

Mary Sarbaugh

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

Thank you for assisting me in my goal to attend Gonzaga in Florence, and consequently have what I am sure will be one of the best years of my life. Growing up with both an uncle and aunt that attended Gonzaga in Florence, with the same uncle having also attended Santa Clara, I was continuously regaled by my family's descriptions and stories of Florence, Italy. My uncle's recollections of the food made my mouth water, my grandma admired the art and architecture, my grandpa loved the people he met during his travels there, and my Aunt Karen studied hard to learn the language. It seemed that all of the people I admired had a special place in their hearts for Italy and more particularly, Florence. Now, with the support of my family and your group, I was able to live in Florence and Florence will always have a piece of my heart.

The small, intertwined streets of Florence hold many stories. The city has such irreplaceable history, art, and architecture. I not only visited the major monuments, such as the Duomo and Uffizi, they became my home. Through people I met, I was also able to see less well-known pieces of art, such as private art collections in homes, and I gained an appreciation for this art. The energy on the streets is incredible. The people taking leisurely strolls, the musicians, and the excitement about the many, many famous monuments resulted in most of my free time being spent walking. On my walks, I slowly discovered new shops, my favorite

bridge to read on, and of course my favorite gelato shop. This year I learned it was not unusual to walk over 7 miles everyday, which before would have seemed ridiculous as I, like many people in the United States, drive most places. I learned that in a car you just pass by, but when walking, you can easily stop and readily join events in the city. I hope I never forget this.

Most of all I love Florence for the relationships I built there. Professors, the owner of my favorite restaurant, and the families I had the privilege of meeting had a huge impact on my experience and my life. After traveling through Europe this year, I have discovered it is not always where you go, but whom you are with. Not only is Florence a small, gem of a city, but the people I met changed my life. I volunteered through my school with a program called "English for Pasta". Weekly, a friend and I would go to an Italian family's home and teach their kids English for an hour, and then have dinner with the family and practice our Italian. The family welcomed us into their home and became part of my extended family. On top of the weekly visits, they invited us over on the weekends to learn to make different types of pizza and we taught them how to make American food, such as chocolate chip cookies. They even invited us to a family lunch during the Easter holiday. I can only hope to experience these types of things again in my lifetime.

Learning and experiencing art, forming relationships within the Florence community, and ultimately falling in love with Florence would not have been possible without the help of the County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister County Commission.

There is no way to express my gratitude in this letter, but you have helped to change my life and allowed me to have a second home in another country. Until I find a way back to Florence, the lovely city with character that will mesmerize anyone, I will cherish my memories from the year you made possible. GRAZIE MILLE.

*-Mary Sarbaugh*