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“Quando a Roma,” meaning “When in Rome” quickly became my favorite phrase while studying abroad in Rome because I experienced things that I never have before and may never again. When reflecting back on my experience, I can say that when in Rome, I had the best time of my life. I made life long friends, visited multiple countries, and lived like I was dying. Not only did I learn about my ancestry and the Italian culture, but I also learned life lessons and became an independent woman. I grew up so much while in Rome that I almost felt like a new person when I got back. I had always dreamed of living in Italy because that is where my family originated, but I don’t know if I ever truly believed that this dream would come true. Now that it has, I can say that my life has been changed and I had such a positive experience that it will continue to influence my life from here on.

I can’t say enough positive things about my experience in Rome, but reflecting back, I can think of some highlights of my trip. When I first arrived, I was so skeptical about living in Rome. Everyone said I was going to have the best time of my life, but I thought how is that possible because I had left behind my family and friends and it was Notre Dame football season. I remember crying for the first and last time the our second night in Assisi because I was homesick. However, from there on, everything changed. I knew that this opportunity was a once and a life time one and that I had to take advantage of it. By doing so, I met some great people and made many new friends, not only from our program, but from other colleges around the United States and I made friends with the Italian natives. While in Rome, I also took advantage of my opportunities to travel Europe as much as possible. I went to France, Ireland, Holland, and Spain besides traveling around Italy. It was so amazing to see the history of these countries and to call home and say, “Yeah, I was in France this weekend.” Traveling quickly became one of

my favorite things because it was so convenient and interesting to see so many new people, places, and cultures. When I wasn't traveling, I took advantage of Rome and all it had to offer. For example, on Saturdays, my friend and I would always try to go see something unique that we hadn't already seen. Some of my favorite, not so well known things that we visited was the "keyhole." This was a door with a keyhole that you could look through and you could see St. Peter's dome perfectly. It was one of the best views of the city. We also did interesting things like crawl the Holy Stairs from Jerusalem and put our hand in the mouth of truth. Just in three and a half short months, saw so many wonderful historical places that if not for this opportunity, I might not have ever seen. I now always feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to go abroad.

My reflection of my time would not be complete however if I did not say how much I grew as a person while I was there. I knew that I was going to have to become more independent, but everyone kept telling me I was going to die without my parents to support me. I thought this was true at first, but as time passed in Italy, I realized how much I had grown as a person. I wasn't calling my mom everyday to have her schedule my life. I was doing everything on my own because I was the only person I had to rely on. I came to the point where I was flying to other countries by myself, which was a huge step for me in becoming independent. Even though I missed my family and friends dearly, I liked being on my own and discovering things for myself. I became more outgoing by meeting so many new people and learning new cultures. I felt like a new person when I got back, like I had learned so much and appreciated life so much more. This trip has impacted me so much that I am considering living abroad when I graduate college. It also made me very interested in opportunities, such as the Peace Corps. Being abroad gave me a new enlightenment on living life to its fullest.

In the end, studying abroad in Rome has forever changed me. I could not have asked for a better experience than what I had. The Saint Mary's program seemed flawless. We learned so much in our classes and through tours. If I could recommend to anyone who was interested in going abroad, I would tell them that it is an opportunity of a lifetime that I would have regretted if I wouldn't have taken it. I know that when I reminisce about my college life, this experience will always stick out in my mind as the best semester of college and a highlight of my life that will always hold a special place in my heart.