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To the Association of Family and Friends:

This past summer I visited Cuba under a program known as MEDICC (Medical Education in Cooperation with Cuba). The duration of the program was one month, beginning on June 28th . There was never a dull moment! My daily activities included an advanced Spanish class in the morning followed by a visit to a health care facility in the afternoon. The Spanish class did not simply involve sitting in a classroom with an instructor but rather taking tours of Havana: its museums, some of its other favorites and speaking to people in the street. The method encouraged us to use our advanced Spanish skills to learn about Cuba's people and heritage. The afternoon involved visiting a clinic, through this classroom we learned about Cuba's amazingly competent and free health care system. Even though Cuba may be perceived as a "backwards" country in the modern western hemisphere, they boast a 97% literacy rate and the #1 cause of death are strokes followed by heart attacks.

The evening was "free time" and the students used this free time to the best of their advantage frequenting the "hot dance spots" of the city. This was another classroom where we intimately learned about Cuba's rich culture. We were able to speak with Cubans openly about their living situations while doing what they love most listening to music and enjoying life.

On the weekends we made excursions to places not endorsed by MEDICC to get more of a feel for Cubans who don't ordinarily get tourist traffic. We were able to visit places such as Trinidad, known for its untouched waterfront and Sonrocco, a place filled with castles and waterfalls. There we were also given the opportunity to speak with Cubans freely, and learn the pros and cons of their lifestyle.

The program also had another aspect to it. For the first two weeks we stayed in Havana, the capital city and for the last two weeks of the program we stayed in a medical school on the countryside Havana. In the countryside, we met other medical students and saw how they learned medicine. It was a humbling experience! After that we should all realize the comforts of a medical education in this country. While we complain of parking, they consider themselves fortunate to share one donated body for Anatomy between five to six students.

To sum up what I learned from my visit to Cuba: Yes, they may be poor and frowned upon by America for its government, but

they are one of the richest countries in terms of their people and culture. Cubans may not have much, but they do the best that they can with what they have.

If you would like to see more of Cuba, I invite you to see my website at: <http://www2.umdj.edu/~rodrigva/Vashun.htm>.

Thank you for your contribution to my international and cultural growth.