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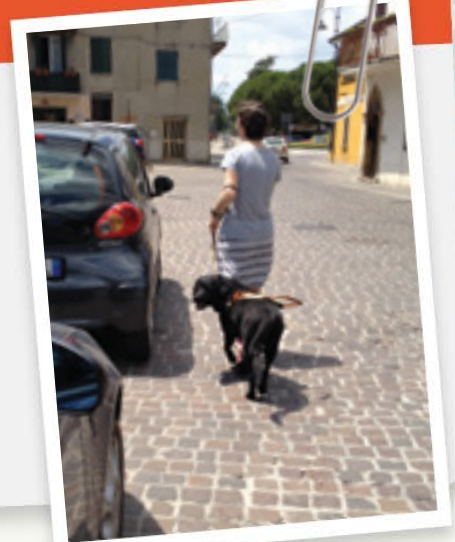
JAMEYANNE FULLER

LENGTH

NINE MONTHS

PROGRAM

FULBRIGHT ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP - ITALY



Natural Born Advocate Goes Abroad

Early on in her 9-month stay in Assisi, Italy, Jameyanne Fuller went to the supermarket to buy groceries, accompanied by the married couple who were her landlords, and her guide dog, Mopsy. When they got to the entrance, a worker blocked Jameyanne from entering. To avoid a scene, her landlords offered to get the items she needed, but she would have none of it.

“I said, ‘I’m not waiting here.’ And I pushed, until the person let me go in. I was going to be independent, and I was going to push back against people who told me I couldn’t do things.”

Jameyanne has lived a very active life as a blind person. Her family always supported her in whatever she wanted to do.

In Assisi, Jameyanne was participating on the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship where she taught at two high schools. At one school she taught students

English literature, social science, and other subjects. At the other school, she helped students who were taking technical courses such as electricity, plumbing, and accounting.

The Italian method of teaching is mostly a lecture model, with little input from students. Jameyanne came from a different tradition. She encouraged her students to ask questions and participate in class discussions.

“Their English improved considerably once they started talking. They had a lot of good, insightful questions, and we had deep conversations, particularly about issues that both American and Italian cultures have in common – what the issues are that everyone is facing.”

As a child Jameyanne took part in various programs for people who are blind. In high school, she hiked in the Andes and river-rafted the Grand Canyon as part of a youth adventure group. She had a special education advocate who helped her get services throughout elementary school, middle school, and high school. In her college, the disability services office helped her get whatever she needed.

Living in Italy was a different story. Italy has laws granting rights to people with disabilities, but the culture hasn't caught up with them. Cars often used the sidewalk as another lane. Bus drivers didn't always want her to get on their bus, or they forgot to tell her when her stop came up. Merchants sometimes didn't want her in their stores.

“Italy was the first time I really had to advocate for myself in a way I hadn't had to before. I realized not only could I advocate for myself, but I was good at it.”

Knowing she could be a strong advocate for herself and others also changed Jameyanne's mind about her future. She had planned on getting a Ph.D. in comparative literature, but ultimately decided to go to law school and is finishing up her first year as a law student.

“In college I didn't want to do anything that drew people's attention to the fact that I am blind. But in Italy, I realized the best person to represent blind people is someone who is blind.”

A few weeks before she returned to the United States, Jameyanne, Mopsy and her landlords, Bruno and Stefania, visited the L'Eremo delle Carceri Hermitage, where St. Francis of Assisi used to meditate. When they entered a small chapel, a nun scolded them for having a dog on the premises.

Before Jameyanne could say a word, Stefania confronted the nun, telling her that Italian law allows guide dogs in the chapel, and reminding her that the Hermitage was where St. Francis went to commune with animals. The chastened nun apologized.

Jameyanne was pleased at the exchange.

“It was a very telling moment for me. I realized how much I had changed these people's perspectives, about what I can do, and about the rights of someone with a disability.”

