

SE03EP09

Candi Obrentz: It All Goes Back to Italy

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: On this episode, we talk to alumna Candi Obrentz about her experience studying abroad in Florence and how it put her on a path that changed the course of her life - including a move to France, then to Manhattan, and to eventually starting her own company. Let's go to our conversation with Candi now.

H: Hey how are you today?

Candi (C): I'm doing well, thank you so much.

H: Awesome. Can you start us off by introducing yourself?

C: Yes, I'm Candi O'Brentz and I am a Manhattanite, I live in New York, New York. I went to Florida State, I graduated in the Spring of 1993 and I've been in New York 27 years.

H: Awesome, and can you tell us where you studied abroad while you were at FSU?

C: Absolutely, I studied through the Florence program in the summer of 1992.

Z: So can you tell us about why you wanted to study abroad and what your study abroad experience was like?

C: I was lucky because I went to Florida State so I had the awareness, keep in mind this was pre-internet so all of our information would have been in manuals and books and newspaper ads and that kind of a thing. So I was aware of the Florida State program, I knew that it had a fantastic reputation and I knew people who had studied through Florida State and I chose summer and Florence because it fit into my schedule and I thought it would be really great to be in Italy for the first time, I'd never left the country, and I also thought it would be really great to walk the streets and hear a different language for the first time.

H: Amazing and can you tell us, what did your study abroad experience teach you about yourself and how did it impact your plans after graduation?

C: I could honestly go on for hours but I won't bore you to tears because it had such a huge impact on my life. I think being overseas for the first time in a city like Florence was absolutely fantastic and at the time the program it was a six week summer program, and we squeezed a lot into that time. So the first thing was I didn't know anyone on my program and I didn't know Italian, so I was I threw myself into a situation of challenges. Of course I knew that I had staff there to help me if I needed it, I was never really alone even though I didn't know anyone. I had a roommate and I knew you know, you get to get to know people and you're surrounded by people but I was able to carve out my own experience and dive into Introduction to Italian and walk from you know my motel, pensione, to the study center and if I got lost find my way back to where I was going on my own. And it was just one of those things where I was on my own completely for the first time and knew that everything would be okay because I knew it would be.

Z: And how did that sort of impact like your future plans after you got home from your study abroad experience?

C: It's a great question it really did impact my entire life because I really got to know myself. And it sounds kind of hokey to say self-reliance but it's a really, it's a character strength building thing when you rely on yourself in a foreign land. And you know, as I mentioned, you've got staff there, you're never really alone but you really can create your own world within a world. And after leaving, which was really difficult and this was pre-social media and pre-internet so I'm thinking how am I going to keep in touch with these wonderful people and these wonderful instructors, and what am I going to do next, am I just going to go back to my old life? And people change, you evolve into who you could be, should be and I was given the gift of a round trip flight where ever I wanted to go in the world as long as I supported myself when I got there. So I took advantage of it and I moved to France for almost a year and being back in Europe, Western Europe, was really great. I got to go back to Florence, cried like a baby I was so excited to see the city again. And then I thought I need, I like being that small fish in a big pond. I really liked that being anonymous and being able to figure stuff out and the challenge of new experiences and endless opportunities. So I moved to New York and I've been here for over for 27 years. So I think I grew into myself during that summer and subsequently just kept realizing that relying on myself and figuring things out and bringing in new experiences to challenge me was the way that I thrived the most. Knowing my friends would always be there, I could always go back to Tallahassee or St. Petersburg, Florida or Florence. You can always go back and be in touch but to keep moving forward and see what sticks and what new things are out there that you may not have known about.

Z: Yeah, absolutely. I love that you mentioned the anonymity that comes with being in a big city. I think that that's something that I love about traveling too. Especially going to big cities and just sort of being, it gives you the space to be who you are. So I'm curious as to like why you think that that anonymous piece of a big city is beneficial personally to travelers.

C: That's a great question Zoë. I think it's, and I agree with you, and because I've been in New York for 27 years it's no longer, you know, I'm still anonymous at times but I think it's goes back to that self-reliance. And you, when you're in your own head and you rely on yourself to meet new people, to network, which is kind of going back to the Florence summer, you know a lot of the students went to Florida State but we didn't know each other. You create a new networking opportunity and all of a sudden you're having coffee with someone from who sat the back of class when you sat in the front and you develop a bond over a 10 minute coffee and that can last forever and I'm still in touch with these people, and we help each other, and we're in touch, and we celebrate each other's accomplishments and we're there for each other. But back to the anonymous question. I think it's just that idea of you just, you're in your own skin and you know what you like and what you don't and you can forge forward to meet your own needs instead of really doing what everyone else is doing or expecting what everyone else is doing, and the anonymous part is kind of fun because you can really expand you know professionally and personally and figure it out. But I think it's knowing that not everyone is, it's not always familiar and comfortable and you know its so cliché to say "leave your comfort zone," you don't have to jump out of it but if you leave it for just a little second, take a turn where you may not have taken a turn, whether it's on a straight or with your career, it's usually the reward outweighs the scariness that you felt at that moment.

Z: I love that that's really great advice for students considering studying abroad. So you talked a little bit about you know your career and taking a jump and things like that. So we want to hear more about after

you move to New York, just like can you talk about your career and how it's changed overtime and what that looked like?

C: Yes it's definitely, I jumped around quite a bit when I first moved to New York. I had a job, I didn't have a roommate, I didn't know anyone but I had a job that didn't go very well so it got me to the city, I left the job and temped which was very wild. But I got to meet a lot of people and realized what I didn't want to do and that I wanted to be in sales. I just wanted to meet people and have the endless opportunities of financial compensation and closing deals. And I did that I hopped around for a little while and then I landed at a global bank, which was great because I was exposed to international people and I thrived in that environment, being you know meeting people who understood my passion for traveling and we just kind of spoke the same language even though a lot of us didn't speak the same language. And I stayed, worked my way up, very hard for about 15 years at the same company. Which is very rare in general, very rare for me and after the company restructured I took a huge leap of faith and I went back to this leaving your comfort zone because 16 years is a long time to stay in one company and I thought I can do this. I moved to New York and didn't know anyone, I traveled around Europe by myself I can I think I can leave a company, let's let's figure this out. And I wound up forming my own business. I call myself the accidental inventor because I discovered a gap in the market for a product I wanted to buy and thought how hard could it be? Famous last words. Purchased *Inventing for Dummies* because I didn't know what I was doing and I thought "oh I think I need to Google how to do this" and realized I needed to form a company and hire people to help me and I did. It took me about a year and I launched the company to the market, I named it an Italian name, Resto Presto. And you know everything just kind of came back to Italy, as usual it's just amazing. And it got patented and it was on the Today show and all of these fabulous things happened and I realized I had to move my production from the good ol' USA, overseas and took a break and launched a second business where I actually consult and help people do what I did, smarter and faster. To say it's rewarding, I never thought I was an instructor and a teacher but I'm thriving and in this environment of explaining things and helping them create something from scratch, whether it's a business or a service, whether it's a product or a service, and it's just wild thing of thinking that I'm all of a sudden an advisor to people and they listen and it works and it's validating and it's pretty exciting.

H: I feel like I've heard a couple threads throughout what you've talked about like naming your company in Italian name and kind of going back to that so this next question hopefully you can expand on that a little bit. Looking back how would you say that your time in Florence has influenced your life?

C: It was, it was beautiful and when the way that it's impacted my life is I have very vivid memories of, and I don't know how to put it into words about stimulating senses without sounding you know cliché, after cliché, after cliché, but when you are in your element and you can touch something that's hundreds and hundreds of years old and you can smell you know the garlic and you look up and you see beautiful things... I can grasp that, I can go back to memories in my head when I want to but I can also seek out that same feeling in life. And I'm finding it in business, which is wild. It's just that thrill. And it doesn't have to be a huge rollercoaster thrill and it doesn't have to involve someone else, it could be reading something and connecting but it all goes back to the warm fuzzies that come with connecting with something. And I've been able to carry that through, I had it before I studied in Florence, but it really heightened my senses in a way that I am very in tune with what works for me and suggest if people can study abroad, because not everyone can especially, I mean irrespective of what's going on in the world right now, but it's you know it's a financial investment. But if people have the ability, I say do it. And try to maybe do it on your own, try to maybe not go with your posse. Because you know what? You've got FaceTime and

you've got email which I didn't have then and they're always going to be your friends. Carve out and experience for yourself and new experiences that you can carry with you and show them the photos, you're going to post it on Insta anyways, so they'll be with you in spirit.

Z: Yeah we hear that a lot from people. You know to go on your own, if you can and definitely just make it your own experience. So you've given you know that advice and a lot of advice throughout this interview, but we want to give you one more opportunity to give advice for any students that are considering study abroad.

C: I think if people, my whole thing is if you're thinking about it and you think about it a couple of times, particularly random times before you fall asleep at night, you know you're in the shower and you're thinking about it, do it. And sometimes you, you know there's this quote I actually have it at my desk and I and I say this quite often to people you know "you miss 100% of the shots you don't take" and it's a crazy world right now and I don't think it should be doomsday you know I must get all of these things in, but you will be entering a program that set up for you. You have got resources galore, things are organized, you have a criteria, you've got scheduling, you've got a place to live. Dive in, don't overthink it, make a list of a few things. Journal. Journal. Journal. Write about what happened, write about your emotions and what clicked. Keep in touch with everyone and just do it because chances are you're never going to look back and say I really wish I hadn't done that. What you're going to say is, "I wish I would've stayed longer" and "I really wish I would have had that extra coffee with you know, Guisepe, who I know who I didn't get a chance to talk to." It's usually what you didn't do while you were there or that it was too short of a period of time. But journal it, embrace it, and just look at it as a stepping stone to knowing yourself better which will enhance your life for years to come.

H: That's such a great outcome that really anyone can get from studying abroad. No matter what you choose to study, where you choose to go, how long you choose to stay, is really just that getting to know yourself piece and how that can impact and influence every aspect of your life. So that's really awesome advice. Candi, it's been so cool to hear your story and how Florence has really changed your life and to hear you put that into words is really fun and getting to reflect on my own study abroad experience through the things that you've been speaking about. And I just echo what you say, I hope that I hope that students do choose to have this adventure and choose to have this experience that will, that they'll carry with them for the rest of their lives. So, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today and for sharing your story.

C: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you, I really appreciate it Hannah, and thanks Zoë.

H: Before we disembark, we want to talk about Season 4 of the Noles Abroad podcast! We're so grateful for each of you for listening, and to those who have shared their stories on the podcast. We are excited to hear from more of you about your experiences abroad in Season 4 and beyond! We love talking about our study abroad experiences and are happy to have this community to share in the joy of international education.

Z: Since there is only one more episode coming in season 3, we're starting to look ahead to the next season. We're looking for students, faculty, staff, and alumni who have studied or taught abroad with FSU and want to share their story on our podcast. If that sounds like you, send us an email at IP-Media@fsu.edu. Also, we want to hear your feedback! Leave us a review on Apple Podcasts and let us know what your favorite episode has been so far!

H: Thanks again to Candi for talking with us today, and to all of our amazing listeners!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.