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## The Power of Reflection

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Prompt: Go through your photos of your time away. Pick two photos that, when juxtaposed, represent some form of contrast and write about this. Make sure to include details in your description and be mindful of your audience. For example, what cultural details might require translation or further explanation for your reader?

Initially, I was going to write about how photos can lie. I was going to say that the picture on the left was the reality and the one on the right is a lie. But that is not true. Both these pictures are my truth. The picture on the left is an unplanned picture that I was not aware was taken. This was taken during our Barcelona excursion while we were on one of our many excursions. As is apparent from my facial expression, I was not particularly happy in this moment. I was complaining about something. The interesting thing is, I don't remember a single thing about that moment. I don't recall what I was complaining about, why I was so bent out of shape. But the picture on the right, I remember everything about this moment. My FSP group was on an excursion in Salamanca; a city I whole heartedly enjoyed. We decided to climb to the very top of this beautiful old church. Usually, physical exercise mixed with heights would be the perfect combination to put me in an awful mood, but not that day. That day all I could think about was the beauty of the city. The sunshine glowing off my cheeks and illuminating my smile. The new friends I had made standing around taking pictures and taking in the breathtaking scenery. I can still taste the hot chocolate we drank that day and the perfectly toasted churros we ate as we walked around the oldest operating university in the world, the University of Salamanca.

When I got back home that day, my cheeks hurt from smiling. It was the first time I really let myself live in the moment of my experience. There wasn't a single time on that day when I felt the need to check my social media, or text my friends to fill me in on what I was missing back home. I was completely absorbed into that moment of me standing on the top of the church, with my heart beating from both exhaustion and excitement. I remember sitting for a second and looking up at the beautiful clear blue sky, and I had this beautiful feeling that nothing could ruin this split moment. This moment was absolutely perfect. I knew for the rest of my life, I would aspire to achieve and recreate this level of perfection and true bliss. Nothing I had gone through, none of my homesickness, social anxiety, or depression was seeping into this moment. It was so perfectly pure.

What has had the biggest in my life was not studying abroad, it has been reflecting on my study abroad. After arriving from Spain, my outlook on my program was dark, negative, and ungrateful. However, after taking some time to reflect and appreciate the positive changes I underwent, allowed me to gain a newfound appreciation for my FSP. I have deep feelings of gratitude that I did not have during my abroad term because I know that all these events had to happen for me to grow, learn, and transform into the new and better person I am today. Pictures like the one on right that capture such pure moments of happiness, are the ones I look back on to transport myself into that peaceful mind state. The negative times, while they

played their role in the moment, no longer control nor taint my memories of Spain. I look back on my photo album and only feel connected to the pictures like ones on the right; the ones that put a smile on my face.

