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The thought that strikes me first and most often each time I recall my semester abroad is how extremely grateful I feel to have been given that truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Unfortunately, these two short pages, or any number of pages for that matter, are not nearly sufficient to relate to you the many memories and experiences of my semester abroad and just how meaningful it was to me. I urge each of you to embrace the opportunity to endeavor on your own semester abroad, and begin to discover for yourself that great big world out there.

My time abroad helped me to grow tremendously by helping me become more self-reliable, street-smart, and aware of the world and all its diverse peoples. My eyes were opened to a whole new cultures and ways of life. It was such a change to go from the quiet, secluded campus life of St. Mary's to being thrust into the heart of the bustling life of Rome and its millions of inhabitants. Although overwhelming at first, I soon thrived on the freedom and adventure I found in exploring this fascinating city and the many wonders it held. We girls loved enjoying the city's lively night life, and the fact that we did not have classes on Fridays was quite the bonus.

In contrast to the excitement of Rome, I traveled by train with a friend to a very small town in the mountains, about an hour north from Rome, called Segni. It was here where a convent was located at which my friend knew some of the sisters, most of whom were originally from Argentina and the Ukraine. One young sister was actually from Baltimore. A few of us were even able to stay with the sisters overnight one night during our spring break. It was so neat to meet them and to learn that the common language between all of these sisters from such diverse backgrounds was Italian. Interacting with

them helped us practice our Italian. It was also a treat to meet a young priest from Ukraine and to attend a mass he celebrated in the Ukrainian language with the sisters.

During my semester abroad, I was given many opportunities to travel to various places outside of Rome. During our two and a half week spring break over Easter, two other girls and I traveled to Taormina, Sicily for a few days. We then spent Holy Week in Rome and took advantage of many unique opportunities in the city, including the ultimate experience of attending Easter Vigil Mass said by Pope Benedict in St. Peter's Basilica. We also spent several days in Paris. It is funny that I had never before ridden a train until my semester in Italy or taken the subway, which we mastered, until our stay in Paris.

I would have to say that the people who were a part of my abroad experience, whether they be old or new friends, the professors who taught me, local people I came to know, or the sisters and priests I met, have made the greatest impact on my memories. One of the reasons why I decided to study abroad was to meet new people and make new friends. It was so wonderful to go from never having met a few of the students to, in a matter of days, forming such close friendships with them that continue today and will persist for years to come. I am so thankful to have been blessed with these new friends and to have shared our experiences abroad together. I have enjoyed so much the many times since our return that we have reminisced about our beloved semester in Rome, and how we only wish we could relive those vivid memories. I cannot wait to go back someday and walk those same streets, retracing that all-too-familiar path I took from the hotel that I called home, to the café whose blood oranges, cornettos, and sandwiches I can still taste, to the classrooms where I learned from some of the most phenomenal professors. My semester abroad was truly the opportunity and experience of a lifetime.