

### **343p Maria Isabel Leon Gil Colombia Journal – English Second Language**

#### **The story on how I learned that the world is not beneath my feet but surrounding me.**

Even before the semester started, I had heard some things about GEE from friends who had participated on past years, but nothing could've prepared me for what I was about to experience. This has been by far the best memory I will take with me from my University years, because in three weeks it gave me the gift to see the world in the light of the eyes of people living in completely different realities from mine, and I loved that. I experienced happiness, fear, concern, excitement, stress and relieve. It was the complete package.

I've always thought that life isn't about obtaining things, but rather about deserving those things, that's the reason why I didn't just want to have this experience, but instead, I wanted to put everything from me in this competition, so that I would know that I deserved the right to have part in such an amazing project. And I think I did it, and it was possible thanks to all my teammates, specially the leader, who was always there encouraging us, and making us know that our ideas were valuable and that all together could overcome this challenge.

Working with such amazing people opened my eyes to a new world of possibilities, as it let me explore a little bit into their minds - I would be sitting in my room, talking to my teammates as I got amazed and my mind was blown by the things I was learning about their cultures and countries - and I felt proud of this generation which is underestimated most of times, and which is referred to as "lazy, entitled narcissists, apathetic, selfish, shallow, and too attached to technology" as I once heard in a video, but now I am convinced that those statements couldn't be more wrong. Thanks to my partners I felt something that was new to me. It was like something changed inside of me, because for the first time I had this strong believe that we can change this world, that we can improve lives and we have the power to conquer whatever we want, as long as we are willing to leave behind our prejudices and fears.

This feeling came to me as we started talking about a variety of vulnerable groups of people, and we were kind of undecided, so me and my pair for the contest thought about developing a different idea, which was kind of challenging for us because everyone had agreed on something different, but we took the risk and at the end the whole team made the decision of working in our proposal, which consisted on doing something about the acid attacks that melt the dreams and lives of a lot of people around the world, especially in my country, Colombia, where mainly women are exposed to this type of violence as a result of the degradation that permeates our society and that drives people to cross the limits of humanity. So we committed to bring together our ideas to do something about this issue, and despite the fact that maybe the stars shined up in my sky while the sun was brilliant in some of my teammate's skies, we found the way to build a castle of ideas, and we developed a complete proposal.

Now that the assignment is done, I feel satisfied and extremely lucky, because even though it wasn't easy due to personal reasons like the great amount of University responsibilities I had, or group-related reasons like the huge time zone differences and the challenges some of my partners had to face, like lack of energy in the places where they live, or religious extremism prohibiting one of the members joining this type of activities, we managed to get through it all by helping each other, and that's why I will never forget this enriching experience, from which I will take with me the courage, commitment, kindness and respect that my partners showed the whole time.