

David Wintermeyer

Stanford University '17

Florence: September – December 2015

2015 Scholarship Recipient

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

I want to deeply thank you for selecting me as a recipient of the County of Santa Clara/ Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission scholarship. I recently returned from my journey to Florence and am only beginning to appreciate how truly transformative my time abroad was. I began studying Italian the week I arrived in Santa Clara county, my first week of classes at Stanford, and from that first week of classes I looked forward to when I would have the chance to study abroad in Florence. I knew even then that my study abroad experience would be special, but I could not have envisioned how special it would be, in part because of the opportunities afforded me by the County of Santa Clara scholarship.

The scholarship allowed me to engage in opportunities, to visit places, to talk to people, and to expose myself to so many aspects of Italy, both in the city of Firenze and beyond its medieval walls. The scholarship permitted me to pay for museum fees and bus tickets, for hostel rooms and *panini*, even for train tickets and a soccer match, without worrying about if the costs of one experience would prohibit me from taking advantage of another. Having the support from this grant gave me the financial flexibility to immerse myself beyond the prearranged programs offered by my school. I had the full freedom to pursue my specific interests, from following Dante around Florence to visiting the baptistery numerous times to gaze again and again at the marvelous mosaics. I had the chance to visit the town of

Ravenna, considered to have the most beautiful mosaics in the country, but personally feel nothing compared to those in the *Battistero di San Giovanni*. I was once nervous when attempting to discuss art history and the Renaissance. I now leap into discussions about Florentine masters. After two years of frustrating study in the classroom, I now have full confidence in my ability to speak Italian. The funds from my scholarship also gave me freedom to explore the city in a different way. I purchased and read many books about the city, allowing me to compare my experiences and interpretations with scholars like John Najemy and authors like Mark Twain and E. M. Forster. I am convinced my experience was made richer by learning about the city and the many scholars who came before me.

I am back now in California, but my experiences are still fresh and vibrant in my memory. Their brightness helps me get through long days of classes. I think fondly about my host mom Guiliana, the liveliest septuagenarian I have ever met. I think about the two University of Florence students we met and would meet up with both at the library and during a night out. I miss buying fresh *burrata* for lunch and walking past *il Duomo* every day on my way to class. I miss seeing the Tuscan hills rise beyond the red terracotta roofs and watching the Arno rise and lower with the rains. I cannot wait for when I can return to Florence.

Lastly, for all the positives of my experience abroad, it was not always easy. Often I found Italy alien and felt out of place. From narrow streets and loud traffic, to the fundamental impossibility of finding a sufficient breakfast, and for many reasons in between, I sometimes wished for a reminder of home, a way to stay grounded. Thankfully, not only did the scholarship support my efforts to immerse myself in Italian life, it helped me stay connected to home and keep my mind in a positive place. Having the scholarship

allowed me to purchase an Italian phone to stay in touch with my family and to write postcards back to my family, friends, and professors. Doing so not only helped me get the most out of my experiences abroad but also meant I already started my task of sharing the cultural exposure I received in Italy to my friends and my communities at home.

This notion of cultural education and exchange is what speaks most to me about the County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission scholarship.

Cultural exchange is ever changing and everlasting. After spending three months in Florence, I feel that I have even more to learn about Italy, not less. I know now that my cultural education and my fascination with Italy will never be completely fulfilled. I can only hope to find a life path that will allow me to continue on the journey I began with the help of the Italy Sister County Commission scholarship. To the members of the commission and the administrative staff, and the people of Santa Clara County who support the commission and its efforts, I extend my heartfelt thanks. Grazie Mille!

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