It was late and we were tired. We had slept little since leaving Orlando and had already walked for hours among the ruins of Pompeii and Cumae. So we put it to a vote—Who’s up for a quick walk to the Colosseum?—all hands went up. Good choice.

We passed cafes and convenience stores still lit and alive with locals, crossed a few streets with tiny cars and Vespas humming by and, there—all gray and half-crumbling but still magnificent—appeared the recognizable shape of the Colosseum. It was old, colossal, and... right there.

At Geneva we often speak about wonder. As a faculty, we remind ourselves that wisdom begins in awe and wonder, and try to help our students experience it in everything: in the abundance of plant and animal life in Central Florida, in the elegance of calculus, in the miracle of millennia-old Latin and Greek texts speaking to us today. We believe there is wonder everywhere if you look for it.

This summer, twenty-eight rhetoric students, twelve parents, and six faculty took this sense of wonder to Italy. Why Italy? First, Italy has an obvious combination of qualities that make for an ideal student trip: beautiful terrain, friendly population, and small size. Within something like the distance from Orlando to Miami, our group climbed among the ruins of Greek temples at Cumae, explored the city blocks of Roman-era Pompeii, watched a neighborhood medieval parade in the hilltop town of Orvieto, and marveled at the aesthetic vigor of Renaissance Florence. No wonder Italy is one of the world’s most visited nations.
For Geneva students, Italy is also a kind of landmark on their educational journey, one that they return to and venture out from repeatedly. From history to literature to language, "All roads," of the Geneva curriculum eventually "lead to Rome," or at least pass through it. Greek Mythology leads them there, aboard the ships of Aeneas the Trojan. As do art history, physics and engineering, which we saw perfectly combined as we climbed the domes of St. Peter’s Basilica and Florence’s Duomo. Latin, of course starts there, before becoming the language of Western Europe for over 1000 years—but so do French and Spanish, as provincial dialects of Latin. And any eighth grader at Geneva can tell you that New Testament class takes us to Rome, in Saint Paul’s epistle to the Roman church and in Acts, which leaves off with Paul imprisoned there.

Our students got to see, touch, and just be in the places where so much of the Western narrative happened. These great monuments and historic landscapes inspired our sense of wonder and connected us to the past; but travel can also influence our sense of place in the present. Imagine the contrast between Orlando and Orvieto, the medieval hill town designed for humans, not cars. We spent a memorable day wandering its streets and gardens among golden-brown stone buildings. The thriving community there suggests that medieval urban planning might just have something to contribute to twenty-first century cities.

Another paradigm shift took place when some of us attempted to speak Italian. From ordering meals and haggling over leather goods to asking directions or simply complimenting a waitress, speaking to the locals forced us out of our comfort zone and into real Italian life. One of my fondest memories of the trip is a conversation I had with an old woman in Pompeii. I admired her beautiful garden; pleased, she gave me a tour and a sample of the same vegetables this volcanic soil has been producing for thousands of years.

The abundance of gardens and flowers, and the fact that many stores still close for a long lunch and afternoon rest, suggest that there is more to life than money and work. Can we take some of this laid-back Mediterranean rhythm home with us? Likewise, taking two hours each night for a delicious dinner and joyous conversation shows us that our appetite for community is as real as our need for food.

It is easy to see a picture of Michelangelo’s Pietà or Ghiberti’s Baptistry Doors, but to stand in front of the object itself invites participation, allowing the artist or architect, or the sheer weight of history to influence how you see the world. It is this same participation that works in the more mundane moments of travel. I realized this each night in Florence when some of our Geneva students joined a pick-up soccer match with local kids. Our boys were willing to participate not only in the awe-inspiring experiences but also in the everyday lives of people not so different from them. It is this combination of experiences, so abundant in travel, that help our students grow into wiser and more wonderful people.

**ITINERARY**

**Monday, May 29:** Departed Orlando for Rome.

**Tuesday, May 30:** Arrived in Rome. Drove to Hotel Pompei Resort in Pompei—a three hour bus ride with an hour stop for lunch. Had dinner in the town of Sorrento on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

**Wednesday, May 31:** Met our guide at the Pompeii ruins for a tour. After our first taste of real Italian pizza we headed to our tour of Cumae before heading to Rome for our first night there.

**Thursday, June 1:** We met our guide for the Roman Forum and Colosseum early, stopped at San Pietro in Vincoli, then boarded our coach to the San Callisto catacombs, Santa Maria degli Martyri e Angeli, and Santa Maria della Vittoria. Had dinner at Mama’s.

**Friday, June 2:** Vatican day—the museums, the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter’s, the dome, the Papal tombs, etc. We had some of the best pizza in Rome for dinner.

**Saturday, June 3:** We enjoyed the gardens of the Borghese and the magnificent sculptures in the gallery in the morning. Then, took a walking tour of Rome—the Spanish Steps, the Trevi Fountain, San Luigi de’ Francesi, the Pantheon, Sant’ Agostino, the Piazza Navonna.

**Sunday, June 4:** Drove to Orvieto in the morning—a hilltop, walled, medieval city—for a day of exploring.

**Monday, June 5:** Drove to Florence to visit the Duomo—the church, the baptistery, the crypt, the museum … and climb the Dome.

**Tuesday, June 6:** We had a scavenger hunt in the morning ending in Fiesole, high above the city of Florence for great views. The rest of the afternoon was free time.

**Wednesday, June 7:** Visited Palazzo-Davanzati, Santa Croce, the Piazza della Signoria, and had a tour of the Uffizi before dinner at a family restaurant.

**Thursday, June 8:** After a free morning we visited the Medici Chapel, the Accademia, and San Marco.

**Friday, June 9:** Flew home.