

Comments for the Madrid 50th Anniversary Luncheon
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In the spring of 1990, I had the privilege and honor of organizing and hosting the May 10th 25th anniversary celebration of the IU-Purdue-Wisconsin Reunidas Program. In so many ways, teaching and studying in Madrid were very different experiences, then from now. There was very little electronic contact with IU and, for that matter, the States. Mamen and I were able, by the spring semester to arrange to have email access on Fridays at a distant site from our office, and it often didn't work! Telephone calls back home could be very expensive. I am talking about the amazing prehistoric world of pre-Facebook and all the other social media and the highly digitalized world in which we all exist.

Way back then, some 27 years ago, once students settled in, finding lodging, making Spanish friends, and becoming engaged with their classes it is likely that students may have had a more intense and complete immersion in Spanish society and culture than is now possible because of the electronic envelope that surrounds students and shapes the ways in which they engage with the world. This is a challenge for overseas programs of Indiana University and other universities as student are more likely to go abroad in shorter programs and sometimes brief summer visits that may last two weeks or less and without having the requisite language skills and knowledge of the countries they are visiting.

But back in 1989-1990, a strong sense of community was forged, because of the need to survive and thrive in Spain, and partly because of shared experiences – for example, seven weekend visits to different historic sites around the country – with all 49 students traveling together by bus – sometimes for many hours. Over the course of ten months, personal bonds were established, professional identities were being shaped, and lives were being transformed.

The participants in the program went on to have careers in education often teaching Spanish language (in public schools and at universities), working for NGOs related to promoting international understanding, or in private enterprises with offices in Spanish-speaking countries. The 1989-90 graduates of the Reunidas Program had formed such a great attachment to one another that, at least 25 of them with their spouses and children came to a 10 year plus reunion in Chicago, the weekend of August 1 and 2, 2001. Jennifer Ulman (from Purdue) and Julie Wolinsky (from IU) played the key roles in organizing the event; and they are still in yearly contact with me. In my opening comments at the reunion. I noted that I was able to attend the event, despite the fact that my mother had passed away the night before, because of the palpable feelings of love that were evident in the group – and being with the group was restorative for me.

I look back very fondly on the 1989-90 Madrid experience, the students, my colleagues at the Complutense, and what a wonderful year it was for my new wife

and me. One beloved person throughout the year was Mamen Castaño, my associate and dear friend, who so effectively administered the office, ensuring that the academic year in Madrid would be such a truly memorable experience for the students and me. I hope that those assembled here can look back on the Reunidas experience with similar fondness and gratitude. Gracias.