I attended the Montessori School of Rome for eight years. My MSR experience began when I was a third-year primary student in what would be Mrs. Kumar’s last class and continued until I completed seventh grade- and I loved every moment of it. Montessori’s unique teaching style creates a learning environment that encourages questions, values diversity, and enables students, and I could not be more grateful for the skills I gained here.

It seems like education today is all about numbers- about grades and standardized test scores and other forms of extrinsic motivation that seems to stifle the purest form of learning. My experience at MSR was vastly different. Our teachers were wonderful and compassionate and nurturing, and they worked with each student’s individual needs. I remember all of them encouraging me to take on new challenges and work ahead to make sure I was never bored. I got to control my own learning, and they facilitated my acceleration with so much enthusiasm and love. Whether I was hunched over at a desk or huddled around the green lesson table or sprawled beside a rug on the ground, the greatest reward for my hard work was a sense of satisfaction and pride. I looked forward to coming to class each day. I wanted to complete more Albanesi cards that day than I did the day before- write more in my morning journal, copy notes from the board more quickly and cleanly. I think there was a healthy sense of competition, but greater than that was just this drive to be the best that I could be. MSR really helped cultivate my love for learning. I wasn’t embarrassed to be smart, and I wasn’t afraid to ask questions, and I was never ashamed of wanting to learn more. I can’t overstate how far this attitude has carried me and continues to carry me today in college. Even now, I enjoy reading my chemistry textbooks and asking questions in large lecture halls and working for hours on end in preparation for a test. What a gift it has been to truly love learning.

Growing up as an Indian-American in a predominantly white town can be a daunting challenge, but I never felt that identity crisis because MSR was so open to appreciating new cultures. My Indian heritage seemed to fit so seamlessly, and I never remembering being uncomfortable with it. I studied remarkable Indian people of the past for Historical Timeline and delved into Ancient India one International Day where I wore a half-sari and ate Indian food with pride. I remember being a budding Bharatanatyam dancer and showing some of the younger classes a dance I had just learned and their warm response really solidified my appreciation and love for a sacred art that has now become irrevocably intertwined with my life. It almost baffles me to look back on my experience and remember how all cultures –not just my own- were respected and celebrated because such true cultural diversity is just so rare in our world today. We had Spanish and French lessons, dressed up like ancient Egyptians, sang Japanese songs at the Holiday Program, and even traveled to England with our class of four adolescents, a trip that I will cherish forever.

The mixed age classrooms were one of my favorite aspects of the Montessori environment. Getting to help the younger students not only reinforced concepts that I had learned before, but it taught me how to be a role model and how to be a leader. Working with the older students that I looked up to presented a constant challenge of reaching their level- one that I thoroughly enjoyed. The values of honesty, kindness, and integrity that I learned at home were reinforced each and every day in the classroom, equipping me with a high moral fiber that I uphold today. There was never any gender bias- never once did I feel lower or lesser or not enough because I was girl; this was so fundamental to my personal development that I was baffled to learn that many of my fellow female peers in college did not receive the same treatment when they were younger. The idea that teachers favor boys or that girls are conditioned to believe that they can’t achieve as much as boys can is so foreign to me based on my own personal experiences, even though it seems to be a prevalent, if tacit, notion in our society.

I am so grateful to the Montessori School of Rome and to Maria Montessori and her philosophy for creating a nurturing learning environment and constantly challenging me with rigorous academics. For helping me every single step of the way as I developed into an independent, inquisitive, hard-working, honest, accountable, responsible, compassionate Indian-American, woman, student, friend, mentor, role model, and leader. For helping me create friendships with other students and my teachers that will last a lifetime. And for enabling me to love learning, to always work my hardest, to never give up, and to always be the best version of myself.

I look back on my days at MSR fondly, and I wholeheartedly recommend it for high-achieving children of all ages and backgrounds.