



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIMMY PASSALACQUA

LEFT: Passalacqua looks out of the window of La Mole, a cinema museum famous for being the highest point in Torino. “My friends was the best experience, the people I met and the places I went.” RIGHT: Passalacqua stands and admires the view of Italian mountains on his way to a small French Province.

# Un viaggio in Italia: a trip to Italy

By Diajah Williams & Izzy Ellery  
STAFF REPORTER & EDITOR

He traveled an ocean away. He swam through waters most can only dream of.

Last school year, senior Jimmy Passalacqua left the Grosse Pointe bubble and embarked on a journey of education that changed his life forever.

Passalacqua attended school in Torino, Italy for nine months as a foreign exchange student. He was able to participate in this experience because of the encouragement of his mom and his Italian teacher and the promise his father made.

“My dad told me he would get me there in this life or the next, and that’s exactly what he did. So when the opportunity presented itself in front of me, I took it, and I’m very lucky to have been in that position,” Passalacqua said.

He went to Torino blind, knowing little Italian.

“I took two years of Italian, but I didn’t really learn that much, so I basically went in there knowing like ‘pizza,’ ‘pasta’ and ‘ciao,” Passalacqua said. “That’s about it. Other than that, I had to learn.”

When Passalacqua arrived in Torino, he and his new family didn’t get along very well. He switched host families after three months and was grateful.

“I had to switch families because the first family didn’t like me very much. It was just weird because we didn’t communicate enough. I would go home from school, eat lunch and go up to my room and wouldn’t see them till the next day,” Passalacqua said. “I switched to a very nice family that lived outside the city, about 40 minutes. All the kids in the first family like shunned me and like didn’t talk to me, like nobody talked to me. I was just by myself.”

School life in Torino was a different story, however. It was Passalacqua’s escape from the awkwardness he faced at home. At school he made many friendships. Academically, school was a challenge for him, but teachers there, although they spoke no English, helped pave the way.

“I actually looked forward to school ‘cause I had someone to talk to, at least; I made some friends, but yeah, like school was impossible,” Passalacqua said. “It was so impossible that like there was no way I was gonna pass. I would do stuff, and they’d give me like a passing grade as long as I tried and put in effort.”

Passalacqua found the students to be his main source of enjoyment while he stayed in Torino. Making friends didn’t seem to be as difficult as he expected it to be, which made the trip a lot more pleasant.

“I thought it was gonna be pretty hard

because like I walked in class and met everybody, and nobody seemed surprised, like nothing new, but as soon as the first interval came, I made a bunch of friends. They just came up to me like, ‘Oh, you Jimmy? From America?’” Passalacqua said.

The friendships that he formed with the other students proved to be as genuine as any.

“They had my back, like if I had to talk about anything, they were there for me. Because while I was there, I had problems, you know, and they were the only people I had to vent to,” Passalacqua said. “I couldn’t vent to my mom or anything. I would go a long time without talking to my mom. But my friends were there for me. They seemed more caring. I don’t know, maybe they just understand things better, I guess, just in that way I guess it’s different.”

These friends also became personal tour guides for Passalacqua. Rather than going to the movies or the mall, they took him sightseeing around the city.

“We’d go walk around because I’d make them take me around and walk,” Passalacqua said. “You walk everywhere. Nobody drives anywhere, really. You have to be like 18 to drive. You take like buses everywhere to explore the city.”

Albina Trumza, Passalacqua’s Italian teacher and one of the people who encour-

aged him to take the trip, sees the difference in Passalacqua since his return.

“He’s so proud of this experience. It has increased his self-esteem and confidence tremendously. What he thought of himself before was nowhere comparable with what I see in him today,” Trumza said. “I feel like he is becoming kind of popular in school. Everyone knows, ‘Oh Jimmy, he was in Italy,’ which is good. And I’m really proud of him with the progress that he did and the courage he had to go there.”

Upon returning home, Passalacqua discovered that he didn’t actually get awarded with any serviceable high school credits for the classes he attended in Italy. He walked away with a bounty of knowledge but still has a hefty senior year to attend to.

“My senior year isn’t chill; I have classes I need to pass. I was supposed to get credit, but I didn’t. Like I got generic credit, so it only looks good for college,” Passalacqua said. “It says that I did a year, but it doesn’t count.”

Catching up with school and friends has been a tough adjustment for Passalacqua, and he acknowledges he missed out on a lot while he was gone.

“Yeah for sure I did, but it’s whatever. I gained a lot more than I missed.”

## Senior continues passion with sixth year of medical research

By Andrea Scapini  
EDITOR

While many kids avoid stepping through the doctor’s office doors at all costs, senior Jayla Hubbard has always been fascinated by the experience. She remembers from a young age constantly asking her doctor medical questions to satisfy her craving for knowledge.

“I’ve always loved science,” Hubbard said. “When I was younger I would go into the doctors’ office, and my doctor is a good friend of the family. You could say he inspired me a little because I could ask him questions and he could answer them for me.”

Because of her early interest in science, Hubbard jumped at an opportunity to begin medical research through Ecotek, a program initiated by lab director Keith Young at Wayne State when she was in seventh grade.

“The director of my lab, Keith Young, has this idea that if you have a passion for something, in order to actually hone in on your skills, you have to start young. I always had a passion for science but I never knew how far-ranged it could go,” Hubbard said. “There’s research aspects of it and there’s clinical aspects of it that I don’t think my peers have been exposed to that I’ve been exposed to since I was 11.”

Young believes that in order to be a professional at something, one has to be committed to that craft and love it.

“In the lab, it’s critical that you’re passionate about the work that you do because I’m not going to be the person that has to remind you about the greatness that you think you want to achieve,” Young said. “Dreams are really just goals with timelines, so if somebody says, ‘One day I’m going to be a neurologist’ or ‘One day I’m going to be an architect,’ that one day could be today.”

This attitude of pursuing what she loves has been a part of Hubbard’s life from even before she was introduced to Young.

“My mom and dad have always pushed me to pursue what I like and that’s kind of

inspiring because they do what they like. My mom’s a speech pathologist and my dad’s an entrepreneur and he loves business,” Hubbard said. “The fact that I’m pursuing what I love—the inspiration came from my parents.”

Her parents, Everett and Jenetta Hubbard, have taught Hubbard through their example.

“We just believe that hard work pays off and we’ve always just told her to find her passion in life. That’s kind of difficult when you’re talking to a 11 and 12 year old, but it was about just finding what makes you feel good inside and then just give it everything you have,” Jenetta Hubbard said. “I’m just really proud of her because we never knew that she would have all the opportunity that she has now.”

Among the opportunities was a summer-long internship at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

“There’s research everywhere at Hopkins. Every step you take there’s a research building. I was in the hospital campus so I was able to be exposed to medicine as well as research whereas at Wayne I’m not necessarily exposed to the medical aspect of sciences,” Hubbard said.

Although research has been such a large part of her life thus far, Hubbard doesn’t intend on choosing a career directly involving research. Despite this, she plans on staying connected with research studies throughout her life.

“I definitely want to be a physician but I think that even in the position of being a doctor, I want to know the new drugs coming out or the new treatments. I want to be that doctor who is on the cutting edge of research,” Hubbard said. “Even if I don’t do research, I’ll always love the development of new things, new innovations. It’s just a cool thing to me.”

“You know how a football player loves football? And even if they were to stop playing they’d be devastated? I think I would be devastated if I stopped being around research. It’s just a love of mine.”



BRIGITTE SMITH

Senior Jayla Hubbard applies her love for science in and out of school. “I found myself freshman year sometimes teaching the class. I had Mrs. Ternes, who’s now Mrs. Michels, and she would sometimes refer to me like, ‘Jayla can you answer this question,’ because she knew I knew.”