

Lynsey Cumberland-Palmer
Santa Clara University
Florence: September 3rd to December 18
2012 Scholarship Recipient

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

I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the opportunity to study abroad in one of the most culturally, historically, and culinary rich cities in the world. Florence was quite truly an “experience of a lifetime”. The memories, friends, and family I made in Florence will last me a lifetime. Although I cannot recount all the amazing days and travels I had throughout Florence, Italy and beyond, there are a few highlights that I can touch upon.

Choosing to study with the Syracuse University - Florence Program was a fantastic decision. Rigorous academics, clubs and activities were a great addition to my study abroad experience. However, the true gems of Syracuse’s program are the host families. On the day we met our host families I was incredibly nervous. I didn’t speak any Italian and I had found out that my “Survival Italian 101” podcast over the summer was not going to take me very far. I met my roommate, Claire, about 20 minutes before meeting my Italian family. Little did I know that Claire would become one of the best friends I have ever had. Claire and I were one of the last roommate pairs to be called up. Both Mama and Papa Leocata came to pick us up. Unfortunately, I totally forgot that the Italians go to the right side first in their “air kiss” greeting and ended up almost kissing my host mother full on the lips. While Papa Leocata drove Claire home, Mama Leocata walked with me. She spoke in rapid Italian and I pretended that I understood much more than I really did. Luckily, my years of French throughout college saved me. I could interpret

many of the words and understood all of the grammar structure. My homestay was less than a ten-minute walk from the Syracuse Campus: 18th century villas just fifteen minutes walk northeast of the Duomo. The Leocata's, my homestay family, would soon become my real family. I loved my host parents and my host brothers. They were phenomenal cooks, each with a different specialty. Mama Leocata made exquisite food every single evening and I learned a totally different approach to food. The culture in Italy approaches food as an act of pleasure, a slow and social experience. I am still in Italian food with drawl here in the United States. Florence truly offered a wide variety of cultural experiences from the food to the language to the people.

Walking around the streets of Florence was my favorite hobby while I was in Florence. I had an internship at the UNESCO Center in Florence and it was a 45-minute walk. I loved walking down the Arno and through the streets of altrarno I refused to ride the bus there unless it was pouring with rain (which was quite frequent). My roommate and I would spend hours getting lost and trying to find our way home again, asking five or more Italians in our slow Italian about where to go. Every day was an adventure in Florence and I loved every minute of it. We would set out with the intention of exploring a different museum everyday. The Syracuse program gave us 'Museum Cards' that allowed us free entry into the vast majority of museums in Florence. My friends and I explored every inch of the Uffizi and the Accademia and we tried to see all of the other museums. However, there is such an incredible multitude of museums that I left Florence in December with a list of things that I had not accomplished.

When I left Florence I was devastated. Florence had become my home, my roommate and host family had become my own family, and the neighborhoods had become my own. There were times that I craved

American customs and food and I was surprised and the immense emotional turmoil upon returning to California. Although it is hard to adjust I know that it is only temporary and I will return to Florence soon.

I would like to thank the County of Santa Clara/Province of Florence, Italy Sister Commission for the scholarship and for the incredible opportunities that I gained from it. This program is a great cultural exchange and I wish I could have brought much more than pictures back from Florence.