

For my Professional Interview Project, I spoke to Jane Mara, who works in the Fundraising department of CHRIS 180, a non-profit in Atlanta Georgia. Mrs. Mara has worked in the Fundraising departments at CHRIS 180 for three and a half years, but recently was offered a different position within the department. Her new position is “Database and system administration” which involves the logistics with doners, and she also works with other members of the fundraising and finance team. Prior to this position, she was a doner communication person. Which involved writing email copy, newsletters, managing doner calendars and so on. All of these job experiences are quite different than what she thought she would be doing. When Mrs. Mara went to college, she was an English major and wanted to work in publishing. She did work in publishing for a brief period of time, but then her and her husband made the decision to travel abroad due to his flexible work schedule. It was then through these abroad experiences that she realized she wanted to have a job that made a more prominent difference in the world. Mrs. Mara then began her career in non-profits.

Mrs. Mara talked a lot about her global experiences and how they shaped her personal and professional life after she returned. She first lived abroad in England and then would visit her husband in China when he lived there. Later in life, her travels involved her visiting many different places in Latin America. The places her and her husband visited were, Buenos Aires, Chile, Coasta Rica, Uruguay and Argentina. While they were living in these places, Mr. and Mrs. Mara would also visit different places. Throughout all of her travels, Mrs. Mara has learned many lessons along the way, some of which I had the pleasure of hearing from our discussions. When talking about her experiences being a scholar in England, she described it as, “No question it was the most difficult academic experience of my life because Oxford University... they study differently in England than we study. It’s a lot more emphasis on individual reading and research

and writing, so I would have twenty pages of papers due every week. Then when I came back to the United States, I was like ‘oh you just want like six pages once, at the end of the term? That’s it?’” From this experience, it is apparent that Mrs. Mara was challenged in her work ethic and that shows in the work she does today. Also, one lesson that really stood out to me from Mrs. Mara’s experiences was the value of community. When talking about her experiences in Latin America she said, “You can experience places more like a tourist as you’re traveling, you don’t necessarily have to meet people, but doing that meeting is what makes it possible to have a real life there.” Mrs. Mara said this sense of community made all of the difference in her traveling experiences. She also said she did some volunteer work during her time abroad such as teaching English. She said she really valued all of her experiences abroad and would like to go back at some point to visit people.

From my conversations with Mrs. Mara, it seems like her abroad experiences have had a lot of impacts on many parts of her life. She said she now feels more sympathetic towards others because she understands how one’s experiences can shape their thinking and personalities. Making the point that people will continue to believe things unless they are given a reason not to. For Mrs. Mara, her abroad experiences taught her to be more open minded towards new ideas and a willingness to learn or relearn more. Also, she learned that voting was very important while living abroad. She spoke more about this by saying, “People in other countries... my understanding of their voting, is that if people are allowed to vote, they always vote. And here... it’s always so disappointing when you see the statistics, even though we all know how important this is, still there are huge spots in the country who didn’t do it.” Mrs. Mara went onto to say that this experience taught her how important voting was and it is something she tries to remember.

She also said her abroad experiences taught her to be more comfortable with taking risks when it comes to her career endeavors.

I took away a lot of important lessons from speaking with Mrs. Mara. The biggest lessons for me were to take risks and to form a sense of community. Mrs. Mara mentioned in our interview, that her studying abroad in England gave her more confidence to travel abroad and to take more risks in other areas of her life. I think this is a very important lesson to learn. I place a lot of importance on being independent and with independence, one needs confidence. From my discussions with Mrs. Mara, she reminded me how important it is to be confident and courageous enough to take risks. Also, having a strong sense of community is very important in life too. I did not realize the importance of community until Mrs. Mara pointed it out. I will definitely keep all of these things in mind as I progress in my college career and post-graduation.

As for experiences I envision for myself, I see myself going abroad and learning similar experiences to Mrs. Mara. While they will most likely not be the exact same, I do expect to learn some similar lessons after talking to her. I can definitely see myself learning more about taking risks, trying to form a sense of community and being okay with being uncomfortable. I am not exactly a huge risk taker, so just making the decision to go abroad is a risk in my mind. I'm sure the experience would cause me to manage my stress better and to have more faith, in lieu of stressing out about taking risks. I also think I would learn more about what having a community really means and how I would form one in a foreign place. I believe in order for me to become more comfortable with being away from home, I would benefit from having trusted people to talk to. Forming a new community is definitely something I would try to do. Lastly, I think I would have to get used to being uncomfortable for a while. I think this would help me feel more at peace if I knew that I would feel uncomfortable, rather than being surprised by it.