It’s hot. The blazing, beaming, red-hot sun is in the middle of the mid afternoon sky. It feels like a sticky and humid 75 degrees. I am in tight faded jeans, a yellow striped tube top that is not a breathable fabric like cotton I wish it was, and brown sandals that are making it really difficult to walk in because my feet are exceptionally slippery and slimly. My hair is enclosing the heat that’s trying to come off the back of my neck and trapping it within the small gap between my skin and the warm air summer air. The small wheels on my suitcase are not doing their job in helping me lug around, what feels like, a 100-pound bag, roll smoothly over the cobblestone streets. There are tons of strangers around us. They are shooting the two blonde, pale, and obviously lost Americans dirty looks as we get in their way by wandering around the crowded streets of Venice. My brother and I for the third time walk up and down what looks like hand made stairs that take us to a bridge over Venice’s canal. We stop on top of the bridge and try to take in our view of the busy city below. We were supposed to meet our aunt and uncle at 10:30 after our train ride from Bologna, Italy, so with my brother’s four semesters worth of Italian and our confidence, we finagle our way through the tiny streets. We ask a wrinkled old woman who that tells us to go one way and another sun-aged woman tells us to the other way. Once the hole-in-the-wall hotel is in our sights, we walk in and are grilled by the front desk with 20 questions about who we are and what we are doing in the hotel until, finally, our uncle walks down the spiraling flight of stairs to rescue us. Needless to say, I was a little peeved for having been blamed for this miscommunication between our relatives, but our dinner that night paid off for our journey. Even though we
already in our own way took a tour of Venice, the next morning was a breathtaking experience.

One place in Venice I will never forget going to and hopefully go back to one day is the fresh fish and food market that is on the edge of the canal in Venice. The morning, 7 am, air was foggy and humid. The visible bright ruby red tent signals to its visitors that they have arrived at the mile and a half long market. As you walk in, endless tables of a variety of fish are set before you. Purple tentacles with round sucker cups of all sizes hang off the end of dripping, iced tables. Live jet black eels squirm in a bucket of cold water, red and blue shelled live crabs pinch at nothing but the hot morning air, clams, oysters, and spiny sea urchins are piled high as little old creased women in their colorful silk head scarves request only the freshest from their vendors and place them their little wire carts. The whole red snappers, yellow tunas, and bright orange salmon are packed full of ice on tables and surprisingly don’t smell like fish. The only word to describe their smell is fresh. Once you come to the end of the fish portion of the market, you enter the produce section. The sizes and colors of the fruits and vegetables seemed so much more vibrant compared to what we in the United States is used to, even during our freshest of summer months. Plump red tomatoes, golden sunflower colored squash, and bright green cucumbers on the first few tables surrounded us. Then came tables of vegetables that not many people, including me, have seen before. I saw violet artichokes instead of green, white and purple asparagus, golden beets, red and yellow carrots, and orange cauliflower. The four of us were so awed by the thick stalks of the asparagus that we decided to buy almost a pound to cook with while in Italy. In the middle of the commotion, I stopped for a minute to take in the city around me. I sat on the edge of the concrete walk way and
watched the late fisherman and produce vendors frantically move their inventory off of their tiny speed boats off of the dark brown waters onto the back lot. I tried to imagine my life depending on a boat the size of a canoe be my vehicle of transportation. On top of that, it would be weighed down by a hundred pounds of fish or vegetables. We thought we had bypassed our mishaps in our trip after the market visit, but I think we spoke too soon.

After a few days in Tuscany, my brother and I decided to take a train to Naples. My grandfather told us before we left for our trip that our family immigrated from Naples to the United States, and that there was still people in Naples that were related to us. Even though we had no intention of actually contacting them, the thought of making the journey to locate and see with our own eyes where our distant relatives live today sparked our Italian heritage a great deal. Our train left crazy early, and we had a four-hour ride ahead of us. 2 naps and 50 pages later in *The Great Gatsby*, we arrived.

A familiar feeling came over us as we once again wandered off of the train onto a crowded platform and made our way out of the station. As we emerged, the view of complex roundabouts, crowded streets full of cars, and oddly high piles of dirty trash on the side of the road…that’s right, I said trash. Remember the confusion and disorientation felt at the beginning? Well amplify that by 20. Our one concern at this point was to find our bed and breakfast. Our trek up and down the steep sidewalks wouldn’t have been so bad except for the hot, steaming piles of trash taking up the entire walkway. So, we either step through the month old trash, since Naples was on a current trash strike, or we walk out into the busy New York-like streets. After walking through the back allies of poorly remaining apartment buildings, we finally find our address. Cramming into an elevator
the size of a coat closet, we ride up to our room number and find no one home. Pounding on their door, knocking on the neighbor’s doors, and even luckily enough catching a young man walking his dog who lives in the building gave us nothing. The boy even had a cell phone that allowed us to call our room number, which only amounted to him finally saying in broken English, “Yeah, they no home.” Feeling a bit defeated, we walk back near the train station, hungry. From the looks of the tall buildings and mass of people in the main circle we made it back to, we thought we might have been in the heart of Naples and decided to get a hotel room and tough it out. We stopped for the worst Italian meal I have ever had, and slowly started to realize the death looks beaming towards us. I tried to think of these people as the people encountered in Venice, people who respected us but still felt skeptical towards us. Just for starters, these men were holding joints of marijuana and looked like they belonged in the show, *Sopranos*. My brother leaned over and said “We gotta get out of here.” Hopping back on a four-hour train ride to Bologna where we were to meet our aunt and uncle the next morning, we get a room right across from the train station and find a small restaurant to eat. Even though it seems like I had many hassles in my overseas trip, I can happily say these mix-ups should not be the focus of anyone’s travels.

As unfortunate as it is, these two blunders in my trip last summer seem to be some of the most vivid memories I brought back from Italy. I bet you’re saying, well what about the other 12 days you were in Italy? Were they boring and uneventful? Not at all. Besides the wonderful time we had in Venice, the scenery I was surrounded by in Tuscany in the villa we stayed in was just remarkable. The meals I had were some of the most exquisite and fresh tasting I will ever have. Even though we weren’t in areas that
are high tourist spots, I was still guided through small towns with diverse and unique characteristics, like in Modena, known for their cars, like Lamborghinis, or in Assisi, for keeping the history of the town alive by having each province in the town keep a flag of their heritage and participate in their local spring festivals, and in Bologna, with one of the largest markets I’ve ever shopped in. Besides the stress and grey hairs I gained from my mishaps in Italy, I gained something else – experience. There are tons of people in the United States that have never been out of their state, let alone into a different country. Even though we got lost, we successfully navigated our way around a foreign country at 20 and 21 years old, and survived to tell about it! The patience and skills we have learned from the hectic and fast pace situations that took place in a completely different environment has now allowed us to be the same savvy people in other places we encounter. If we can take care of ourselves in Italy, then I am sure we can in many other places.