

Dear Mr. Sutherland,

I would just like to take a moment to say thank you for the best experience of my life! When I found out about AMA back in September, I was hooked in the first five minutes. Mr. MacAvaney explained to me in detail what the trip was all about. I went home both excited and nervous about what my parents would say. Asking to go to Europe wasn't like asking for 20 bucks for gas.. So I went home and talked to my parents about possibly joining the 2009 Empire Tour. My parents were very excited I had been given such a wonderful opportunity, however the cost of the trip was a large obstacle I faced. At first, I thought about selling candy, but my busy schedule did not allow the time. I went through numerous options, and all seemed too time consuming. After a week of thinking I thought, "a bottle drive!" I pitched the idea to my parents, and to be quite honest they thought I was crazy! I was convinced that I was going to get myself to Europe somehow, so I started making flyers right away. In them, I explained who I was and that I was attending SUNY Fredonia in the fall to major in music education, and so on. I explained that this trip would be a wonderful experience as a musician, but unfortunately the cost of the trip was too much to afford without fundraising. I decided to have a bottle drive on the first Saturday of every month from September until July. The neighborhood and close friends could drop off their bottles and cans in my driveway on the specified dates, and my parents and I would return them all for cash. I went to every single house in my neighborhood and dropped a flyer in the mailbox.

Believe it or not, my silly bottle drive idea was a hit. I had piles of garbage bags overflowing with bottles and cans every month. Sometimes I would come home after school in the middle of the week and find a bag or two of bottles sitting in my driveway. The people in my neighborhood were extremely supportive. Not only did both friends and strangers donate their bottles and cans, but many sent money in the mail as well. The

first week, I received a letter in the mail with a check for \$100.00 from a stranger that lived up the street. It simply stated "good luck." I was amazed. I introduced myself to this man and he didn't have much to say. He just thought it was a good cause. From then on, I would receive envelopes with \$10.00 here and \$15.00 there. Many attached letters that said they weren't soda drinkers, but they wanted to donate to my cause. I didn't even ask anyone for donations, only bottles and cans, yet my bottle drive brought in a lot of money.

All said and done, I raised over half of my trip with this bottle and can drive. I was headed to Europe! The 2009 AMA Tour exceeded every expectation that I had of the trip. I went home with more friends than I had ever imagined. As I stepped off of the bus in Westmoreland after almost 3 weeks of vacation, I had my very own receiving line with hugs from friends that had become family. I loved everything about the AMA Tour, and I only hope that I can join once again someday (even if it means collecting bottles and cans for 10 months!).

Sincerely,

Corrinne S.