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CWIL Grant Final Paper
Women in Italy

As I mentioned in my initial proposal, Diane Ackerman describes my aspiration for my life quite well, “I don’t want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width as well.” I had great hopes that Italy would allow me to do this, to live my life more fully. It was a wonderful growing experience, but certainly not what I had anticipated. I had more difficulties adjusting to the language and culture than I had expected. Because there were many times, especially at the beginning of the semester, when I did not enjoy the Italian lifestyle, it was difficult for me to focus on it for journal entries. Part of me wanted to separate myself from my surroundings and I knew that journaling would not encourage me to do this.

Due to this fact, I do not feel that my journal entries are as in depth as they could have been and I purposely did not journal as often as I had originally intended. When I did journal, it was difficult, but it also enabled me to see the beauty in the country. There are so many wonderful things about Italy that I would love to incorporate into American culture. I mentioned throughout the journals that the Italian people are so friendly and welcoming. I am curious as to what America would be like if half of our population modeled that behavior. It would most likely create a new attitude towards life.

My intention upon beginning this project was to investigate women’s issues in Italian culture. While I was able to see some differences in comparison, many of them appear to be rooted in the Italian culture. I found it difficult to separate the difference between roles of women in both America and Italy without considering the cultural context of those roles. Yet, it seems

impossible to compare them in this light because both cultures are drastically different. It is like comparing night and day.

I mentioned abortion once in my journal (November 16, 2005). It is a rising issue in the political arena, but it not one that seems to be getting much attention. In comparison, here in America it is one of the hottest debated women's issues. I found this surprising. I had always thought of Europe, including Italy, as being very liberal. In some aspects, they are, but not in all. Abortion is legalized, but the amount of women utilizing the option is decreasing. I do not know the reasoning for this. Perhaps the number of pregnancies has also been reduced. I know that the birthrate is fairly low. Of course, I am supportive of what is going on in the political spectrum to make abortion illegal in Italy. I simply found the information surprising.

I also mentioned homelessness in my proposal. I certainly expected to find more individuals on the streets than I did see. I also expected to come across a homeless shelter at some point, but I did not. I never saw one in three months. I asked a few people about where the homeless shelters are located. I learned that they are primarily run by religious organizations. They must be out of the way, maybe on the outskirts of town. I do not think there is as much of a demand here in Italy as there is in the United States. Part of this may be related to the fact that Italians are focused on relationships and the family. They help each other out whenever they can. American society focuses more on the individual. You move out of your parents' home, get your own job, and support yourself. Generations do not live together. Sometimes, people are kicked out and left to be homeless. Family support is not a focal point in our culture.

Overall, this project forced me to think about Italian society in a different light and to attempt to investigate certain aspects of it. However, I do not feel as if I made much progress over the time that I spent in Rome. I do not know if the issues that I discussed in my proposal

(i.e., abortion, homelessness, abuse, pregnancy, divorce, etc.) are simply not as prevalent in Italian society as they are in American society or if they are just kept well-hidden secrets. Do they exist, but Italian culture sees them as unacceptable so they are ignored? If this is the case, it is unfortunate that these issues are extremely prevalent in America, but at least they are not being ignored. There are individuals who are spending their lives working to change the trends. If they simply do not exist, then we need to begin to model some of the Italian culture in an attempt to address our own issues.

I had planned on being further along in my development of these ideas at the end of my semester, but finding information was simply not as easy as I had anticipated. Regardless, I have gained information for thought. I suppose that is the beginning of an understanding. Overall, my experience was one of great growth that provided me with a new perspective on myself and America. I would not say that I am drastically different, but I think I now have a little Italian in my blood and a little Italian can go a long way.