

**Gabriela Hamm, Santa Clara University**  
**Florence: August-December 2019**

To the Florence Sister County Commission:

It is hard to express how special this experience in Florence has been for me. Looking back on it I am grateful beyond words for the opportunity to have spent a semester in such a breathtaking, culturally rich city. I went to Florence to learn about Italian culture and the arts, and left with a lifetime supply of warm memories and a hunger to return. I have fallen absolutely in love with Italy and Italian culture, and this scholarship allowed me the freedom to explore the smaller towns that harboured this love. One place in particular that sparked my love was a small town called Perugia, which I visited for a chocolate festival! The kind Italians and delicious assortment of chocolate are some of the reasons my love for Italy grew so much.

The money from the scholarship also allowed me to get a pass for gli Uffizi, where some spectacular art is kept. My favorite thing to do on my afternoons off was to go look at *Primavera* and *Nascita di Venere* by Sandro Botticelli. With the scholarship money from the County of Santa Clara Florence Sister County Commission, I was allowed the freedom to eat gluten free pizzas and pastas that cost more than their regular counterparts, which I feel was a very important part of making my experience so fulfilling! Not having to worry about budget on top of just worrying about finding a restaurant that serves gluten free was so helpful and allowed me to worry less and live more.

Studying abroad changed me for the better. It was often emotionally challenging, and made me feel very lost and alone at times. Other times, being in a foreign city made me feel as curious and excited about all the unexplored unknowns that exist for me. My host parents were two very kind Italians. Bonizella and Massimo are their names. Bonizella grew up and has lived in Florence her whole life, and Massimo grew up in the nearby Arezzo. I always looked forward to our dinner conversations over Boni's delicious homemade gluten-free pasta (my roommate, Bonizella, and I are all gluten intolerant), and to our dinnertime conversations. We would talk about classes we were taking and about Florence and its history, and I always learned something new and exciting about Italy. We would talk about our days in Italian, and I would ask them for language help when I needed it. They enabled my language skills to grow and allowed me to experience so many good foods I otherwise would not have been able to eat due to my gluten intolerance. They really allowed me to have a safe space to find comfort in during a time where everything was changing for me.

Being in a city with so much history was really humbling for me, and changed my point of view, as a person as well as an artist. It almost didn't feel real. I would be in class discussing how important Michelangelo and Botticelli were as artists and their techniques, and we would get to go see their artwork that same afternoon! While learning about the importance of a clean and controlled brushstroke in painting, I got to go see the paintings done by some of the best painters in history, and walk the same streets they had walked, and look at the same building they had looked at. I was constantly in awe of my surroundings and wondering if the artists I adore so much had felt the same.

I am beyond grateful to the Commission for not only offering this scholarship opportunity but for choosing me to receive it and believing in the power and importance of learning abroad. Florence holds my heart, and it was such a good place to go and deepen my learning, and it would not have been as wonderful and fulfilling without the financial support of the Florence Sister County Commission.

Grazie Mille,

Gabriela Hamm



My roommate and I were both in the art program, and this is us and our host parents at our end of semester art show!



My favorite view, l'Arno



My friends in I at my home, where our host parents made us American students a homemade thanksgiving meal :)