

**The important things don't need translation.**

I always choose the window seat. I am an observer. I like writing outlines, inspecting blueprints, and reading maps. I just want perspective. From Seat 12F I traced the outline of the Italian border along the Swiss Alps; I watched dollhouse villas tucked into rolling hills come into view; Tuscany in autumn is beautiful from one mile above ground.

On the third of September, my plane landed safely in Florence, but I crashed into Italia. It has been two months and sixteen days, and I am still trying to pick up the pieces. I cannot write a cohesive synthesis of my experience. These words are not ready for gift-wrapping. I am still here. Clips from my journal and letters make more sense than the ideas swirling around in my head. So here is what I have found. This is what I do know:

Pasta is a culinary necessity.

Thinking about the future creates a barrier to enjoying and accepting the present.

Always respect the three C's of coffee: Caldo, Comodo, e Corretto.

Home is a feeling.

Carla Fabbriotti makes the best lasagna in the world.

Expectations always exist, but are usually suppressed until they are not met.

Una risata è bella.

A culture is more than language, food, and art. It is defined by the ways people rush and slow down; by the things they hide and show off; by the reasons they smile.

Refrigeration is overrated.

Language is important, but the most important things don't need translation.

These are the things I know, but my mind still whirs with questions: What makes a good traveler? Can I ever be at home in a country that I spent twenty years not knowing? Is it even possible to be at home while traveling?

I cannot answer these questions. I cannot tell you what this experience has meant to me. In one month I am flying home, but I cannot rationalize my life in America either; I don't even like American coffee anymore. I do not know exactly where I am. I have lost all perspective since that first plane ride.

I always choose the window seat. Up in the air, above the clouds, in the blue sky, everything is clear. So maybe when Flight 5039 takes off, when I look down on Firenze through the smog, when the tiled roofs shrink together, when the hills of Tuscany come back into view—maybe then, when I am suspended between two cultures and two homes, I will have some more answers... and I will be sure to let you know.