

*The following is a testimony given by Carlotta Bertelli, exchange student of Lynn and Richard D'Antonio in 2008-09. Carlotta was 16 yrs old at the time. I found it going through my desk for the New Year! A story worth sharing:*

"U.S.A.: the land of great mountains and high skyscrapers; the land of traditions and innovations; the land of much diversity of skins and cultures; and the land of equality and unity under the colors of the same flag. The land where independence is celebrated and freedom has its own statue.

I came here from Italy as an exchange student willing to learn the language - of course - not only that: I wanted to have new experiences, my own experiences, far away from home, family and friends. I have always been very independent and this would have been a great chance to prove that I can make it by myself, that I don't need anyone but me.

This was what "being mature" meant to me.

I arrived here on the 19th of August and the first month was full of discoveries and surprises: everything was new to my eyes, from my host-family to all the people I met, from the house to the school and all the habits and ways of life I had to get used to. It hasn't been difficult and I settled in pretty well.

Everything was going on as I had expected it to be: I was improving my English, I was doing pretty well at school, the family that hosts me was nice and kind and I had friends to hang out with during the weekend.

Then suddenly things changed.

It was a Friday afternoon and as usual I came back home from school. No one was there and I decided to surprise my host-parents with an Italian dessert made by myself. It had to be fried so I put some oil on the stove waiting for it to start boiling. I had put it in a pan and covered it with a lid and when I took it off it was on fire. I was afraid of burning the kitchen but I didn't know how to manage it; instinctively I put some water in it and I ended up with third degree burns.

I won't tell what happened moment by moment; it would result as a mere taste of the macabre and I would really prefer to avoid it since it's not useful to the purpose of the story.

The reason I've mentioned this accident, indeed, is that it completely changed my view of things, my attitude, actually - I can tell - my whole life.

The oil had burned both my hands and my torso and I understood this time I couldn't make it by myself. I needed someone to take me to the emergency, I needed someone who cured me and I needed someone who cared about me to just stay beside my bed while I was shaking for pain

and cold. I needed help and I received it without even having to ask for it. Then they brought me to the St Mary's Hospital and I spent four days there. It was one of the most intense experiences I have ever had, both physically, mentally and emotionally speaking. Several times I have been thinking about this as a gift, and I can swear I wasn't under the effect of morphine or any other drug. I may be a dreamer, but I like to think that God let me make a mistake and feel pain to understand that I needed help. That He let me burn my armor of independence and strength, to clothe me with new skin as delicate and vulnerable as a baby's. I believe that He let me be born again in a new place and with a new family and friends; that He gave me the chance to have a mother, the one I have never had, who I dearly love and who I feel beloved by: like a baby I've been cleaned and fed, like a baby I have learned to laugh and cry without shame and then like a baby I discovered the sweetness of a hug and I experienced the mystery of a hand that can dry my tears like the infinite love of God can relieve my pain.

This is my story and I can't think of any other word to end it but a big THANK YOU!"

*I'm not sure if Carlotta gave this testimony at church or wrote it and gave it to Lynn. Carlotta is now 26, married, has a 2yr old, Francesca and she and her husband have an amazing photography business in Italy.*

Blessings to all in the New Year, Wink