dream semester quickly turned into a nightmare when she discovered her carry-on bag had been stolen outside the airport in Spain.

Kelly, who will be a senior this fall at Central College in Pella, spent the spring semester studying in Granada, Spain.

"The day the flight was leaving from Madrid I was getting my luggage off the bus," said Kelly. "My friend was standing right there so I thought it would be fine if I laid my bag on the ground. I turned and grabbed my other bag and when I turned back it was gone."

The bag contained Kelly's purse which had her passport, credit cards, driver's license, cell phone, camera, MP3 player \$23 American dollars and 15 euro.

"My friend called the embassy and we had to race there," she said. "We got there at 9:15 a.m. and my flight left at noon."

Originally she was told it would take a few hours to process the necessary paperwork. Kelly said she told embassy workers her flight would be leaving soon and they sped up the process. She was back on her way to the airport an hour later.

"I called my mom and she had to cancel my debit and credit cards. When I got back I had to get a new phone and driver's license. I'm just lucky that I didn't have more cash on me."

Theft aside, Kelly looks back on her months in Spain as a positive experience. An elementary education major, Kelly studied four years of Spanish at North Fayette and three semesters in college.

"My host family spoke English but there were some students that lived with families that didn't speak any," she said. "If there was a word I didn't know they could help me with it but my friends who lived with only Spanish speakers had to talk their way through it to understand each other."

Kelly went with 45 other students from all over the country. Some were from Central and others were from different colleges. "There were people from all over; like Indiana, Illinois, Texas." She said meeting people from different parts of the country was in some ways as interesting as meeting people from Europe.

The group of American students arrived in Granada, Spain Jan. 12. Granada is the capital city of Granada province in south central Spain.

Granada is well known within Spain due to the prestigious University of Granada where Kelly and the other studied.

"The first two weeks we were in orientation. We had class each day and night to prepare us for the classes at the University."

While attending the University of Granada, Kelly took an art class, geography of Spain, an Islamic studies class and a grammar and writing class. She said the Spanish education system is similar to the U.S. in that elementary through high school is free to attend through a public school system. Students must pay for college courses.

Carisssa stayed with Amin and Pilar Gonzalez with another American student, Abby, from Philadelphia.

"They made our meals for us but the food there is so different," said Kelly. "They use olive oil in everything. It's really important to them. An hour away from Granada was Spain's largest producer of olive oil." Kelly said Spanish homes do not have central heating or air conditioning like in the States. A space heater was the only source of heat in their bedroom.

"Electricity is really expensive there. The heater didn't really heat up the room and it wasn't warm outside when we got there."

Conserving was a lesson that Kelly and the other students had to learn while in Europe.

"They told me they had been in a drought for five years," she said.

"There was no grass." Kelly said the river had very little water in it.

"We'd have to turn off the water when brushing our teeth or in between shampooing your hair."

Another difference was "Siesta." Traditionally, the people of Spain take a short nap in the early afternoon. Shops, grocery stores and most businesses close from 2-5 p.m. then reopen until nine. Kelly said they normally ate supper around 10 p.m.

"That took awhile to get use to," she said.

The night life was quite different too. "Things don't normally pick up at the discotechs [clubs] until 1 a.m. and they stay open until 7 in the morning."

During Spring break, Kelly and several of her friends had the chance to visit Ireland, England and Germany.

While in London, Kelly saw an anti-war protest. She also saw one while in Spain. "People would have signs with pictures of President Bush that would say world's # 1 terrorist. I saw one that said 9/11 was an inside job. That one made me really uncomfortable because it wasn't."

"They're all against the war over there," she said. "They didn't treat us any differently though because we were American. They knew it wasn't our fault."

Kelly said she was surprised at the interest Europeans had on American politics. "On the news and in the newspapers were stories about the U.S. elections. I met many Spaniards that supported Barack Obama."

Kelly will spend next year student teaching in Pleasantville and Oskaloosa. She said her time in Spain was one of the most exciting parts of her life.

"I loved my host family and it was really hard to leave them. I would recommend to anyone that if they get the chance to go to do it."

"I got the chance to see places that I'll probably never get to see again. I mean when's the next time I'm going to Rome?"

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