

## **Night before leaving for ENGLAND!!!!**

Hello there.... This is my Pen International 2010 Blog! My name is Erica!

This past week has been crazy, and just yesterday, I arrived in Rochester, NY (Wednesday the 18th). I recently came back just last week from my backpacking trip throughout Europe, starting in Croatia then swinging through Macedonia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Italy, Germany, France, and finally Amsterdam. Getting over the jet lag has been a yucky experience for me and I will have to do that two times, again, this upcoming week.... Yuck! Regardless, I am very very very excited for my trip to London, where I will be staying in Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex, England. (About an hour away from London). I have never been to London, and I heard is a great place! I have a nickname, Princess Israel (since my last name is Israel, and I often fool people into believing that I'm the princess of Israel living in America...), and I'd like to brag for a moment, Princess Israel will be staying in a castle for a whole week!!

Anyways, I have no idea what to expect at this week long conference. All I know is we will be listening to many presentations with four other countries. Each country will have their own voice and sign language interpreters. That will be crazy! It'll be like playing the Telephone game.... hopefully whatever I said in my presentations will not end up completely different when interpreted!

Hopefully, this blog, when I am finally interacting with other deaf delegates from Russia, Japan, China, and Philippines, will provide you a picture of what my experiences were like with the Student Leadership Institute. I will try my best to provide as much details as possible without being boring!

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## **FIRST NIGHT- Saturday August 21, 2010**

It is now Saturday, August 21st in East Sussex, England!!!!!! I have finally made it here!

The plane ride was about 7ish hours, and it was quite painful! The seats were so close to each other, and we had a hard time getting some sleep! We all pretty much pulled an all nighter! We made it to England much earlier than expected, and had to wait a couple of hours for the Russian group to come. The airport staff kept yelling at us because some of us were sleeping on their couches and chairs.... Hey, we were sleepy!



The bus ride to the castle took about 3 hours. I passed out on the bus! I felt so bad because I knew I should be interacting with the Russians and my American peers, but I was so exhausted! We finally made it to the castle, and it was absolutely beautiful! The castle was a lot smaller than I expected, but that did not matter to me at all! The surroundings had a typical layout of a castle-land and I felt like I was in a movie! There was a MOAT around the castle with water in it! There were many gardens around the castle, and there were many specialized patches in the garden. "Herbs Garden"..... "Shakespeare Garden"....."Butterfly



Garden", you name it! I had a big surprise in the garden... a peacock was walking around the garden! I could not believe it when I saw the bird. Who would have thought there would be a peacock chilling out by the castle in England???! The whole scenery looked like it came straight from the Harry Potter movies! I know, I know... I sound like a crazy American who is completely obsessed with Harry Potter, but I am not kidding when I say the whole

scenery reminded me of the movie!! It exactly what I had in mind. A combination of quaintness, rural, green, and cloudy.

That night, we played some cards with the group from Philippians, and I have learned way more than I expected in such short amount of time! Their sign language (FSL) is so similar to ASL. I could not figure out why it was so similar, and I asked them that. They told me that while their original signed language was not yet united and recognized, it was due to the works many Americans and our own U.S. Peace Corps that helped them shape their sign language today. As a result, their sign language today contains about 60% of ASL. Intrigued by this, I could not stop myself from asking them about their education, their support access, their families, and more. I was shocked when the Filipinos had told me that for most of the time, they have to pay for their own interpreters. Imagine that! And on top of that, they will find only one interpreter for one class at a time. One of the Filipino members told me that she had a class with the same interpreter for the whole three hours! I was shocked.

As I was hanging out with the group, I began to pick up on their cultural beliefs that took me by surprise. While we were playing cards, I won the first round of the game and all of the Americans shouted, "you're so lucky! I can't believe you won!!" I responded by saying "Hey hey, it's all luck! Whaddah expect??" One of the Filipinos chirped in and said, "No, it is god!" In the mist of all of the hands movements that were flying all around me, I caught his remark. It touched me how, without him explaining to me, I started to understand our cultural differences. They do not believe in luck, but instead, rely on their spiritual

understandings. Amazing.

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### **Sunday August 22, 2010**

So, last night, my alarm clock got fried. Rule of the thumb when traveling, always double check the voltage compliance on your technological items!! My roommate and I miraculously woke up on time! We showed up to breakfast, and I could not believe how heavy the British food is! Think of pub food.....

The Americans and I are so out of it due to Jet Lag, and we are doing our best in getting through the day without looking like zombies! We have met way too many people so far, and I think I can say this on the behalf of my group, I was already completely overwhelmed! The whole translating process between the countries baffles me. There are interpreters from each country, and I cannot get over my shock at how communication works.

After breakfast was our introductory session where we talked about our usage of Facebook, and how we use that to network with each other. We had asked all of the countries what their sign were for "Facebook". All of the signs were both different and same at the same time. I could understand why they used their sign, but it is different from mine....

Hard to explain! We spent a long time "speed dating" with each other using Facebook's "questions" such as our relationship status, hometown, interests, and etc. It was fun, but tiring! Some could gesture with me really well, and some had to rely on writing in their notebooks to get their answers across. Imagine all 20 delegates together doing that!!



We ate some lunch after that, and again, think of pub food.... Then we had a tour



seen a wedding here!

around the castle. Apparently, the current owner of the castle offered to buy the castle for his wife and she rejected the offer. Can you imagine that? I would have said "YES!!!!!" without a doubt!!!! He was an alumni of Queens University and decided to donate the castle to the university. Even though it is affiliated with a university, many people use this castle for other purposes such as conventions and weddings. (By the way, we have already Apparently, they have several wedding

parties throughout the week!) To my delight, there are many legends associated with the castle. The tour guide talked about the “Headless Drummer Boy”, and if you stood in the room he showed us, you can hear him walking around on the floor above you. The legend says the boy went off to a battle with his lord. He got his head cut off, hence the name of “Headless Drummer Boy” and due to his utmost loyalty to his master, he came home to the castle still drumming without his head on. Oh my gosh. I am a sucker for stories like that!

We gave our leadership presentation today, and we had to present it in slow motion. Literally. With all of the interpreting, a sentence would take about 30 seconds to be conveyed. Amazing. We chose three leaders, Laurent Clerc, George Veditz, and William Stokoe. The first two leaders were deaf, but the third one was hearing. One group did not like the fact that we had chosen a hearing guy as one of our leaders. To our best ability, we tried to explain clearly that in spite of his hearing status, his contribution to the deaf culture was very important to us.



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### **Monday August 23, 2010**

Today, we went through several presentations that covered many different topics. Judy and Gerry Buckley talked about the impact of having diversity in their family. They have a mix of deafness, hearing, Native American, Irish, and Italian. It was funny because it was no different to me. I was used to diversity. However, the other groups were probably more fascinated with this concept because it is rare in their own countries. I could not blame them for that!

Jim DeCaro gave a presentation on “Effective Communication”. It is funny to see that simple words can mean so much. We had to come up with words that make a good leader, such as Empowerment, Confident, Innovative, Flexible, and Assertive. Each country gave their views on what their vision of a leader is. Some were very different from the American group. We valued a skill of multitasking (because of diversity), while Japan valued eloquence, China valued harmony (and they used their recent earthquake as an example), Philippines valued compassion (and they talked about typhoons), and finally Russia value power and strength (because of their huge country).

That night, Japan and Philippines gave their cultural presentations. Japan taught us how to make origami and played some of their games that involved food. Philippines talked about their culture, and I noticed that they talked a lot about

spiritual aspects of their culture, which included animals such as birds, and as well as music. They did several dances, and I participated in one of their dances!



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### **Tuesday August 24, 2010**

Today, we listened to several presentations and did one of my favorite activities of the week. First we listened to Gerry and Judy Buckley talk about “Leadership in the Global Deaf Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. There were some shocking statistics about deaf people from all over the world:

- *90% of the world's Deaf children/adult never went to school*
- *19 countries do not recognize Deaf people as citizens*
- *31 countries do not allow deaf people to have a driver's license*
- *18 countries provide sign language interpreters at universities*
- *52 countries are “ignorant” about whether the HIV/AIDS situation affect deaf people*

All of the countries shared their struggles in their own countries:

- **Philippines:** Have to pay for their own interpreters. Sometimes those who know FSL will be taken away from their real job in order to provide interpreting assistance.
- **Japan:** No help in emergency situations (ex. Fire alarms)

- **China:** Less job opportunities. Low hiring percentage. Usually the government will assign them jobs.
- **Russia:** Lack of interpreting support. The sign language interpreters do not have a recognized profession like teachers. And Deaf discrimination too!
- **America:** Lack of support for veterans and latened deaf.

We did a scavenger hunt activity, and it was my favorite activity of the week! Without all of the waiting time and having the interpreters finish conveying the messages, we were able to finally communicate with each other face to face. Through gestures, we were able to communicate with each other just enough to get by. The goal was to find all of the objects or statues around the castle together in one hour. I could not believe the results! The best part was looking at mine and other countries' photos!





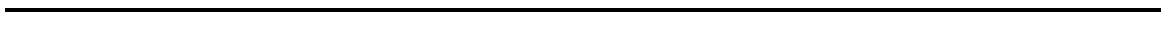
**Tuesday Night:**  
did their cultural

China

presentation, and it was really fascinating to watch how much dancing they did, and plus they made tons of art work for everybody to take home. It really showed how much their culture valued art. I got a sense of their culture, and the long complex history it had endured.



We did our cultural presentation after China. It was so interesting because when we were explaining our traditions, we did not even think of expanding on some of the terms we used. For example, we did a Halloween activity, and it did not even occur to me that the audience would not know what “Trick or Treat” meant. Luckily, Pat DeCaro stopped us and explained the history behind Halloween, and why the American children say that. After the brief explanation, we forced all groups to go “trick or treating” and picked up their candy. We also spent some time talking about Hollywood, and we made our own “Walk of Fame Stars”. I think the audience was really interested in our Salad Theory when we tried to show them how diverse America is. We closed our presentation with our famous musical chair activity.





### **Wednesday August 25, 2010**

Today, the representative from the Nippon Foundation came in and introduced himself, Mr. Yoshida. I truly appreciate what their foundation does for the communities around the world. Every year, they have a huge fundraising event, and they use that money to help many different organizations around the world. We also did an activity led by Pat DeCaro and Alim Chandani that focuses on Deaf Culture at home. We talked about the misunderstandings between deaf and hearing cultures that go on at home. It is amazing to see how many similarities and differences there were with both groups from all countries.

Tonight was Russia's turn to do their Cultural Night. Like other countries, their country was filled with long history and art. The group did a dance for us, and talked about their country. It was interesting to hear each person in the group talk about their hometown and what their town was famous for. One person talked about her town being famous for their honey! After their presentation, they showed us several fun games. We were so loud, and I am sure the castle workers were very annoyed by us that night! Oops!



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### **Thursday August 26, 2010**

Today is our last day. We did many wrap up activities that involved talking about how we can move forward as leaders in our deaf communities. We were asked to really look deeply into ourselves and figure out what our future goals are, and how we can incorporate our leadership skills into it. While we should be focusing on our successes, we should be aware of the issues that arise in our deaf and hearing communities. It was also emphasized in today's presentations that networking is crucial for our own success, and networking is not all about "brown-nosing". We should use networking to really get to know each other, and learn from each other. And use those connections for our future careers.

That night, we did our final presentation on what we have learned that week. In summary, we talked about four different skills are important in leadership:

Communication: Very important to connect with another especially with the language barriers. We have to be careful and sensitive about this!  
Cross-cultural interpretations: We easily misunderstand each other.  
Self-discovery: This is important since we have to know ourselves. Also we should identify our strengths and weaknesses.  
Versatility: Different countries' perspectives of a good leader.

We also called for a hugging ceremony, and interestingly, a girl had asked us if it was appropriate for men and women to hug each other. In America, this was absolutely appropriate, but in other countries, it was not. A perfect example of cultural differences we have encountered throughout the week.



After the hugging ceremony, we all received our diplomas and moved to our closing reception party.



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**Friday August 27 2010**

Today we went into London to spend a day exploring the city before we went back to the States. I absolutely loved London! It is such a cute old city, and it had everything! Unlike America, you do not see any chain restaurants, and they had different kinds of cafes and boutique shops. We took the “tube” (train) around the city, and it was all so strange and interesting to experience! Sadly, all of the groups decided to split up for the day. My American peers and I decided that we did not want to see the landmarks because we all agreed that we have already seen it all through pictures. We wanted to get a taste of some British culture, and spent the day sitting at a nice restaurant (they serve pigeon meat!) with our interpreter Oliver. He is living in London, and he was our perfect tour guide! It was such a relaxing day, and it to embrace it all in was such a perfect ending to our week!



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### **Post Student Leadership Institute**

It is amazing what a week long conference can teach me. When I was on the airplane going home, I realized a whole new meaning of “Deaf Can”. Just from learning about different experiences from everybody from various places in the world, I could not believe how different our lives are, just because we are deaf. Our struggles we have in America was very different from other countries’ struggles when facing Deaf issues. I saw the new understanding we had for each other, and in spite of the language barriers and cultural differences, it did not stop us from uniting together as one Deaf group. I hope that can be applied to everybody in the world, both Deaf and hearing. All of the leadership skills I have learned with communication, interacting, and networking have made me look forward to whatever paths I may come across in my future.

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**Special Thanks to:**

My American delegates who made this Student Leadership Institute fun and memorable for me. Thank you for your patience with me, and everything you have taught me throughout the week!

(Pictured: MJ Kielbus, Me, Derrick Behm, and Jeff Barnette)



My group throughout the week for helping me build my leadership skills and gain more confidence in my networking with the international peers in spite of many communication barriers that were present.

(Pictured: Alexander Kirsanov, Me, Jonathan San Juan, Takeya Tango, and Yue Wang)



Everybody that was involved with the Student Leadership Institute. All five countries; America, Russia, Philippines, China, and Japan have made this week a success! Your stories and ideas have opened up my world even more, and I hope I will continue to education myself about you and other Deaf friends from all over the



world.

And finally a BIG thank-you to the Pen-

International staff, the Nippon Foundation, and all of the interpreters who were involved in making this week a success and a wonderful experience for me!

(Pictured: Corinne Heschke, Nora Shannon, Jim DeCaro, Bill Clymer, Mary Lamb, Denise Kavin.

Not pictured: Gerry Buckley, Judy Buckley, Alim Chandani, Pat DeCaro, Scott Gentzke, and Oliver Pouliot)