I love being home. I miss Peru. I love the enchanting winter wonderland. I miss the fuerte Arequipa sunshine. I love giving my friends and family hugs. I miss hugging Gabi, Yocely, and Emily, and being in constant communication with my dear Calvin group. I love chatting and catching up with my mom. I miss gossiping and sharing my thoughts and feelings with Jota. I love snuggling Lily. I miss Mota's quiet company. I (most of the time) love Jared and Brandon's jokes and quick wit. I miss Alfo's teasing and "mira quién ha venido, la Lori!" I love the comfort of homemade baked goods and Pizza Hut like it should be. I miss S/.2 empanadas at the U and coming home from class to a glass of fresh limeade and a plate Jota's personal creation of the day with a heaping side of rice. I love having back my expanse of English vocab. I miss the feeling of "tranquilo," "rico," and "bonito" rolling off my tongue to describe a wealth of various things, people, places, and circumstances. I love not missing my family and life here. I miss not loving on my family and life there.

If my body isn't torn in two, my mind and heart surely are.

After 4 months away from home and a final 25 hours of airports, planes, maintenance issues, and weather delays, being in the arms of my mom and dad was the only thing I desired. When that moment came and was made better by also being in the arms of the rest of my family, other family members, and some dear friends, a few tears of joy were shed and mostly I just couldn't stop smiling. I had left all of them and so many more with so much unknown ahead. Unknown people, unknown places, unknown foods, unknown streets, unknown culture, and a relatively unknown language. I came out on the other side knowing all of those things. As I would say if we were conversing in Spanglish, "I certainly did conocer it all!" I walked into their arms the same Lori that left them more than four months before: alive and well, stubborn, hopeful, unlikely to cry, quick to frustration, slow to anger, eager to give and receive words of love and encouragement, and ready for adventure.

But in so many ways I am not the same Lori that left back in August. It is astounding, the things that pass in just 127 short days. I have learned un montón about Peru, the world, God, and myself. I have learned how to cross busy streets, how to dance the salsa, how to pick up a package from customs at the post office, how to barter, how to make close friends in a short period of time, how to ignore catcalls, how to say no to vendors, how to make a collage, how to stand when the professor walks in the classroom, how to put mayonnaise on everything, how to prepare lomo saltado, how to enjoy a beer or pisco sour, how to walk everywhere, how to always be able to fit one more person in a combi no matter how full, how to choose a safe taxi, how to differentiate between llamas and alpacas, how to greet and despedir with a kiss on the cheek, how to deal with high altitudes, how to say "thank you" in Swedish, how to never take for granted beautiful sunsets even if they are daily occurrences.

I have learned how the Incas built so perfectly, how they learned so much from the tribes before them, how devoted these native people were to their gods, how the Spanish came and conquered, how the native Americans were treated after the Spanish conquest, how this history is seen throughout the country, how to depict a building between Pre-Inca and Inca, how to depict whether a painting was done by a Spaniard or a native.
I have learned that Peru is over half jungle, that Peru contains some of the world's highest peaks and deepest canyons, that Peru's coast has some of the most beautiful and unique beaches and driest deserts. I have learned about ways people live in la selva, la sierra and la costa, and have briefly witnessed some of it myself. I have learned that God's creativity is more beautiful than man could ever imagine and that the wonder of this world is vaster than man could ever evaluate or define.

I have learned to look. To look people in the eyes when we are talking; to remember to look up to see the flowers on the roofs when I am walking; to also remember to look down so as not to trip; to look at street signs in a new place to remember where I came from; to look for nature in the middle of the city and life in the middle of nowhere; to look at the playful dogs chasing each other; to look at the moon even if it's not full; to look at the sun, but not directly; to look to strangers for help; to look into the toothy smile of a child; and to avoid certain looks if necessary.

I have learned how to joke in Spanish, how to pray in Spanish, how to argue in Spanish, how to defend in Spanish, how to love in Spanish. I have learned Peruvian slang, bad words, and beautiful words that simply cannot be translated into English. I have learned to have a personality in Spanish, one of my goals prior to the semester.

I have learned patience. Lots of patience in both more and a wider variety of situations than I would have predicted.

I have learned love. Given to and received from both more and a wider variety of people than I would have predicted.

I have learned grace. Given to me when I least deserved it and proven a blessing to have up my own sleeve to show to others.

I have learned heartbreak. Either triggered or caused by situations both far and near.

I have learned generosity. The taking in of, acceptance of, and hospitality shown toward a stranger. Whether it is into a house, a home, a family, or a heart. For an hour, a weekend, four months, or a lifetime.

I have learned hellos.

I have learned goodbyes.

The most beautiful and tragic part of all of this is that I didn't finish learning. Any of it. I feel like just when I hit my niche in Arequipa, I was plucked right out of it. God put me there for a reason. He brought me back for a reason. I am still figuring out what that reason is. I might be figuring that out for weeks, months, or years down the road yet.

In the meantime, I don't want to forget anything from my life there, though I know it is inevitable to an extent. I think about Peru all the time. A majority of my thoughts are spent walking la calle Jerusalén on my way downtown, or la avenida Ejército on my way to visit friends in Cayma; painting nails and chatting
with Gabi; sitting in the first grade class in Unámanos, the school for kids with Down's Syndrome where I volunteered; eating lunch with Jota and Alfo and doing the dishes after, where it almost became routine that I break a glass; being amazed by the places we visited on excursions with Profe Bierling and the Calvin group; going out to dance with the usuals who frequented discotecas together; climbing the stairs at la San Pablo to history class; studying Exodus, drinking tea, and becoming sidetracked with my Bible study; kneeling in the pews at mass; and opening my room's light-blocking curtains in the morning to let the sun and the heat of the day crash through and see Misti looming in the background. Please don't get me wrong, there is a part of me that is overjoyed to be back with the people that I love, in the place that I love, at the time of year that I love.

This is the blessing and curse of the gift that God has given me through the experience of my past semester. I have two homes. Two places which hold my heart. It seems as though I will always have a hole to be filled. But in a way, I never want that hole to go away completely, meaning that I have forgotten. So challenge me. Ask me questions. Cause me to remember, to write down, to tell. Please bear with me as I bring memories of my time in Peru into casual, every day conversation. And if I apologize for bringing it up too often, assure me that it's okay and that you enjoy hearing about it, even if it drives you crazy.