

## Best part of my summer in Spain? The people: [www.heraldtimesonline.com](http://www.heraldtimesonline.com)

By Holly Hays  
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Spending eight hours stuck in Chicago's O'Hare International Airport on delays was not exactly how I wanted to end my trip to Spain. However, it certainly didn't spoil it.

I'm back! After seven weeks as a participant in the IU Honors Program in Foreign Languages for High School Students (IUHPFL), I am able to say I had the best summer a 16-year-old could dream of.

First off — and I don't care what any of my classmates say — I had the best host parents in the program. My dad, Pepe, thoroughly enjoys watching any kind of American TV he can find and was constantly quizzing me on the differences between the Spanish and American cultures. My mom, Maria, is one of the most adorable people in the world and the best cook I have ever known. She makes killer paella. Once you get past all of that superficial stuff, though, I couldn't have been placed in a more caring and loving home. I love my host parents.

My extended family included my sister Vanessa and her boyfriend, Jorge; my crazy "aunts" (other host moms in the program) Magdalena and Isabel; and my classmates-turned-siblings Corey, Andres and Emma. We had some pretty great times this summer, and I can't believe I'm returning to the classroom without them.

When I wasn't at home, I was usually at school. I can honestly say that I have never had so much fun in a classroom. My professors Mateo, Ivy, Victor and Israel are some of the most amazing people I've ever met. Their individual personalities came together and made everything into a party. Even something as simple as the announcement that we would once more be having ensalada Valenciana for lunch became something I looked forward to every day because I couldn't wait to see what Victor and Israel had to say about the dish. Thanks to them, I learned more than I had ever expected to.

And when I wasn't at home or at school, I was experiencing the culture. I got to visit some pretty awesome places: Cuenca, Barcelona, Salamanca and Madrid. Within Valencia, my hometown, I got to see the City of Arts and Sciences (Google it), my first concert, my first trip to the beach (the Mediterranean), eat the best pizza on Earth that isn't the Cream & Crimson and catch some sweet flicks. There is nothing like Harry Potter dubbed over in Spanish.

In hindsight though, the cultural things didn't really matter. They weren't the best part of my trip. No, the best part of the trip was realizing the beautiful connection that you can make with people over the course of seven weeks. No matter how nervous or happy or sad I was, my family, friends and professors were always there for me. The bond that we were able to make during that time is something I will forever cherish.

Bloomington South senior Holly Hays regularly writes a School Diary column.

**Holly Hays**

