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Our World Revolves Around the Goodness of People

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ROME - As I stare out the opened *persianas* (shutters) in my room at the Hotel Gioberti in Rome, Italy, I am fascinated by the sure hustle yet simplistic way of European life.

At the late hour of 1:20 A.M., I hear the sounds of motor scooters racing down Via Gioberti towards the city's major train station. The trash and debris are no match for the street sweeper weaving in and out of garbage dumpsters while its flashing yellow lights warn pedestrians of each move. Tour buses one by one arrive at their final destination for the evening and small cars sounding their horns jet through the traffic lights that now blink continuous red.

A way of life that seems so hectic, yet simple. Especially if you are like me and are experiencing Europe for the very first time.

I have been one of the fortunate individuals who have traveled the United States extensively at a fairly young age. From Los Angeles to New York, I have seen spectacular sights and experienced extraordinary landscapes. The tides crashing against the rocky shoreline of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are powerful. The snowcapped mountains in Colorado and Nevada are breathtaking. The festive atmosphere and history of New Orleans's French Quarter appeal to a cheerful mood.

However, as extraordinary as the landscapes are and how powerful the tides thrust is, this world revolves around people. That is, "the goodness of people."

Throughout all of my travels, a common theme exists in my mind. No matter where you travel or where you live, this world revolves around those who occupy space and those who bring it to life.

My two cousins from Pennsylvania and I came up with the idea to travel to Italy last summer. My grandparents, who set sail for America in the late 20's, originated from Calabria, Italy. When they left their southern village, for the promise of a better life in America, the remainder of the family stayed behind. As a generation passed, our family in America lost touch with our Italian relatives. That was, until the summer of 2000 when a new connection was made thanks to an internet search engine and the

Yellow Pages. Rome is where our newfound relatives make their home today.

It did not take me long to realize the beauty of the country where I landed while peering out the window of our *tassi* (taxi) in transit from Rome International Airport to our hotel. Fields of red poppy, graceful trees and flowers, rolling hills of green and grape vines galore. I had never seen anything quite like this. A landscape where not only plants and trees dwelled, but where history was built one stone at a time. Rome, which was founded in 753 BC, originated when groups of shepherds and farmers settled on the hill known as the *Palatine*. With this, the history book of Western civilization was opened and many life times lived out.

The emotions that occur when you begin to discover the art, history and archaeology found in *Roma* are beyond words. The closest description – It's a holy experience. The city's religious and civil architecture, the churches, the palaces, the monuments, the squares, villas and parks all make up incredible sites to see. *Piazza San Pietro* (Saint Peter's Square) in the Vatican City, the Spanish Steps or *Scalinata di Trinita dei Monti*, the ancient Roman Coliseum, the Forum and Palatine and the *Fontana di Trevi* are all truly amazing. The Basilicas inspire, the statues are astonishing and the springs gushing from the fountains refresh you during your journey in this hectic, yet simple city.

As I walked up the street towards the train station to board the *Euro Star*, bound for Florence, I began to discover something truly special. The sounds of the *una motoretta*s (motor scooters) subsided, the smell of the buses and cars faded, the fascinating sites and architecture stood still and the goodness of people came to life.

"Buongiorno" (good morning), the shop owners said as I entered their boutiques. "How can I help you?" or "What would you like?" were asked with a grin and a smile. A true feeling of pride could be felt as I began to experience people with different colors of skin, hairstyles new to me and fashion,



oh fashion that's simply elegant.

Mothers and daughters holding hands as they walked down the narrow cobblestone streets window shopping for the perfect find. Men and women alike greeting one another with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Couples lounging around coffee shops drinking cappuccino, sharing *gelato* (Italian ice cream) and enjoying each other's company. Romantic wedding ceremonies taking place in neighborhood churches while the *bambini* (children) play kick ball in the streets. Family and friends not seeming to be so caught up in time, but in conversation as they share a toast at their favorite restaurant before the *tortellini*, *spaghetti*, or *cannelloni* is served.

A place where the breeze still dries clothes hanging on lines strung above the flower boxes on each window. Where beggars, business people and explorers all meet at the end of the day to catch the streetcar or metro while musical notes from an accordion ring from a corner cafe. Where the type of car or scooter you drive is not seemingly important to the average person. Where fashionable sunglasses and shoes are noticeable, but where the joy of family stands out.

For me personally, traveling to Italy for the first time and meeting my relatives has been something extraordinary. An adventure that intrigues a person like myself, for as the simple things in life are clearly becoming much more important.

Touring the world can be exhilarating, exploring the landscapes and sites memorable, but observing people from all different cultures and languages not only occupying space, but bringing it to life – Now, that's unforgettable. For our world revolves around the goodness of people and for that, I'm thankful. ♦

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