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Ho...Diciotto Anni

“Are you an accomplished student interested in starting your college career in the culturally and historically rich city of Florence? Is your desire to study abroad so strong that you would like to have the opportunity to acquire a global experience now that you can later apply to your academic years ahead?”

- *SUF website, Discovery Florence*

Stumbling across this email nearly a year ago, I really had no idea what I was agreeing to. In theory, it sounded great. Spend my first semester, of my first year in college, in Italy. A unique chance to mature and see the world. All-expenses paid. Well...why not?

After clicking “Yes” I didn’t think about the decision too much during the next few months. My friends thought it was a bad idea, that I would not connect with the home campus and miss out on essential freshman experiences. My teachers were skeptical, but tried to keep an optimistic look on their faces for my sake. My mother talked about it much more than I did; she was always worried about something, but for me the end of summer seemed so unrealistic I still could not fully grasp what I had signed up for.

I picture September 2nd at the orientation hotel and I astonish myself with just how clueless I truly was. I was in Florence, but how I got there was uncertain. I had never had a driving desire to go to Italy. I never really thought about the country at all in terms of future vacations, save for Rome. I had never studied Italian and I certainly couldn’t name who the head of state was or pinpoint the exact form of government that existed. Suddenly I was in an unfamiliar country, wielding no background knowledge, no college connections, and no communication skills. Oh, and I was an oddity; a freshman.

I wasn’t too concerned with that status though, until the conversations began. What school are you from, what is your major, oh and, what year are you? Upperclassmen and professors began prodding me and telling me how brave it was to do such a thing, how they could not have ever done that, and what made you chose to do it? I could never give them a straight answer because I honestly didn’t know. I never thought it was particularly courageous. Sure, I was afraid of not getting along with the other first-

years, and I had no idea what to expect of my classes, but surely other students were going through the same things.

By the end of the first week, all of my friends' objections were moot. If I had to sacrifice a few frat parties for the Duomo, The Arno, and the David, so be it. There was too much excitement for me to devote energy to caring that I was eighteen years old, or missing out on a few months of dorm life. I ask you to picture my town in Upstate New York. It is so small that it is represented as a greenish blur on Google Earth. I have spent little time outside the tri-county area, no time away from my family longer than ten days, and no more than four hours on a college campus. Coming to Florence to study at one of the most prestigious institutions in the city with the opportunity to hop around Italy and Europe every weekend was the most exciting thing to ever happen in my life.

One the other hand, living in Italy has had more of an impact on me than simply giving me a constant high. I have been learning and consciously maturing constantly, sleep being my only reprieve. My Italian hosts have taught me what it means to exist within a functional family, and how to reach out to other cultures. The Salimbeni's have been the main conduit through which I've begun to understand European culture. They have been incredibly patient with the evolution of my language and international identity, for which I will be forever grateful. More than this, being away from home, I have truly learned how to fend for myself. Being away from life-long friends, I have learned how to make and keep new ones. What I am most grateful for though, is having had the opportunity to define my opinions, to discover what my true passions are in life. I believe I would have been too distracted at home campus to have made so much personal progress as I have here. For the first time I am sure of who I am and what I believe in, and I am determined to stay focused on my studies throughout all the good times to come at Syracuse University.

Being a freshman in Europe has been nothing less than an epically transforming episode. This semester will surely be notable for my age, but my time in Florence will not be completely defined by my collegiate year. When I reminisce about SUF I will remember late-night McDonalds-runs, site visits with the art class, meals with the Italian host family, incredible field studies, terrible yet hilarious discothèques

and so much more. I have come in contact with both Italias: the ancient and the modern, and I have come to love both. For they both contribute to what I can honestly describe as the best months of my life.