The Jane C. Waldbaum scholarship helped cover my costs for the Astypalaia Bioanthropology Field School in Greece this summer. Including airfare, the total expenses for the field opportunity amounted to around $6,000, so I am very grateful for the aid of the Waldbaum scholarship.

The site focused on the infant, neonate, and preterm skeletons from a Classical Greek cemetery on the Greek island of Astypalaia. It is the largest children’s cemetery in the world with over 2,700 burials. The field school itself is part of a decade long (and continuing) rescue excavation, because the landowners are looking to build where the cemetery is currently located. It is a joint effort between the Institute of Archaeology at the University College London and the 22nd Ephorate of Prehistoric Classical Antiquities.

Each individual was taken out of the soil in a small vessel, usually an amphora, and we learned how to excavate the bones from the hard soil ball that remained. It took a few days to get through each pot as we needed to photograph, plan, excavate, and identify every bone and feature that we found. It is amazing what will survive after over 2,500 years in the ground. It was not uncommon to find tiny teeth, inner ear bones, and even epiphyses.

We worked at a laboratory which was an old school house. It was located right next to the castle at the top of the hill. We climbed that hill every morning, about a 25 minute walk.

Every day we worked from 7:00am until 3:00pm with two half hours for breakfast and lunch. It sounds like a long time, but the work needed to be extremely careful and was thus time consuming. I learned so much in those few weeks. Before this field school, I had taken some courses on osteology but knew little about conservation methods or excavation techniques. It was so satisfying to have a true hands on experience after having only read about these ideas in textbooks.

Excavation was a delight, though the fact that we dealt with human remains did often feel odd and invasive. Yet, there was a sense of satisfaction in knowing that we were at least saving these skeletons from being crushed into concrete. I would say that the greatest thing I learned from my experience at field school was that human connections exist across generations, even those who are apart thousands of years. I would highly recommend this program for anyone who is interested in bioarchaeology and the early development of the human skeleton.

I have attached two photographs from my experience. They are just a small sampling of the beauty of the island.
Part of the walk up to the laboratory

The view of the water from the laboratory