Growing up, Rebekah Lee and her parents spent their summers in Peru working with children. From these summer trips, her love of the Spanish language and the people of South America grew, as did her frustration with not being able to fully communicate with the people and the children she met. Lee decided that she wanted to dedicate her life to helping children in South America, and realized in order to do that she needed to become fluent in Spanish and learn about how countries develop.

Lee, a junior majoring in Spanish and International Studies, has known that she wants to be a teacher since she was in second grade. As a child she felt anxiety about being separated from her parents while at school, but a teacher helped her through it and inspired her to become a teacher herself.

“Every day when I would walk into school, she would give me a hug and a huge smile and make me feel really welcomed and loved,” said Lee, a Denver native. “She not only told me that I would be safe at school, but showed me through her actions and allowed me to dream big. I knew when I met her that I wanted to become like her when I grew up.”

“Being a teacher isn’t all about getting kids to learn textbooks and memorizing and studying for exams. It’s about being a mentor and a friend and allowing children to dream dreams and accomplish goals.”

Lee said that her high school Spanish teachers also influenced her decision to follow this path because she admired and looked up to them. Last year, she worked as an intern at Munroe Elementary, an experience that enriched her academic career and confirmed her career plans. The experience was different than any other she has had. The students were predominately Latino and did not speak English. Several also came from impoverished conditions, but being able to teach them was a joy to Lee and helped reaffirm her career goals.

To expand on her studies, Lee will be studying abroad in 2017. In February she leaves for Mendoza, Argentina. She hopes to compare orphanages that were established during Argentina’s Dirty War, from roughly 1974-1983, to the ones she has volunteered at in Peru.

“I knew I wanted something different from what I was used to and get ‘out of my comfort zone’. I had taken a film class on Latin America and learned about the history of Argentina and was intrigued to learn so much that is not usually taught to us from an American point-of-view,” she said.

Lee looks forward to being immersed in the culture and being able to show love and kindness to the orphaned children. Moreover, she looks forward to the opportunity to learn and grow in her own education.

“I definitely am excited to be able to continually speak Spanish and improve my linguistic skills but also hope to gain insight and knowledge!” she said of her upcoming trip.