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**Kelly Gonzalez Tapia, Colombia, Universidad EAFIT**

**English, second language**

My Name is Kelly Gonzalez, and I’m from Colombia. I live in Medellin, but I was not born there. I was born in Barranquilla, a small city in the northern coast of my country, you may be wondering what I clarified this, and the truth is that the fact of living where I wasn’t born changed my life completely. Being born in the coast of Colombia represents that the rest of the country has a stereotype of you and not precisely a good one. We are consider lazy and mediocre, and a lots of times we face rejection in other more developed cities such as Bogota and Medellin.

I arrived to Medellin when I was ten (now I’m twenty), and it was a hard transition for me. I was rejected, and I couldn’t find a group of friends, I’m also from the Seventh day Adventist church, and most of the population of Medellin is catholic, so I also suffered religious rejection. I was only ten, but I already felt that I didn’t fit anywhere. In the school, I failed in social relations, everyone kept saying that I was a “silly coast person”, and when someone understood that and I tried to start a friendship, the other ghost of my life appeared: “Can you come to my house on Saturday?..and I had to say, oh No! I am from the 7th day Adventist church, I cannot do anything on Saturdays”, and I faced lonely again. I felt that I was in a nightmare and I just wanted to end it up.

Time passed, and I entered college. I again could not belong to a group. My religion does not allow me to party, or to get drunk, and I didn’t have permission from my parents to go out late, So, I had to stay at home, and therefore I didn’t make any friends. That problem, of never create relationships brought me a big problem: I didn’t know to work in group! And that is a big problem in the globalized world we live in, and more in the international business arena (what I am studying).

I knew I needed to fit, that I needed to start developing leadership skills, and that I needed to learn how to treat people, and how to make people to understand me and accept me just as I am. I knew I had to do that, but I also knew it was not going to be easy. At first, I couldn’t do it, and when a teacher assigned a project that needed to be done in groups I worked by my own.

This year, I had to take an intercultural management course. It was in that class where another group project was assigned: We had to engage the Global Enterprise Experience. When the words “you have to participate in the GEE” came out from my teacher’s mouth I felt I had been shot. If I couldn’t work properly with other people from my country, how could I do it with people from around the world that I didn’t even know? If you ask me now, I sincerely didn’t want to participate in a contest like this, and I wouldn’t have enrolled by my own will.

The project started, and we had to work in a wonderful subject: indigenous groups. I find this area interesting, and that cheered me up. I started researching, reading about the contest, looking for previous years projects and giving my best. However, when everything seemed to be improving, our team leader got sick. I began working with a Colombian partner, and we started to get together. You don’t imagine and I have no words to describe how much value this experience, added to my life. Although I didn’t want to participate, I have learned so many things, that I thank God the opportunity that gave me to enroll the GEE. I grew up as a person, and I made friends! GEE taught me how to talk to people, how to manage stress, how to work under pressure. I learned how to work in group. I, that felt almost all the life rejected, felt that I was important, and that my work was necessary and valorized by a group. I had the opportunity of create bounds with another Colombian girl, and I gained experiences that are unmemorable and unforgettable in my life.

What I found most important of this experience, is that showed me that people can accept you just as you are. When we were setting up the first meeting to start our project, people were willing to do it on Saturday. For me, it was a great inconvenient, since I respect Sabbath, and it is a holy and spiritual day; so, I didn’t know what I was going to do. I decided to talk, and I felt great when people understood my point of view and our meeting were settled for another day! For the first time in my life I felt important, and I felt that someone cared about what I thought! GEE open my eyes, and made me look after appearances and stereotypes.

Now, I know every person is important, no matter his believes, manners, behavior or way of doing things. I learn that you can take advantage of every failure and every mistake and that it is possible to understand people, that it is possible to fight against your fears and problems, and that it is possible to succeed. I thanks GEE because taught me to do intercultural dialogue and to understand what other people, extremely different for me, think, and how different points of view and diversity can enrich every process and add value to a work. I learned that we are individuals who act and see things different from one another, but that is in these different where we find success. I learned how to interpret other people’s ideas, and how to work on them.

But, what I learned the most, and what really changed my life, is that GEE taught me that no matter your culture (no matter if you are Colombian, or African, or Australian, or from Germany), no matter the religion, no matter the language, the ethnicity, the differences in ways of behaving, no matter anything. When every person unifies forces, and works together with a purpose and with a dream, that dream can be a reality, and that dream is more real when you learn to work together and to understand that is in this variety but unity in which you find success. No matter the rainy day, the sun always comes up, no matter if in your life you have a problem (if you cannot work in group), the sun rises, and God, is going to put in your life and experience, just as the GEE, that will take you out of your problem and give you an unforgettable learning! Thanks God, and thanks to the GEE, because now, I am a different persons who feels is valued and who can value others. I have become a better person for the world and for the society. Thanks again GEE!