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Reflection

I pushed open the gold handled *Hotel Tiziano* doors and took a sharp right. Suddenly, I was surrounded by busy Italians and confused tourists on one of Rome's busiest streets. I placed my newest Sunday market purchase, a fake pink *Gucci* purse, snugly under my arm and walked through the pedestrian crossing. I was on my way to a strange Italian home to tutor for the first time.

I remember leaving especially early that day because I was nervous about finding my way across town, so I held on tight to my directions and walked confidently up the street. Although as the year went on this walk became more and more rushed due to my busy schedule, it remained special. Once a week I walked by myself across Rome to and from the Riccardo's home. Up Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, past the "wedding cake building", around the corner past the Roman Forum, and finally past the lighted coliseum where the scene abruptly turned residential and no tourists were in sight.

Finally, I would reach the correct building and ride the ancient elevator up to the top floor where I was warmly greeted by an only Italian speaking wife with a large smile and a great sense of humor. Although I had taken a year of Italian prior to going to Rome, my Italian was nothing to brag about and when put into situations like this one, I often froze and only said a few confusing words. Mostly we communicated in warm smiles and hand gestures. I was there to tutor two of her children in English. The beauty of this was that I was not allowed to speak Italian to them at all, since their father thought that this was a better way to learn a foreign language.

Lorenzo was the oldest, a tall seventeen year old athlete with good English. My only assignment was to talk to each of the two kids for an hour each. We talked about everything from how our weeks went to his favorite American music artists. His favorite topic of conversation seemed to be how he hated his father. The funniest part about this was not that I knew his father and that he was a good man, but that his accent did not allow him to pronounce the 'H', so I often explained to him that he did not "ate" his father.

Maria was the next oldest, a bubbling teenage girl with decent English. Our favorite thing to do together was to sing the latest Hilary Duff songs and understand the English lyrics. She taught me her dance routines and I taught her the secret to doing Michael Jackson's moon walk. When the year went on, the older kids got busier and I ended up working with the two younger kids. It was a challenge to talk only English to them and create understanding through only repetition and body language. The youngest girl at the age of six loved our meetings and watching me make a fool out of myself as I ran around her bedroom and finding tools for the next activity.

After every meeting I would take a brisk walk back in the dark past all of the same monuments that would be lit up in the dark. Although I was walking across town in the dark, it was much safer than doing so in the United States. I would make it back to the Hotel Tiziano in time to eat a hearty Italian dinner with my friends.

My Tuesday evenings were only a small part of my experience abroad. The many trips that I made outside of Rome also contributed to my experience. As part of the Rome program, there is no place provided for you to stay if you decide not to go home during the Christmas and Spring breaks. This forced me to leave the comforts of the hotel and

try to survive on my own. With little knowledge on how to travel in foreign country, I spent four months traveling at Christmas and two weeks at Easter. The time when I think I matured the most was when I traveled totally alone for two weeks. Growing up in a stable home, I had no idea what it felt like to travel and not have a guaranteed place to stay. Twice I was put in the situation that I didn't know if I would be able to find a place to stay the night. I had to use many of the skills such as critical thinking and analyzing of situations that I had learned all through my schooling, but I never realized their importance until I put myself into these situations. I became more independent and self confident through this experience.

The experience of spending a year in Rome is more than I could have imagined. It taught me so much about other cultures, customs and values that I would not have learned in the classroom setting. The experiences of tutoring some Italians in English and traveling alone made a major impact on me and it has inspired me to continue my learning through other experience opportunities.