

Clara Romani
Stanford University
Florence Winter 2019
Scholarship Recipient 2018

Dear County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission:

Having recently returned from three months of study in Florence, I can with all honesty say that my time abroad has been one of the most beautiful and formative experiences of my life. While in that city, I deepened my love of Italy and Italian culture, all while growing as a person and forming connections that will last a lifetime. But before I tell you about my time there, I must first thank the Commission, deeply and sincerely, for having made this experience possible. Because of your generosity, I was able to fully immerse myself in my Florentine experience, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Studying in Florence has been a dream of mine for so long that in many ways, being there felt almost unreal. When I was ten years old, I spent three months there with my family, and I've wanted to go back ever since. Thanks to that time spent in Florence in my formative years, I developed an incurable wanderlust, a passion for history, and a love of languages. Now at Stanford, as I work my way toward a degree in History (focusing on medieval Western Europe) with a minor in Italian, I have been able to fully lean into those interests, and studying in Florence has brought me full circle. On the academic side, nothing can quite compare to analyzing the frescoes of Fra Angelico in person as you stand before them in San Marco or studying da Vinci with the director of the Galileo Museum. The entire city is like an open-air museum, with history bleeding through its streets and masterpieces of architectural and sculptural genius in every alley and piazza. And for language study of course, the opportunity to be in a country where your target language is spoken, immersed in its cadences from morning to night, is unparalleled. (Being in the birthplace of the modern Italian language and learning unadulterated Fiorentino-style Italian doesn't hurt either).

What was even more meaningful to me, though, were those experiences that are harder to capture on paper or in a resume. Throughout my time in Florence, my hosts in Florence were a font of knowledge, a source of lively conversation, and, at the end of the day, a family to come

home to. I treasure my memories with them close to my heart, from learning to cook gnocchi from scratch with my host mother Grazia to comparing the way literature is taught in Italian and American schools with my host father Gigi to wheedling favorite café recommendations out of my sister Claudia. Though they spoke little English and my roommate spoke no Italian (at the beginning of our trip, at least), I was able to translate for them and bridge that gap, making our family dinners unforgettable for not only the food but also the laughter and conversation. Even beyond my host family, the day to day interactions I had with other Italians were part of what made my stay so meaningful. Whether it was the baristas at my favorite coffee shop on Via Vincenzo Gioberti who greeted me by name or the Ligurian girls who adopted me on the train home after track flooding and a missed connection, the understanding of Italian culture I gained from these little interactions would have been utterly impossible without the study abroad experience.

In the end, when I look back on my time in Florence, I want to thank the Commission again for the innumerable things that would have been impossible without your support. The countless gelati, the museum entrance fees, the train tickets to visit my family in Pisa and explore the rest of Tuscany from Arezzo to Siena, all this was made possible by the Commission's generosity. When I look back at the time I spent in college and the experiences that made me the person I am today, I am sure that my time in Florence will always be the first thing on my mind.

Cari saluti e grazie mille,

Clara Romani