

A Conversation with Dylan Griswold

Dylan Griswold

Hey, everybody, my name is Dylan Griswold and I'm a third year PhD student in Clinical Neurosciences. I am Gates Cambridge Scholar, class of 2019. And this is my girlfriend, **Ana Maria**. But we'll get to that.

So I arrived in Cali, Colombia, in November of 2020. I really did not like it. But the opportunity for the project in which we would be implementing guidelines for severe traumatic brain injury in low-resource settings arose in Colombia. You know, that is exactly what I wanted to do. So, you know, I was excited for the project. My first few months there, I felt completely out of place. I didn't understand anybody with the masks in the hospital. I couldn't understand the nurses, I just felt completely useless. I was sleeping 10 or 11 hours a day, because my brain was trying to take in all of the Spanish. And I just felt really, really bad. And the project wasn't starting, there was a lot of delays because of COVID in the hospitals.

I had the opportunity to go back to the US for one week in February of 2021, and I took it. I was really excited. And on the way back I got an email saying that I could go back to Stanford, where I was a third-year medical student before starting my PhD, and that I could get the vaccine there. So I was really excited that I would be able to spend a month, at least a month, away from Colombia, because I would have to get both doses of the vaccine, I'd be able to see my friends again. And going back to Stanford, and spending time with my friends. You know, I ended up crying telling them how much I realised that *they were home* to me. That I realised that being in Colombia, how sad I was, that I needed that friendship, that I needed the camaraderie and that I missed the feeling of being at home at Stanford.

And I flew back to Massachusetts where I live, and was supposed to head back down to Colombia. But in the city in which I live, Cali, there were protests throughout April and May. So I was really sad about the protests, but I was really happy about not having to go back to Colombia, and that I would be able to go back home, spend more time with my family. And I told my advisor here at Colombia, Dr Andreas Rubiano, that I would try again in July. It was the best time you know, that I've been able to spend with my family for a long time. And so, that feeling of *home* you know, I was overcome with that feeling of *being at home*.

When I finally had to go back to Colombia, in the middle of July, I was dreading it. But, when I went back, things were more open. And one of my other advisors – external advisors – Dr Nancy Carney, she moved to Cali, Colombia around the same time that I came back. And so now I finally felt like we were making progress. I didn't quite feel comfortable in Colombia yet, but I was starting to feel more comfortable. My Spanish became a lot better. I started to be able to understand a little bit more, but it wasn't perfect. But, you know, I was able to at least function.

Around October, I got news that my grandfather was dying. And so I flew back. Spent three weeks on staying with my grandmother and him -and he didn't end up passing at the time. And I've never spent that much time with my grandparents. And so, you know, I had the feeling again of, "*wow, this feels like home*", in a different sense. And I was filled with, really, a sense of gratitude and hope.

And I remember entering the airport, and you know, seeing the immigration and the *Welcome* sign and thinking to myself, “*wow, Colombia now feels like home*”. It's so weird.

And you know, what has been the most surprising thing, actually has been that I met **Ana Maria** shortly after I arrived back to Colombia. She is a medical student at the military hospital in Bogota. She wants to be a cardiothoracic surgeon. We talked for about five hours, I bought a flight to Bogota, that night, at 3am to go see her the next day. And when I arrived, and we met and hugged, the feeling that I had was that I'm finally *home*. The feeling of being *at home with a person* is a completely different feeling than any of the other feelings of home, whether it be at Stanford, whether it be back in Massachusetts with my family, whether it be with my grandparents, whether it be here in Colombia. That I would meet someone here and fall in love, and for it to feel like *home*, was the greatest gift that I've been given in my life. We're at home with each other.