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Why SPI Exists...and Plans to Continue

A note from Rose Potter, SPI's Co-Founder and Master Teacher



As a Spanish teacher in 1984, I arranged a student educational tour with an internationally recognized company. I wanted my students to explore Spain, use their emerging language skills and learn culture through observation and experience. With these goals in mind, I promoted a fifteen day trip. My students had a great time. However, the educational part of the trip was a total flop. Our group of 13 joined 42 other travelers to form a huge bus load of 54, most of whom had little interest in speaking Spanish. Within days my own students lost their interest in honing their language skills. Who could blame them? They wanted to get to know the other participants—in English. With eleven cities on the itinerary and two days lost to flight time, we continually traveled. Because mass seatings at breakfast and dinner were included and lunch was a quick snack to keep up with the tour, we had no opportunity to taste quality Spanish cuisine.

But, the biggest disappointment came at the end of the trip. As we sat in the airport near our departure gate, I asked, “What part of the trip impressed you the most?” A voice quickly responded, “I loved that huge discotheque with mirrors.” Someone else dissented, “No, the one in that white town was awesome...” I interrupted. “What did you think about the cities? What did you think about Toledo?” *Silence*. Then, the hesitant voice of one of my brightest students asked, “Was that the one with the aqueduct?” As my heart sank, I vowed to myself that I would never again subject my students to another “cattle-drive” tour. In that moment, the seeds of SPI took root.

After eighteen years of sending my students and SPI students abroad, I attended an information meeting for parents. Three former participants shared their SPI memories. They eagerly talked about their homestay family, the night life, and the people they had met... “What do you remember about your excursions?” I asked. “Which city did you like the best?” Eyes brightened. “The medieval city on a hill, Toledo! I loved the cobbled stone streets and that cathedral! It was amazing!” The response was music to my ears and food for my soul.

Our mission continues today.

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