



ALMA MATER VILNENSIS

 INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

 NAME

TRAVIS GUNN

 FROM

USA

 TO

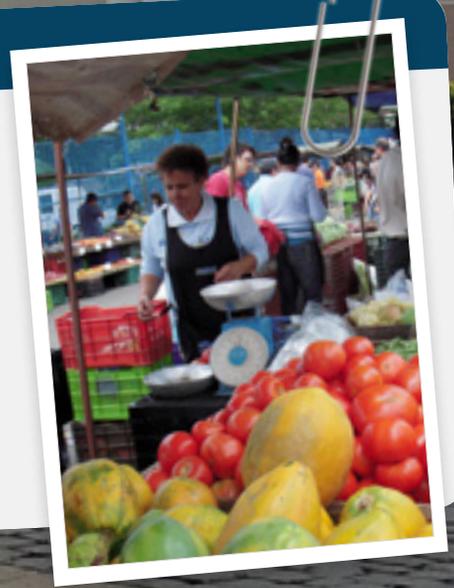
MULTIPLE COUNTRIES

 PROGRAM

GILMAN



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# Coming Into My Own

## Away From Home, I Managed to Find My Voice

Travis Gunn has been told that he is missing out on life, that his fear is allowing it to pass him by. He spent years trying to change himself. Others have spent years trying to “fix” him. And after four years, four continents, eight countries, and a countless number of cultures, he found what he needed most. And, it was his Global Studies degree from the Global College of Long Island University in New York that helped him achieve it.

“Leaving home was recommended. In fact, it allowed me to start over in some ways. I can’t say for certain, but I think that is the only reason that my parents (neither of whom have ever left the United States) allowed me to participate in a four year study abroad program. We didn’t just think about it as an educational investment; it was a treatment program.”

Although they saw the benefits, Travis worried about going away from home, which had been the only place where he could be himself. Would he lose himself in the process and become reclusive?

Growing up Travis rarely spoke to anyone outside his immediate family, which developed into “selective mutism” as his interactions dwindled. Today this is known as a form of social anxiety, and which he still has but to a lesser degree. He describes himself as quiet, though most others immediately notice the red splotches on his face and the quiver and gasping in his voice when he does speak. They see it as a personality trait – shy or socially awkward – but these fail to address the intensity that surrounds speaking for him. And the success he feels when making progress.

“Other people don’t understand, can’t understand. For almost ten years, I never really spoke to anyone outside of my ‘inner circle.’ Then, in Costa Rica, I talked to someone, really talked them, for the first time. That night, I fell asleep smiling. It was then that I knew I could make it away from home.”

While others may not have recognized it, Travis found he was progressing by leaps and bounds during his time living with a Costa Rican host family and interning on a HIV/AIDS and tourism project with a non-governmental organization (NGO). He continued to be challenged and grow over the next years of his program: he interned at a newspaper in India, did independent research in China, and finally interned with the U.S. Department of State Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Lithuania. All as part of his unique undergraduate degree program.

His time in Lithuania was supported by a U.S. Department of State-sponsored Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship, and required a lot of adjusting. It was his first experience without other students from his U.S. university, his first experience juggling a 40-hour work week with a full study schedule, and his first time being asked to “make connections” during work-related social functions.

“It’s terrifying and frustrating and, at times humiliating, but it’s precisely for those reasons that it’s so worthwhile. It’s in these moments, I think, that force you into a state of discomfort, that you learn the most about yourself.”

Travis developed a newfound appreciation and understanding for the United States having gained comparative perspectives with other countries and witnessed the U.S. role abroad firsthand. He also says the experiences further helped to accept himself for who he is.

“I’m living life just like everyone else. I just live my life differently. My international exchange experience forced me to become more independent. With social anxiety, it’s easy to become reliant on friends and family. For a long time, they were my voice to the public. Now I am my own voice.”

