AAALAC Fellowship Report October 2010

After encouragement from an esteemed work colleague, I submitted a nomination package for the AAALAC International Fellowship Award. The application that I submitted highlighted my previous achievements, expressed my passion for good animal science and how I hoped that being awarded the Fellowship would enable me to learn new approaches and solutions to familiar problems and would allow an exchange of knowledge and best practices with my peers on both sides of the Atlantic.

When, to my surprise, I got the call informing me that my application had been successful, I was over the moon and really excited at the prospect of the adventure on which I would be embarking. Three months later I was on my way to Washington, D.C., to start my visit to the U.S.A.

The trip began at Manchester Airport. As it was my first time travelling alone, I sat watching the screens with nervous anticipation, worried that I might miss my plane to New York. It would have been a pleasant flight if not for an inebriated fellow passenger, whose drunken antics led to us being delayed on the runway while she was subsequently arrested for air rage (the U.S. police received an ovation as she was escorted from the plane at JFK airport). This resulted in my having to run through the airport, only narrowly making my transfer flight to Washington Reagan Airport.

I arrived safely in Washington but unfortunately my baggage had not made it onto the connecting flight from New York. This meant that, after I was chauffeured to my hotel, I had to go straight out shopping. What a perfect excuse for some retail therapy! After such an eventful day it was a pleasure to relax in the friendly atmosphere of the Hyatt Regency Bethesda hotel.

My first full day in Washington was spent exploring and visiting many of the famous landmarks. I saw the White House, the Washington Monument, the Reflecting Pool, the U.S Capitol buildings, the Thomas Jefferson and the Lincoln Memorials, and all of the other Memorials that were present in Memorial Park. I found the Vietnam Memorial particularly moving. Throughout the day I rode the Metrorail, walked a lot, and after my feet could take no more, I took a

bus tour around the city. I saw so much but still had much to see, so I would highly recommend adding days to your trip to explore the city.

My first week was spent at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. My morning started with a 7:30am pickup from my hotel by the Chief of Animal Program Administrator for the National Eye Institute and another member of the NIH staff.

After passing the strict security checks to gain entry to the campus, I was introduced to the Priority One Services and various NIH teams. We discussed our various backgrounds and what I was hoping to gain from the experience. During my introductions I was also briefed on the health and safety procedures required for the areas I was going to visit and was given bite, scratch and splash training for working with large animal species.

During my week at NIH I toured a number of animal areas where I saw work with various species and got to talk to a number of scientific investigators and animal technicians. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to see the facilities at NIH, and to compare and contrast the approaches to animal technology in the U.S. with those that I am familiar with in the U.K. During this time I also got the chance to go to the AAALAC Executive Office, where I was informed on how their accreditation system ensures high standards for animal care and experimentation across the world.

While in Washington I was also lucky enough to be taken for a "behind the scenes" tour of the National Aquarium, an event organized by Priority One.

During my second week in the U.S.A., I traveled to AALAS 2010 which was being held in Atlanta, Georgia. While there I was impressed and pleasantly surprised at the size of the conference and the attendance. I have been to the U.K.'s equivalent, the IAT Congress, a number of times in the past and had naively expected something similar. The trade hall was vast with many hundreds of exhibitors, and I could have spent days looking around it. The posters and presentations were also very interesting, but to read and see them all would have been impossible necessitating a focused visit to those key to my personal interests.

In addition to the conference there was adequate time to socialize with the other attendees. Together we went to the Georgia Aquarium, the Atlanta Zoo, the World of Coca-Cola and the Inside CNN tour, all of which were organized as part of the social program of the conference.

I cannot give enough praise for the organization of my visit, which was exceptional, and I would like to thank everyone at NIH, AAALAC and Priority One Services for making me feel so welcome. I also want to especially thank Priority One Services for funding this fantastic Fellowship and for giving people like myself the opportunity to get a broader view of how good animal welfare is practiced in the U.S.A.

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