

## Sono Piena!

July 5, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

I AM FULL!

Plot twist, I'm not cut out to eat in this country. Food here is art....eating three courses and then still having room for dessert and espresso is an art form. Let's just say I have not mastered it...YET.

This is my first blog post so let me introduce myself to those of you who don't know me: I am a Nursing major with a Social Justice minor. Two years ago I studied abroad in Florence and Rome and absolutely fell in love with Italy so when the Moreau Center put a program together that combines service AND Italy, I was totally hooked. I speak almost zero Italian, but I can basically understand what is said to me, I just can't respond (you know, minor details). I love polka dots, baby animals & baby humans, everything related to soccer and football, and terrible jokes with an emphasis on puns.

I have been in Italy for 2 weeks now though tonight is my first night here at L'Arche in Bologna. I have been to Rome, Assisi, Siena, Venice, Ravenna, and now I am happy to call Bologna home.

I am beyond excited, though admittedly nervous, about beginning my journey with L'Arche. I feel welcomed already and have made friends with a few of the ragazzi-the core members.

For the past few days we have spent time with the two girls who have spent the past six weeks here in a formation/retreat reflecting on what the definition of friendship is and learning how they have developed this definition throughout their time at L'Arca. The connections they have made, the lives they have touched is evident by the smiles they receive EVERY time they walk into a room.

We have been blessed by Sara and Lizz as they have given us advice and perspective from their own time here and given us a resource when we feel entirely overwhelmed. I know I can't fully appreciate it yet but I feel we will be indebted to them for their kindness.

I have had time to reflect on my travels and I'm just starting to learn all the lessons that this country has to teach me. I am not used to being surrounded by such beauty. This country and its people are filling me with a sense of profound joy that I have yet to truly experience.

So now I am ready to do and I am ready to learn. I am letting go of all of my nervousness, all of my inhibitions that take me away from being truly present. My philosophy for the next six weeks: TO LET BE. I am not going to worry about all that is happening or try to overthink, as I often do, but to just fully embrace all of it and let it change me. There is a plan for all of this and I know now that I have about zero control over any of it and I think I'm okay with that.

I welcome any and all prayers as I embark on an adventure to learn how to love and to be loved, about the L'Arca community, and about life itself.

Here we go...Andiamo Tutti!

Filed Under: [L'Arche Bologna](#)

## L'amore è amore

July 9, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

I think I just had the greatest day of my entire life.

Let me start by saying the transition here has been rough. There is a lot of wondering about where I'm supposed to be and at what time. Until today, we have not been given our complete assignments. We knew we were supposed to clean in the morning but the afternoon schedule was still unclear.

This morning, like every morning, we cleaned for three and a half hours. It's a pretty daunting task, all the sweeping, mopping, disinfecting, ironing, etc., but it is an integral part of community life. I can show that I care about the well being of the core members and assistants by putting an effort into the cleanliness of our environment. So each morning I listen to my country music and I clean.

After lunch has been the tricky part. It usually includes some more cleaning, snack and dinner preparation, then dinner and the dishes afterwards, all the while wondering if I'm doing things correctly or if I'm in the correct place.

Today we finally met with our volunteer coordinator and got our actual assignments and they include more time with the core members.

At lunch today we had a conversation about love. There was talk about the difference between family love, platonic love (which got changed into atomic love—which can definitely be a thing) and being IN love. There was all this chatter about the differences and I was asked if I have ever been in love (in which I proceeded to turn bright red apparently) but then a core member shushed everyone and said, "L'amore è amore" "Love is love."

It is really true though and love should be the basis for all that we do. We as humans may have a million differences but setting all those differences aside and saying "I can love you because you have inherent dignity."

In the four days that I have been here I have seen love in many different ways: the holding of hands, the praying together, singing together, in dance parties, in being together in silence, and especially in eating together. The main idea though, just being together, being with another even

when I can't communicate. It's as simple as taking the hand of someone and you see the appreciation when they look back at you and give you a huge smile.

Tonight I ate dinner in a different house than I have for all of my time here. I was welcomed with a candle that signifies that the light of Christ and how they hope that light will enter into my heart so that I can give that light to the community. We ate dinner and I just tried to listen, to absorb as much of the conversation as I could. I know most of the core members from different activities but was introduced multiple times just so it would stick.

We cleaned up after dinner and then sat around the living room watching the World Cup news. A core member came back from the restroom and requested that I specifically paint her nails. Needless to say I was pretty freaking excited. We moved to the table and she picked a color and I painted her nails. I asked her in completely broken Italian if she likes polka dots and I knew I wasn't being clear by any means but she nodded so I put little polka dots on 4 nails and a heart on one nail of each hand. Now normally I'm not very good at this girly stuff but it was exactly what this core member needed. We did her hair and then she helped me paint my nails.

Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, we were sitting doing our evening prayer and an assistant asked a core member if he remembered who I was. The core member responded, "Kelly." The ragazza whose nails I had just painted responded, "Famiglia." I have been brought into this L'Arche family and after only 4 days I know that I can forever call this a home.

In this community it is not about good days and bad days. It's a collection of moments. The moments that put a huge smile on my face, that fill my heart with joy. It's about holding on to those moments, cherishing them and letting them overcome your whole self.

Love is love and that is all you need.



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## What a Week

July 18, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

I would be lying if I said I was sad that this week is coming to an end. The past 7 days have been dramatic to say the least. This week has been filled with a trip to the ER, heartbreak, and tragedy. There have been many smiles in the past week but there have also been lots of tears.

My heart is broken for Morgan and her family. She had to leave in the middle of the night to get home for a family emergency. I don't know how a family can recover after such a tragedy but I pray that they will heal and that they feel the love of their community.

My immune system decided to have a meltdown last week in a response to 52 mosquito bites and different pollens in this environment. After 4 hours in the ER I returned to concerned assistants and core members. I was exhausted but to see such care and concern in people after only being here is absolutely incredible.

A few days later I had a conversation with the volunteer coordinator (and translator) about how I was doing. They were concerned about my health and I told them that this sort of thing is pretty normal for me, that my body rebels sometimes. I explained that I was still fatigued but happy to be here and continuing on with the tasks I have been assigned. I explained that I was embarrassed about having to be driven to the hospital and to make people go out of their way to make sure I was alright.

They explained to me that to share our deepest insecurities and troubles with another is to enter into a sort of intimacy with them. They explained to me that L'Arche is about sharing in each other's weaknesses. It's about getting rid of the shame that is associated with imperfections. They welcomed me because of my crazy body and told me that I don't have to smile and pretend everything is okay if it isn't, that I won't be inconveniencing anybody if I ask for help. It doesn't matter that sometimes I feel like I'm living in the body of an 80 year old, what matters is that I bring those experiences to the table and share them with this community I am now a part of.

When Morgan left I was sad for her. I was sad that she did not get to continue this journey in the L'Arche community just when we got everything figured out. I am heartbroken today in hearing the news of the death of her niece. I was not myself today and the core members could tell. A few of them asked if I was sad and I told them yes and I have received countless hugs and smiles. And in the past few days, the number of times they have asked about Morgan and her family is truly heartwarming. This is a community that has welcomed us, embraced us, and is loving us. We remember Morgan and her family each morning and night in prayer and I ask all of you reading this to please do the same.

So yes, I am happy that this week has come to an end, even though I am one week closer to leaving a place that I can call home. One core member was leaving today for vacation and she won't be back until after I leave. We gave each other at least 15 hugs and if this is how it feels to say goodbye to someone I've only known for 2 weeks, I can't imagine what it's going to be like

when I leave in less than a month. I have never experienced more love through tears and smiles than I have in the past 7 days and I am filled with joy amidst the sadness.

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## Silence

August 1, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

For the first time in my life I can say that I appreciate the value of silence. Silence, it's such a profound topic and I have been trying to write this blog post for 2 weeks now, but I wasn't quite able to put my thoughts into a cohesive entry.

When I finally made it to L'Arche just about a month ago, I was so excited to have someone to talk to. It sounds crazy but when Morgan and I spent the first night in the retreat house we talked for hours because we both had been traveling alone for a couple weeks and we didn't have anyone to share our experiences with.

Now to be clear, I am a very chatty human. I love talking to people, hearing about their opinions and sharing our point of views. 10 days of backpacking through Italy by myself was challenging in many ways but the most difficult was not being able to talk to anyone because of my limited and completely terrible Italian. I found that in the silence though I could reflect and on my journey, the moments that brought me to where I am in that space and time.

I think I am so struck by the moments of silence here because the day consists of a semi-controlled chaos. The perfect word to describe this community is busy. There are always activities and meals being prepared, core members to be with, cleaning to be done. The routine though is basically the same. We prepare dinner, eat, clean, give medicine, pray and then it's off to bed. This is the foundation for the evening but things don't always go as planned and by the time we get to prayer the exhaustion has set in for almost everybody.

Now controlled chaos is not new to me. I have been a nanny for an amazing family in Camas for three years now. This family has four kids, ages 8-16. Between after school tutors, music lessons, sports, dinner prep, homework, baths, and everything else, things can get a little crazy sometimes. The mom and I usually divide and conquer and we make an excellent team. There is a routine and that way everything gets done that needs to (well, most of the time).

In the midst of all the business, this community emphasizes the value of prayer, of silence. We have adoration every Monday evening and it is in these times that I feel the most joy. Ultimately, life doesn't need to be so complicated. We each carry the burden of our own shortcomings and frustrations, but to see all of that put aside to just reflect and to find peace is truly astounding. It amazes me that all of us in this community can put aside everything else, and just be together. By being together we are forming a community of solidarity, we carry the burdens of one another.

One day this week we had five different countries represented at our lunch table. Germany, Ukraine, Italy, Colombia, and the United States. That's 5 different languages. There was very little conversation because we could not understand each other. The amazing thing though is that our differences didn't matter. We are all here because we love the L'Arche community and if that isn't amazing, I don't know what is.

The friendships I have made here are not based on conversations about mutual love of a football team or favorite movies. The friendships are as simple as having my hand held by a core member who does not like change or new people while we sit on the couch together. My friendships are as simple as a kiss on the cheek because they are truly excited that I am here.

For the first time in my life, I do not feel that there is emptiness in silence. I do not feel I am alone. I honestly believe that silence is one of the most beautiful parts of life. I can look around the room during prayer and feel the most intense love I have ever experienced, without the words ever being said.

I have debated for two weeks whether or not I was going to share this photo but I think that the UP community deserves to see this beautiful moment. This moment happened without words being exchanged between the two core members in the photo. I was sitting next to them pulled out my phone and just snapped the photo without ever looking at it. I forgot about it and did not look at it for probably 4 days. When I saw it though, it brought tears to my eyes. Without any words expressed, these two core members showed their love for each other. Because isn't that what love is, knowing what another needs without any words being spoken? I strive to live in this example of love.

Take the time to put away your phone, turn off the radio, to be alone with yourself, to develop your own spirituality. Just be with the person you love because they are worth your time, your respect. And most importantly, let yourself be loved because despite what you may believe, you are absolutely worth it.



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## [I Giorni della Lumaca](#)

August 12, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

The snail days. (That actually haven't been slow at all.)

In our theater group for the past couple weeks we have been acting out scenes as snails. As in shuffling around the room, pretending we have a shell on our backs. I don't really know who decided to have so many weeks focused on such an odd animal, but nonetheless we act like snails.

These past couple weeks have been absolutely crazy. I mean my whole time here has been a little strange in regards to the schedule, but for the past two weeks things have been totally different. Assistants are on vacation, as well as groups of core members. The whole community has not been together since the middle of July.

So last Thursday afternoon it was time for the theater workshop. We gathered in the big room that we call the salon and we sort of all just looked around at each other. The two assistants who normally plan everything were both gone so we improvised. And what do most people do when all else fails? YOUTUBE. We watched probably ten videos of snails. If I'm being completely honest, if you've seen one video of a snail crawling, slithering, oozing—or whatever you want to call it—you've seen them all.

We were running out of videos to watch and we still had 10 minutes left in the workshop. I saw at the bottom of one video the movie Turbo. Now I took a chance and I told one assistant to type it in and we watched the movie trailer. It's an animated film but the trailer was in English so while I was giggling everyone else was silent. Luckily though there was one in Italian too. It was a hit. Everyone loved it.

The trailer is about this snail who is tired of life going by so slow. He wants to really live and be in the fast lane. He somehow gets sucked into the engine of a racecar and gets supercharged with whichever chemical they use to make cars go really fast. (I really should know what it's called after making my dad watch all of the Fast & Furious movies with me, but of course I can't remember). Anyways, the snail gets superpowers and becomes Turbo. He can go faster than any snail around and faster than some cars apparently.

The core members enjoyed this so much that we pretended to be fast snails for the rest of the afternoon, fast shuffling all around making ridiculous noises. It has since become a running joke (hah or a shuffling joke for the sake of the pun) between me and one core member. Whenever things are quiet we both just look at each other, put our hands behind our backs and start shuffling around.



The point to all this back story? Friendship is really so simple. It's about not being afraid to look like a total idiot while being trying to be a snail of all things, and not caring who gives you strange looks when you fall over laughing.

The amount of work I have has quadrupled in the past two weeks and I have been completely overwhelmed, but when something reminds me of the lumaca and all of our craziness, I can't help but smile. Even without a shared language, we have the snail days and I am so happy for that.

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## [Awake My Soul](#)

August 18, 2014 By [Kelly](#)

I had a teacher in high school that told us that to find a soul mate we would have to develop a soul. I never really put much thought into what that really meant but somehow it has stuck with me. The six weeks I spent in the L'Arche Bologna community have ignited something within me. A yearning to pass along the love and joy I have experienced.

This experience has changed my life. I see things differently and I see a change within myself. I am back in the States and still need time to reflect about what this experience means, but I know already how it has made an incredible difference in my thoughts and hopefully my actions.

With tears rushing down my face I left a place that will forever be a home. I am sad but I am also satisfied. I am at peace with my time there, with all the challenges and frustrations, with all the lessons I have learned and that I will continue to learn for the rest of my life. I am still in awe of the lessons in love and the overwhelming joy I have in my heart.

In the past 8 weeks I have had mass in the Tomb of Saint Peter, attended a Papal Audience, been to the Pope's Sunday Angelus, backpacked through Rome, Siena, Assisi, Venice, Ravenna and Bologna. I have lived in the L'Arca Bologna community for six weeks learning about how to offer my insecurities to share in the burdens of another. I have learned about friendship, and what it truly means to love another. I have experienced extreme sadness, but also profound joy. On my last morning I watched the sky lighten while sitting in the train station as I began my journey back home. How lucky I am to have not only a community that is so hard to say goodbye to, but also a country. This country has a special place in my heart. It has a special place in my soul.

I offer extreme gratitude to the Moreau Center for giving me the opportunity to represent our UP community in Bologna and I give sincere appreciation to the L'Arcobaleno community for welcoming me, loving me, and inspiring me. Thank you for taking the time to read about my experiences, I didn't do it justice but I hope you enjoyed a look inside this beautiful community.

Always,

Kelly Slauson



