

Spending a summer in Washington, D.C. was a once in a lifetime experience and one that I will not soon forget. As with all experiences, there were ups and downs along the way and I learned so much and grew in a myriad of ways.

When I first arrived in this historical city, I could not stop thinking about how amazing it was that I was right there in our nation's capital. I was not there just for a short visit, but this was going to be my home for the next two months. Without Illinois State University and the scholarship that funded my housing, this would not have been possible.

As a 3rd grade teacher and a master's student, much of my time is taken up throughout the year with lesson planning, meetings, studying, and classes. Although I love the learning process, I love even more to experience new things in person and apply what I have learned. Every year in 3rd grade, I teach my students about citizenship and our country. We discuss Washington, D.C., the history, and the politics that come from this place. Since I have summers off, I was able to accept this scholarship and head to the city for the first time in my life. The monuments, museums, and places I had only known about through books and research, now became a reality as I was able to capture part of the city for my students. Everywhere I went, I collected pamphlets, asked questions, took pictures, and bought mementos to share with my students.

I was able to visit places I hadn't dreamed I would be able to: walking through the White House, standing where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I have a dream" speech, touring the Capitol building with an Illinois senator, visiting Mount Vernon – George Washington's home, experiencing a mix of cultures, celebrating the 4th of July at the Capitol, seeing the Declaration of Independence 240 years after it was signed, walking through the National Cathedral with the heavenly voices of the choir singing, studying in the Reading Room at the Library of Congress, seeing the smallest book in the world, and so much more.

Living in Washington, D.C. is a unique experience that most tourists don't see simply because their visit is so short. When you live in D.C., there are many options to travel from one destination to the next. Travel time depends on the choice and availability of transportation. Without a car, riding the metro, taxi, or biking are your best options. There are so many cultures of people who live in the city, which makes life in D.C. so unique. The styles, restaurant options, beliefs, and worldviews that people have are numerous and makes everyday unlike any other. I found that it is nearly impossible to be bored because there is always something going on, places to visit, people to talk to, views to take in, and new discoveries to be made.

Acclimating to a city different from what I was accustomed and that had so much political power provided its own challenges, but I learned how to adapt to the new environment. This was my once in a lifetime experience. I found that I was challenged and stretched in many ways: mentally, physically, emotionally, and

spiritually. I had to decide what was most important. I was in a beautiful place that was full of need, disappointment, and power struggles.

I learned that I couldn't live for myself. I can live as a citizen of the United States to better our country by giving people dignity, looking them in the face and smiling. I found that my life was important because I could be the one person to better someone else's day just by thinking about someone other than myself. Now that I am home, I don't want to forget. I don't want to lose that vision. There are still people here who are in need, who struggle, and the power and struggle for money and position is still real. I believe that I can make a difference by empowering my students and teaching them to speak up for what is right and serving other people.