

Buongiorno, Principessa!

May 8, 2014 By [Sara \(Edit\)](#)

This is one of the only Italian phrases I can constantly remember. I have the film, *Life is Beautiful*, to thank. I highly recommend watching it when you feel like you need to remember how beautiful life is— or if you just need a good cry.

I'm not here to tell you about movies though. I'm here to invite you to walk along a journey that I have been given the chance to be a part of. Before I delve into my journey introduction, you should probably know who I am.

- **Name:** Sara Tellez
- **School:** University of Portland ALUMNA ('14) :)
- **Major:** Social Work
- **Minor:** Drama
- **Interests:** Traveling, Reading, Swimming, watching films such as as those that rhyme with Shmarry Shmutter
- **Dislikes:** Kristin Stewart in the Twilight movies, oppression and injustice, mustard.



Beginning May 23, I will be leaving my hometown where sun and heat thrive, and heading to Bologna, Italy known for their Bolognese sauce (or at least that's what I know about it). Through the University of Portland's Moreau Center, I will be living in a L'Arche community in Bologna, Italy until early July. You probably have about a thousand and one questions. What is L'Arche? What are you going to be doing? Will there be said Bolognese sauce?

Allow me to provide you with a little bit of background of L'Arche. Founded by Jean Vanier, L'Arche is a foundation where people who have intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist share life and daytime activities together in family-like settings that are integrated into local neighborhoods. L'Arche Bologna has a number of programs and workshops that community members can take part in together. These are grouped into what L'Arche calls "communities." I will be one member of the community for these summer months, and I am scared, excited, and overwhelmed with gratitude. It is uncertain what I will exactly be doing, but

what is certain is I will be living in solidarity with others. I will be living life with others, and being a witness to how beautiful life truly is.

This is my brief introduction to my time in Bologna. I hope you will come along with me through your thoughts, prayers, and positive vibes as I take this journey. I have little experience living with those with disabilities, but I know the Lord has great things planned.

Well, I guess that's it for now. I hope to keep you all involved and entertained along the way! I need to go learn some Italian, and I think I found a clip that could help me.

Ciao!

~Sara

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

The pizza has been delivered. Over.

May 25, 2014 By [Sara](#)

That's my way of letting you all know that I have arrived safely in Bologna, Italy. I am typing this message half asleep on my bed in the L'Arche community over here. This will be my new home for the next 6 weeks! I have only been here a few hours, but I can tell that this will be unlike anything I have done before.

God definitely decided to test my patience before I even left my hometown, Phoenix. My first flight was delayed until the next day, and it was then delayed again. I had to reschedule two flights. I was frustrated at first, but realized I wasn't meant to be on those planes, and for good reason—they malfunctioned. The Lord is good!

All the hullabaloo aside, I am safe, by His grace, and all is well. I am a day late from my original volunteer start date, but at least first thing tomorrow morning I get to dive in to things! I have already noticed so much about those that are living here in this house with me. I am getting to know everybody (roommate, other volunteers, core members, and chickens). Each core member has such a different personality, and it's amazing. I feel so blessed to be here. This is going to be a challenge, and I am up for it.

Goodnight! Time to let the rest of my hair out of my ponytail because a certain new friend of mine enjoyed pulling some out earlier! Haha Buono notte!

xx

Sara

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

L'amore é universale*

June 8, 2014 By [Sara](#)

Things that are universal:

- “oops”
- “okay”
- Hugs
- Smiles
- Gratitude
- Love

*Love is Universal

First of all, allow me to apologize for the lack of correspondence on this blog. I'm two weeks in and I am finally getting to feel like I know what is going on. Also, our blog site is working again. Now, on to better things:

Allow me to preface: I really wish I spoke Italian, or Spanish for that matter. I'm thankful that I can understand Spanish and the skill has allowed me to understand some Italian. I find myself wanting to respond in Spanish and not Italian which can only go so far here. As a Catholic, I am thankful that I know my prayers in español (shoutout to the youth group kids who would act like we knew Spanish and solely *speak* the words to the Hail Mary)! The language barrier here has been one of the hardest aspects to get a grip on.

The first week was the hardest where I constantly found myself at the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people. However, there was always willing somebody willing to state some keywords in English to help me. “You. Come. Kitchen. Clean?” Yes, I will go to the kitchen and clean. Nobody really shared any time schedules with us so we would wonder a bit. However, I think being lost can be just half the adventure.

There are certain things that are nearly identical if not the same in most countries. One of the most powerful things is to see is one receiving and giving love. Every day, I eat breakfast and dinner in one of the houses here called “Grano”. I eat among the same faces and we pray every morning and evening in addition to the prayer over meals. This has been a breath of fresh air for me because I know in that moment we are all sitting together in solidarity with similar intentions. Some people have different beliefs here too, but they all take part in the prayers that happen within the community.

One evening I was especially struck by one particular adult who lives in Grano. I will call this adult Stanford**. One evening during our nightly prayer after dinner and before bed, we do as we normally do in our daily prayers and read a reading and sing a song together. After the reading, the assistant reading usually reflects on what has been said with the res of the house. On

this particular night, I recognized certain keywords: amore, Gesù, duve (where). We had prompted with the questions, where do you see Jesus' love? Some answered in L'Arche Bologna, one answered outside. However, my new friend Stanford turned to me and explained in Italian he saw Jesus' love in me. I came from America, but I was here in L'Arche with him and everybody else in the house. He was grateful. In this moment, I could feel my heart wanting to explode. The entire week I felt like I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it was then that I realized that even though I felt like I was doing it all wrong, my presence was all they asked for. I had already begun to form a small place in my home away from home. It did not matter if the language was different, I felt the love of not only Stanford in that moment, but Jesus as well. "Where two or more are gathered, there I am in the midst of them."- Matthew 18:20.

**Name changed

While I may find myself saying "no capito" a million times, there are a million things I am understanding, and the love of a neighbor is one of them.

Here are some pictures with captions to catch you up on a few things since I haven't posted in a while!

xx

Sara



They weren't kidding! I spent the mornings cleaning the house usually by myself, but it's a nice time to stop and sing and take selfies.



A festival celebrating the quarter moon and the surrounding neighborhood. All proceeds of the 4 day festival went to L'Arche Bologna.



L'Arche Bologna—my home away from home.

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

Label-di! Label-da! Life Goes On!

June 14, 2014 By [Sara](#)

Labels are a part of our everyday life. We place labels on things such as food and clothes. The overall function of a label is to set one group of items apart from another. If we washed our colored clothes with our whites, we might all end up with pink sheets! This happened to me one time and it was quite unfortunate.

Here in our L'Arche community we label A LOT. We label the food reserved for certain house members based on dietary needs and likes, linen closets for easy access and identification, and we even label food with the date it was opened. Allow me to be the first to admit this way of living may seem exaggerated at first, but the more time I spend here, the easier this system seems.

This week in our weekly meeting with the volunteer coordinator, Luca, he asked us to go through the week and notice if there were any differences between the adult and disability in the core members of L'Arche. I thought this was a very profound question to ask of us, and I tried to pay close attention all week. He was indirectly asking us to notice the labels put on people living with disabilities. I have noticed Italy and the US both have a tendency to place labels on those with disabilities. So many times we often forget about the life people with disabilities are living. We often treat them like children or think that perhaps it is best to "baby-them" because they are "fragile". How sure are we about that?

In my social work and social justice classes, and even in my personal experiences, I have learned the impact a label can impose on a person. Think to your own life. Have you caught yourself saying "the autistic kid" or perhaps using that word so many (including myself) cringe at "retarded". There were times I found myself using wording like this before I was educated on the importance of a label. We are all capable of learning and changing our ways. This post is not meant to scold people for that language use, but rather to self-reflect on your own life and notice your own tendencies. This language use and way of thinking is not an American tendency, I think it is an educational tendency. If society (universal society) is not careful with their word-choice, we will continue to negatively impact groups of people through labels.

There is one core member in our L'Arche community who reminds me of my Tata (grandfather). He is an older gentleman, keeps to himself, and has a very rough-sounding voice. I eat with him 3 meals a day and every once and awhile I am fortunate enough to sit next to him. In Italy, we drink wine. That is not even a question. You can choose the water, but if you are offered "vino" (wine) it isn't unusual to accept the offer. This particular core member loves two things: coffee and vino. Whoever sits next to him at meals has to monitor his intake of wine or else he will skillfully sneak an entire bottle if nobody is looking. Here at L'Arche we also water down the wine for most residents (I know some of you are making a face, and believe me...I made that face too until I tasted some of the wine here...it needs water). If there is no bottle of wine (of his choice) on the table, he grunts and asks why there is none. He also requires someone to cut his food before he eats it. One evening I offered to cut his food, but he insisted a different volunteer do it. There are certain things he will not do with me. At first I took this personally, but then I realized I am still new to him. This core member is also very timid. He carries a handkerchief in his hand 24/7 and seems very timid. I have not asked what disabilities he is living with, but there are a few I think he may be facing.

These moments I have described to you were instances where I saw the adulthood being lived by a person with a disability. In my classes, I learned to put a person's humanity before their disability. A boy is not "asthma boy", but he is a boy with asthma. This way of speech puts their humanity ahead of their disability. The same goes for my new L'Arche friend. This gentleman was still an older adult living his life with a disability. He was an older Italian man who would like his vino with dinner. He is a male who would like his meals cut by certain people. He is a human being who enjoys singing. He also happens to have a disability.

Maybe you can think of your own family member who likes things very particular. My Tata enjoyed his alcoholic beverages too. He also liked his food prepared a certain way. He kept to himself, and he usually did not say much. He told you when enough was enough and there was

no changing his mind. While this L'Arche core member may not realize it, he makes me feel at home. I love sitting next to him in the living room and watching the World Cup. We don't say much (partially because I don't speak Italian), but I just enjoy being in his presence. I feel like that is what this experience is about. So many times we disregard the humanity of those with disabilities and forget they are like you and I.

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. L'Arche is a community that praises the humanity of its community. Think before you place a label on someone or something next time. Are you labeling correctly? Is the label even necessary? Is the label going to help or hinder you or that item?

Romans 12: 9-18

Love one another, contribute to the needs of others, live peaceably with all.

Xx

Sara

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

Celebrate Diversity

June 22, 2014 By [Sara](#)

Please watch the following link before you continue reading. :)

[Signs-A Video from L'Arcabaleno](#)

I'm going to assume being the amazing person you are, you did as I kindly recommended and watched the above link before continuing on in this blog post. If you did not, it's okay. You just won't see all the cool stuff we are up to in L'Arche Bologna.

If you did not, here is a brief synopsis: L'Arche International is celebrating their anniversary and so is the community here in Bologna. One of the ways of celebrating the organization's anniversary was creating this video to invite people into the community and share a story and object of diversity from their country with the community here in Bologna. Also, if we didn't, we would be forced to play with baby dragons all day. Just kidding, but if you watched the video I linked you to...you would know what it's about! :)

This community in particular is diverse in itself. I have been working along a number of Italians from every nook and cranny of this beautiful country, two Germans, and one woman from

Portugal. Recently we had two visitors from the L'Arche community in Kenya visit us for about a week. Their names were Leah and James. These were two of the most beautiful beings inside and out. I was also very glad to meet them because they spoke *BEAUTIFUL* English.

As I am hoping you saw in the video, there were small signs that translated what the core members and assistants here were saying. These symbols are how many core members can read some of our favorite stories. One afternoon during one of our workshops called *Libri*, or book, we learned about the African country, Kenya, and the L'Arche community Leah and James come from, and the information they shared was translated into these symbols. They shared a story about a magical mango. Afterwards, information about how early they woke up in the morning, what typical meals they ate in their country, and what friendship means to them. Lastly, they shared items of diversity from their country. One of the objects was a beautiful painting and the other was a common local house utensil, which I cannot pronounce to save my life.

I was then surprised when one of the coordinators here asked if I wanted to share my own story of diversity with the community here. At first I was hesitant because I thought (as I am sure many others grapple with) the USA (in my opinion) does not have one distinct culture. We are a country of many cultures blended together. We may think hamburgers are our staple food, but they're not. Although, Lizz, my roommate, and I agree we might be able to call the deep-fried Twinkie an American staple. However, the coordinator then sensed my worry and said, "But you are of a different heritage, correct?" Well, if you are speaking about the Mexican blood that flows through these veins, then yes I am.

So, I agreed to do something I was in no way prepared to do. I was going to share a story of diversity and present an object of diversity to. After pacing through my head for about a week, I came up with an idea. I decided I would share a story that I was told from a young age, the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I had a small magnet of *la vigin* in my back pack too. This would be perfect to share with the community! My Mexican background was going to highlight a part of my life that can often times be disregarded where I come from. As a state, Arizona struggles with its relationship with Mexico, and many people are verbal how they feel about the Mexican people. This was an opportunity to highlight an important part of who I am.

I shared the story of Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe with the *Libri* workshop the following week. I don't know why, but I was completely nervous. Was this story what they were looking for? Was this magnet anything in comparison to the beautiful objects from Kenya? A friend of mine here, Ivanna, translated everything I said into Italian, and assured me it was all going to be okay. After my story, the *ragrazzi*, the core members here, asked me certain questions about Mexico and the US. For example, "Do you eat anything special on Easter or Christmas?" Of course I had to mention my families menudo and tamales! ***TO MY FAMILY READING THIS....YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!*** They also asked me if God's love is important to me, and what I do in order to preserve that love. I mentioned how my social work background has allowed me to help others and how that goes along with my own personal beliefs. They loved my magnet, and they thought it was small yet beautiful.

Because we had time to spare after the presentation, we Google searched tamales, red and white menudo, tortilla, the distance between Phoenix and Mexico City, and my house! This was one of

the funniest moments here. Some people fancied the white menudo over the red, and others were more obsessed with tortillas. I got a little homesick at this point. I was then asked one final question, “Why did you choose this story to talk about diversity?” One simple answer: As a Catholic, we know many stories of our mother, Mary, but one is specific to my culture, and she is known as the Mother of the Americas. While all images of Our Lady are just as miraculous, this is one *literally* close to home.

That evening at prayer, a few of the ragazzi prayed for me, my family, and all of my friends and family back home in the US and Mexico. It was one of the most simple yet beautiful prayers. It was in this moment I realized...1. They were paying attention to the story I told them. 2. They were genuinely interested in what I had to say, and 3. They were grateful for my participation. For the next few days people would tell me in Italian (who were not present for the story) that a core member told them about my story and they wished they were there. Other times, we had visitors over for meals, and I would suddenly hear the ingredients to white menudo! I felt very proud. I felt so proud of my heritage, of my faith, and in the community here. No matter where we come from or language we speak, we have one thing in common: diversity. Diversity is meant to be celebrated, and the L’Arche International community does a fantastic job!

xx

Sara



Kenyan art from Leah



The story Leah and James shared was translated into symbols for the community.



My Our Lady of Guadalupe magnet for L'Arche

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

My Day in a Nutshell

June 27, 2014 By [Sara](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzBmQMyYDBk>

xx

Sara

P.S. I'll explain later, but I am tired.

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

I hate this part right here.

July 2, 2014 By [Sara](#)

Remember that one time...

- I was blessed to be 1 of the 2 first students from the University of Portland to be a part of L'Arche Bologna—thanks to the Moreau Center.
- I panicked over not knowing Italian.
- L'Arca core members and volunteers picked me up from the airport, and we quickly began something beautiful.
- I was constantly in the wrong place the first week.
- I met a Jesus look-a-like and he happened to be from Argentina.
- I learned authentic Italian cooking and baking!
- I was a giraffe in a parade and some local kid threw a bag of crisps (chips) at me in celebration.
- I jogged along with my butterfly companion for a ¼ of a mile.
- I was on the winning basketball team with the other volunteers and core members from L'Arche Bologna vs....some other very nice group of people.
- I went to an Italian Yoga class but the instructor spoke English...which only meant that he could encourage me harder.
- I trained 5 Special Olympians for their event at the Special Olympics. I've never been a more proud assistant coach.
- I met Jess and Scott atop of one of the Towers of Bologna. They were two New Yorkers on their honeymoon.
- I ate my weight in gelato.
- I ate my weight in pasta and panne (bread). Grazie Maragoni!
- I watched the World Cup with Italians, Germans, Americans, Belgians, and a Portuguese. Talk about diverse.
- I ATE MY WEIGHT AND LIZZ'S IN CRESCENTINE!
- Lizz took a 30 second time out.
- I shared the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe and my Mexican heritage.
- Lizz and I nearly wee'd ourselves one evening when a frog jumped in front of us!
- Three of us sat in a ball pit and watched an Italian film.
- I had a "Discoteca" party with the ragazzi!
- I had one of the most unforgettable summers with the most amazing people.

If you haven't been keeping up with the Kardashians, I hope you have at least been keeping up with me! Above, I have provided you with "Remember that one time" events from the past 6 weeks in Italy. These events are only some of the highlights. There are also those that are so incredibly special and forever embedded into my mind that Michelangelo himself could not recreate the moment with his paintbrush.

I hope you have enjoyed the small glimpses into my experience here at L'Arche Bologna. Being one of the first students from UP here has been an incredible honor. We broke ground on something beautiful. I am excited for more students to experience a L'Arche community if they have not already. What is great about this program is the convenience of a L'Arche community back home in the US as well. For Lizz and I, this is our first time volunteering with L'Arche, but since being in L'Arca, we have been researching their various locations to continue Jean Vanier's vision of praising one another's humanity. There is a L'Arche community in Portland! Unfortunately, I no longer live in Portland because I am a recent UP alumna, but this experience has caused me to further address one of UP's mission pillars of faith and service. As I continue to grow in my social work experiences as well as my personal, I am figuring out what sort of populations I could see myself working with in the future. Before this experience, I had little familiarity with folks living with disabilities, but I have since gone completely out of my comfort zone and surpassed these barriers. It has also caused me to want to go home, learn Italian, gain some money, and return in the next few years!

The ragazzi here are wonderful human beings. Each one of them has a beautiful story to tell and it makes them unique. After only 6 weeks they found a place in my heart and in my prayers. These are the memories I can try to explain to you, but I don't know if you will fully understand. Michelangelo can paint his own personal image of God, but we cannot truly 100% fathom what God looks like. *This. This* is how I feel about my ragazzi experiences. To get to know a 25 year-young woman whose speech is limited, but the two of you very clearly have inside jokes nobody else understands. To get to know a 26 year-young man who cannot verbally express his needs and wants, but remembers the clapping game you play with him that makes him smile every time.

I like to live by the this quote a wise man once told me, "We are one beggar asking another if they want a loaf of bread". This quote has become more of a way of living for me. Christ broke bread with the outcasts. He didn't feel bad for them and send them a delivery. He sat with them and He washed their feet. For those of you who know me fairly well, you would know I cannot stand handling people's feet. These past 6 weeks I have put my aversions aside. I went outside of my comfort zone. I massaged the feet of the ragazzi. I helped some achieve great success (they were proud of themselves) in the bathroom. **THESE. THESE. MOMENTS.** Michelangelo couldn't paint them, Leonardo DiCaprio couldn't act them out, Sally Jesse Raphael couldn't interview me for further information. Basically, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles couldn't offer me their best New York style pizza (not just because I have Italian instead). These are the moments I will cherish forever. Grazie ragazzi. Tutti!

Don't get me started on the volunteer friendships. They already know how I feel. Here is some love. Take the love and keep it forever.

What's next on the horizon for this Phoenician? She has come to the point in her life where she will rise again and star anew. It is time to slow down and decompress these past weeks, and look forward to what is yet to come. To all those at home, know (as always) it can be a struggle to reenter into life back at home. Bare with me because it isn't going to be an easy transition. Also on this note, I'm looking for a job that involves social-worky things! I have also learned I'm quite good at cleaning and working with others! Haha please message me for any availabilities.

Well, the time has come. This has been great. This will be one of my final blog entries. I may upload some videos and such later on, but this is the one with the carne. The meat. The good stuff. We have a few days of Formation with the new ragazza from UP and then....the undeniable. This has been such a great experience and I have loved every millisecond and every kilo of pasta of it! Know that you are forever a part of my life, and I am forever a part of yours (whether you like it or not hahaha)! This is arrivederci! Ciao tutti! Until next time!

Grazie mille!

Xx

Sara

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