

Home



"Venice's Grand Canal," by Jocelyn Phillips '06

"Home" is generally defined as "one's place of residence, or the social unit formed by a family living together." While traveling in Venice, we had the opportunity to visit a very different type of home, one of great beauty interlaced with silent whispers of sadness: the Jewish Ghetto.

The beautifully gilded synagogues, carved banisters and tessellated floors showed no sign of the suffering we would have witnessed in years and centuries past. The rituals we studied here were religious acts, acts that perhaps provided a sense of normalcy amid the pain and separation from home and family. These ritual spaces were spaces of calm, hope and prayer, representing salvation and optimism. Although we could not see the tangible signs of suffering, there were visual clues as to the amount of hope that once rested in these places of worship.

As a visitor, I couldn't help but imagine the challenges faced by those forced to call the Jewish Ghetto home. Our comprehension of Jewish culture and the delicate balance of religion, faith and ritual requires us to witness these places in the present and study them as they existed in the past. The visit made me think that perhaps a more thorough definition of "home" would be not only where one's physical body lives, but also where the heart, soul, optimism and faith reside.

—By Margaret Astolfi '07

Margaret Astolfi and Jocelyn Phillips were students in Professor Allison Levy's "Ritual and Representation in Early Modern Florence" course, which studied in Italy during the 2005 winter break.