

# *A Trip to Italy*

## *...Che Bello!*



*The Ancient City of Narnia in Umbria*

### ***Two Years of Planning***

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*Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem  
In Rome, Umbria and Tuscany*

*A Trip to Italy*

*Che Bello!*

*Two Years of Planning*

*Two Weeks of Fun, Food and Mayhem*

*In Rome, Umbria and Tuscany*

*.....by John Perides*



*...for the dreams of my parents, Assunta and Steve...*



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# *A Trip to Italy...Che Bello!*



*Annual May 15 Festival in Gubbio, Race of the Ceri*

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*A Trip to Italy... Che Bello!*



*Gelato in Siena*

***Part 3***

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*The Joy and the Journey Continues  
Through Umbria and Tuscany*

## Chapter 17

### *A Weekend Off in Umbria*



## *The Weekend Plan*

*Saturday, August 28*

*7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*8 a.m. Donna and Liz rendezvous in L'Antico Forziere lobby with John Perides for departure and return trip to Fiumicino Airport. If you would like to return to Rome for an informal day of touring, you can join us on this drive to Rome.*

*Those of you remaining at L'Antico Forziere may do anything you want the rest of the day.*

*10:30 a.m. Arrive at Fiumicino Airport Departures Terminal 5. Drop off Donna and Liz for return flight to Philadelphia.*

*11 a.m. Group continues on to Rome for informal day of touring. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of Rome, maybe the Baths of Caracalla, the Catacombs or the Appian Way.*

*11:50 a.m. Donna and Liz: US Airways Flight 719 to U.S.*

*5 p.m. John and Diane will depart Rome for return to L'Antico Forziere*

*8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*Sunday, August 29*

*7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*9 a.m. Optional. Church in Casalina.*

*10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns.*

*8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

### ***The Reality...***

*Our in-between Saturday in Umbria was the day of departure for Donna and Liz. Once again Alesandro made sure we had breakfast goodies ahead of the normal time, and we were off on the E45 and A1 heading south toward Rome and the Fiumicino Airport. Originally I figured after the airport drop we could spend the day in a slow tour of ancient Roman ruins in Rome, but Diane, Judy and Dave decided to rest up at L'Antico Forziere in preparation for our second full week of touring Umbria and Tuscany.*

*Donna, Liz and I shoved off right on time and we made fantastic time getting to the airport. Following the best instructions I could find on the internet, I*

dropped the girls off at Terminal 3 which in some literature is called Terminal C so they could catch the bus to the new Terminal 5 where international arrivals and departures were now taking place. They had built Terminal 5, identified here as Satellite Terminal, on a back lot a year or so ago and there was absolutely nothing in any of the available airport



information indicating that you could drive all the way to Terminal 5. There it is in the upper left of this airport diagram with

no apparent automobile access road and not called Terminal 5 at all. As usual - think Italy here - OPPOSITE is the golden rule, because there is a roadway for drop-offs at Terminal 5. It is just a secret, and I found it after I had dropped the girls off. The next morning I received e-mails from both Donna and Liz saying that they made all of their connections in Rome and Philadelphia and were safely home, so at least that worked well.

I left the airport, set BB for a new course and started heading back to our Rome hotel, dei Consoli to search for my electric shaver which had been missing my entire first week in Umbria. This is why in some of the photos of me in Assisi I looked like Gabby Hayes. On the way over I called Fabrizio our friendly desk clerk. He remembered me (good tip) quickly did a

search and checked with the rest of the staff. Fabrizio assured me no one had found anything fitting the description of my shaver in a small black bag. I knew it would do no good if I showed up at the hotel, so I thanked him and reset BB for Casalina and L'Antico Forziere. Naturally since I had no time deadlines at all, the A1 and E45 were clear sailing all the way back home.

I managed to make it back by mid-afternoon and joined Diane by the pool for a dip, some reading and snoozing. That night we had another great meal at our little country inn, and other than the 300 kilometers of driving it turned out to be my first really restful day of the trip. I have to admit my 3 hours alone in the car that day were good. I could play any CD I wanted, sing to my heart's content and act as if, as I said before to the staring women of San Giusto, "Sono matto" (I'm a little bit crazy). Of course there were a lot of Italians in other cars singing to themselves, too.

Sunday was another laundry day. We cut ourselves a break and slept-in getting to the breakfast room just in the nick of time. We agreed to leave at 10 a.m. for our favorite laundromat. As we weaved through the streets of Casalina there were no cars parked near the church so we figured we would just have to give ourselves a special vacation dispensation. We were in Collazone in 3 more minutes, only this time someone beat us by a hair to the machines. Well, we

all had books, it was a sunny day, cooler temperatures and there was plenty of street entertainment. Actually the little strip mall shopping center was deserted except for the woman and her teenage daughter who had beaten us to the machines. They turned out to be our street entertainment.

We were all dressed in shorts and tee shirts to do the laundry. She was dressed in 300 euro rhinestone jeans, a sequenced top, long ear rings, a designer bag and Jimmy Choo shoes – well they may have been Ferragamos. Dressed in worn, ripped jeans the daughter presented a more disconnected view of the world around her.



What was entertaining about this mother-daughter duo is they had no reservation about fighting in public. As I have observed in life with some other mother-daughter combos, their world is “the world.” The rest of us might well have been graffiti on a wall when they got down to arguing. These two had a pattern that repeated for the 45 minutes we were all together. The mom would bark out a command in Italian, the daughter would ignore it or scowl, and the mom would go into a Ferragamo tirade. They finally got their clothes loaded and the machine started. They went to their car to sit and wait. It was then that the

cannolis hit the fan. The mom discovered one more of the daughter's items to be washed lying in the back seat of the car. The front-load washer was already in motion, filled and automatically locked shut, so there was no dropping it in with the rest of the load. I was sitting in my car "reading" – well, I was really peering through my sunglasses at this dynamic duo as a new installment of Italian World Wide Wrestling Federation was performed, verbally of course. Now I know there is no payoff in stepping in at a moment like this with loved ones, much less strangers. I just cowered in my seat waiting for the sun to go down or a rainstorm to douse them, but it was sunny and about 11 a.m. They eventually calmed down but amidst all of the ancient ruins and churches we had seen during the week, it was refreshing to see something modern or at least current being played out.

After about an hour and a half we finally had all of our laundry through the washing machines and out of the dryers – those Miele's are the fastest dryers I have ever seen. We headed back to L'Antico Forziere and as we passed the big church in the middle tiny Casalina there were dozens of cars parked all around it all pointing in like at a Stewart's Root Beer snack bar. We had tried attending the Saturday night mass at Madonna dei Bagni again only they had switched back from the summer mass schedule to the winter schedule, so when we pulled up at 7 p.m. all of the 5:30 p.m. mass goers were cleared out and a few old Italian men were stacking the folding chairs. Now on

our return from the laundry, it looked like we missed the Sunday mass in Casalina, too. I quickly drove the 5 minutes to our inn and dropped off Judy, Dave and Diane who wanted to fold laundry and crash rather than attend 5 minutes at the end of mass. I turned around and scooted back to the church, fully expecting the congregation to be walking out the door. Nope, it was still quiet with all of the parked cars waiting for root beer service.

I parked and went to the front door, but I couldn't find a handle. I stuck my fingers in a small hole in the door and pulled - nothing. The door wouldn't open. There were people sitting in folding chairs across the street watching my plight. I turned, shrugged my shoulders and raised my palms to the sky. They simply smiled, remained seated and made a twisting motion with their hands like they were unlocking a door. There it was a big old brass key in the giant front door a little higher than normal. I reached up, turned it and the door popped right open.



Mass was only about halfway done, so I slipped into one of the wooden pews. The pews also had permanent hardwood kneelers, and believe me even the 90-year olds knelt at the right portion of the mass. Out of self-respect I had to do so, as well. I had expected in such a small town to find a small, simple church with an aged interior. Nope! This tiny

*town had simpler adornments but in perfect condition in a building with high vaulted ceilings. The architecture was definitely Renaissance, so the building must have been hundreds of years old. The walls and ceiling were painted a bright, unmarked eggshell blue. The ceiling had also been painted over in white and light gray to resemble heavenly clouds with some gold trim against the sky blue. The walls were adorned with six spectacular framed paintings that were on wood or canvas. Each was about 6' by 8' and depicted - what else? - important bible scenes.*

*I arrived after the homily but just before the consecration had begun. Since the mass is the same in every language in the world, it was easy for me to follow along, and I just prayed in English when it was time for prayer responses. Eighty percent of the people around me were 70 to 90 years old. I guessed this because they looked like they were in their 60s and 70s. The rest were a few young families with children who either had decided to remain in little Casalina or were visiting family. I was the only outsider and in shorts to boot! It was easy to tell that some of the elderly folks were either grandparents or great-grandparents of the small children who were very well-behaved.*

*When the mass ended, I spent an extra 15 minutes walking around the church studying the pictures and altars – there were two side altars in addition to the main altar. I found a wonderful prayer candle*

*display unlike anything I had ever seen before. Nowadays in the US you generally find electric candles due to fire insurance requirements. Here the candles were small votives sitting loosely on flat metal plates that extended like tree branches around a central pineapple-shaped trunk. The branches made all of the lit candles float out in mid-air. A few were already lit. I lit 3 candles, one each for Diane, Judy and Dave, and offered up a prayer that the second week of their stay in Umbria would be as fruitful as the first. I noticed the priest was besieged with people waiting for special requests so I did not try to speak with him. We probably would have only been able to use the arm waving pidgin-Italio-American dialect anyway.*

*I worked my way out of the church and back to the inn where I told Diane and Judy about my church adventure. They were amazed that I had finally made it into an open church with a real weekend mass going on inside. The only other places we had seen a real mass taking place was in St. Peter's Basilica and the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi but at those moments we were on guided tours.*

*It was lunchtime and everyone was hungry. We decided to head back to the laundry shopping center for lunch in another one of those unimpressive storefronts that once again turned out to be modern, brightly decorated and clean inside when we stepped across the magic threshold. Italian design is amazing. In a country of so much old stuff, the new is mostly hidden from view and always sneaks up on you. You must try going into a few places that just look doubtful from the outside to understand the full impact of this dichotomy. It seemed to be a pizzeria, but it had several varieties of fresh roasted meats for hot plates or sandwiches. There it was, a perfectly roasted leg of lamb. Let's see, should I have the pizza? Not on your life! I asked for the lamb using my best international finger-pointing technique and they understood completely. Next thing I knew I had a mountain of roasted lamb on my plate with roasted tomato and some other roasted vegetables.*



*Score another one for us, the poor unfortunates - we were trapped far from home in a land of perfect food. Ha!*

*With lunch under our belts we headed north on the E45 for a leisurely walk around Perugia.*



**Perugia** is a lively town with a major university where kids from America and England flock to be immersed in the Italian language, the culture and to

meet Italian kids. This is where Californian Anne Robichaud, our Gubbio guide, taught English to Italian students 40 years ago before her tour business and Pino's masonry business took off.

Parking here was about the easiest I found during the whole trip. As we started the climb toward town there were road signs with "Parcheggio or the big white P on a blue background" and clear arrows pointing the way. We soon found ourselves inside of a modern parking facility with covered levels tiled up the side



of the mountain. Attaching all of these was an escalator that took us up the hill to the train and bus station. From here it was just a short walk on sidewalks, up a few steps and another escalator to the [underground](#) portion of the Centro Storico. The ancient tunnels of underground Perugia date back

2,000 to 3,000 years to the Etruscans way before the Romans were conquering the lands. Even on a hot summer day these tunnels with brick walls and vaulted brick ceilings were cool as a cucumber. We were not yet at the top but eventually found ourselves in a venerable old neighborhood crawling with students and tourists. One more escalator up and we emerged into the portico of a large building.



Next to us in the street was a very large farmer's market with many stands selling the expected fruits or vegetables and others with unexpected artistic treasures. We wandered independently and

searched all of the tables of instruments, pottery, old jewelry and tomatoes. I took off to the end of the street which let out into a park with a few dozen stone benches, walkways and trees. Every bench was taken either by students or adults quietly passing this sunny Sunday afternoon. The students were also sitting and lying all over the grassy areas between the curved walks reminding me of the Mall at NYU's uptown campus back in the sixties. I moved over to the short wall at the perimeter of the park and found another magnificent



view of the countryside to the south. We were near

*the top of this mountain and it also commanded a view that stretched for 20 or thirty miles to the east past Assisi and all the way down to Spoleto which appeared as a tiny white speck on its hill top.*

*The details of the town of Assisi were far more discernible.*

*It suddenly was crystal clear why*



*these two towns were such bitter rivals over the centuries. They could each see the other develop and grow very clearly. The threat was evident. I had seen the much larger Perugia from a similar vantage point in Assisi earlier in the week. I had no idea that Assisi would be as clear from Perugia since it is much smaller. I guess I thought it would look more like Spoleto did from this spot.*

*I rejoined our little group amidst the trinkets and knick-knacks, and we headed for the heart of the city. Diane suddenly was consumed on her mission from God – to find the precious Baci. Baci is the brand name of a famous Perugian chocolate candy made with delicious rich dark chocolate and*

hazelnuts. Its reputation is worldwide and it is the reason that every October the European community descends upon Perugia for Eurochocolate. Not only did we find a Baci candy bar, we found a whole store named Baci! In we went and in less than two minutes were munching on our first tastes of this delight. The creamy sensation just melted in your mouth and the crunch of the



hazelnuts made your soul sing. A second bar went into a bag along with a tube-shaped stick of individually wrapped round Baci that was quickly followed by a small box of round Baci. We were

set and smiling, so we worked our way toward the main piazza in the [centro storico](#) of the town.





When we got to the Fontana Maggiore located in the Piazza IV Novembre we encountered yet another wedding party all lined up in front of the building containing [La Sala dei Notari](#), a very famous music

venue. The exterior of this building and the piazza were very impressive backdrops for the 60 or so Italians who were trying to jam into the wedding party pictures. There was even a street drunk who was trying to get into the action yelling at the bride and groom, probably



for money to leave them all alone, but two big limousine drivers muscled him out of the way and gave him the heave ho.

We hung around for a while watching the wedding party festivities and then worked our way out of the piazza. We found restaurants and tabacchi shops on the side streets and even a patisserie. Naturally a

*stop in the patisserie was in order and delicious Italian cookies were scored!*

*In a nearby tabacchi shop we found our Baci candy bars for less money than we had just paid in the fancy Baci Shop. We bought another bar. In another tabacchi shop we*



*found GOLD! Well not gold, but golden yellow Limoncello. Above the cheap Baci bars and expensive cigarettes there were about 10 or 12 varieties of the precious golden liquid. Compared to liquor stores in the States, these were dirt cheap – about half the cost or less. We found a fancy enough looking bottle and bought it as a souvenir for a loved one back home. He will get it for his birthday if he is good. We worked our way out of town, to our car, successfully paid the robot at the parking lot exit, and found our way back to our Ancient Treasure Chest for a restful afternoon and evening....*



## Chapter 18

### *A Bountiful Day in Tuscany*



*Festa in Radde-in-Chianti*

## *The Plan...*

*Monday, August 30*

*7:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*8:00 a.m. Depart for Siena, Tuscany.*

*10:00 a.m. Rendezvous with Beauty in Italy private tour guide for morning tour of Siena (included).*

*1:00 p.m. At your option you may join us for a quick snack in Siena or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location to depart for San Gimignano.*

*1:30 p.m. Depart for San Gimignano.*

*2:30 p.m. Arrive in San Gimignano. Park and walk to Piazza del Duomo*

*3 p.m. Join afternoon guided group walking tour of San Gimignano (included).*

*6 p.m. Depart for L'Antico Forziere. We have the opportunity to stop in Panzano or Greve, in the Chianti Region of Tuscany for a wine, cheese and salami tasting (freelance).*

*9 p.m. Dinner (freelance) in Radda in Chianti during return to L'Antico Forziere.*

## *The Reality...*

Well it was Monday, again, now in Week 2 in Umbria. Liz and Donna had successfully jetted back home and they each reported to us that they were safely ensconced in their homes in Plattsburg, NY and Lumberton, NC. This was likely a bit of a come down since Liz faced summer in Plattsburg which can occasionally look like this, and Donna was now back to cooking



for herself or eating out at Fuller's Buffet out on the interstate. After jet-setting to Rome, touring the Green Heart of Italy, experiencing the joys of Gustavo's Salumificio and Cantine, and eating fine foods for 10 days, Fuller's might not be high on her list - but hey, they were both home safe and sound and its oh so nice to get home.

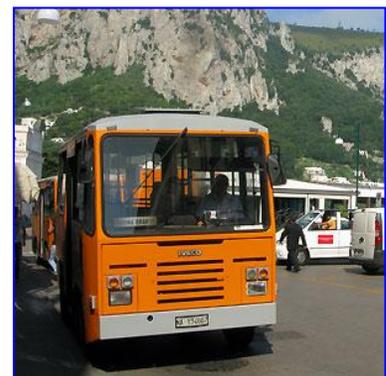
Dave, Judy, Diane and I were about to embark on our next Tuscan adventure. We were off to [Siena](#) and with any luck; we might fit San Gimignano into the day's itinerary. Driving to Siena we saw just about the same scenery as on the way to Florence. From Casalina, Florence and Siena are relatively close to

each other, and BB advised the same high-speed roads most of the way. BB took us right to the edge of town. We planned on using one of the lower Parcheggio this time to avoid any conflicts between the side panels of our car and rock walls that had been put in place about 2,000 years earlier. Since my van and I were the newcomers, I couldn't claim that the rock was poorly placed. A Parcheggio appeared



miraculously as we made the turn from the highway toward Siena. It was on one of the many Google Maps I had of this area, but where was Siena? We couldn't see it. We couldn't detect any sign of the city. We parked for free, and I immediately ran - walked fast - to a nearby little bus stop shelter where there were several seated women. In my best Italian I said, "Es autobus a Siena?" "Si, si." Oh boy, we had struck gold. Not only did they understand my half-Italian half-Spanish question, but it actually was the bus stop to go to Siena, wherever they had hidden it!

Almost instantly an orange bus appeared on the twisting road charging toward the bus shelter, and the women started pointing. I gestured to our little tour group to come to the bus stop right away. We hopped on the bus and I tried to give the driver money. That technique just does not work in Italy. The drivers



handle no money. They handle no tickets. They just drive the bus and dispense advice to foreigners by waving their arms and saying, “Si, Si” or “No, No.” You have to have the ticket before you get on the bus. If you don’t, they give you a free ride. Needless to say, there were no ticket sales at the little bus stop shelter. Being a native New Yorker, this is the weirdest system I have ever encountered. In New York they force you to jump the turnstiles to get into the subway or the bus driver forces you to leap from the moving bus giving you the boot if you have no dough. So we rode for free again this time up to the perimeter wall surrounding Siena. The bus started the long pull up the hill toward the center of Siena and the Duomo to meet Margarita, our guide today. We took careful note of the gate where we were dropped, so we could get the same bus down to our van. I have to say we were getting good at all of this.



Naturally, as we walked up the hill inside the city gate we passed Parcheggio after Parcheggio after Parcheggio. Could we have parked in one of those? Yes! We consoled ourselves with the thought that we could not drive within the city walls, the Centro Storico, but we weren’t really sure. So many cars just whipped right past the open gate. No one was checking! A lot works on the honor system in Italy.

*Damn, we could have been so much closer. No, no, away from me Satan and take your thoughts of jealousy about Parcheggio mastery with you! HA! My soul was saved. On we trudged up the incline.*

*We arrived in the piazza in front of the Duomo with more than a half-hour to spare. After 12 days in Italy we were starting to get the hang of getting around this*

*country.*

*In a few more days we would be real pros, but it would be time to go home.*

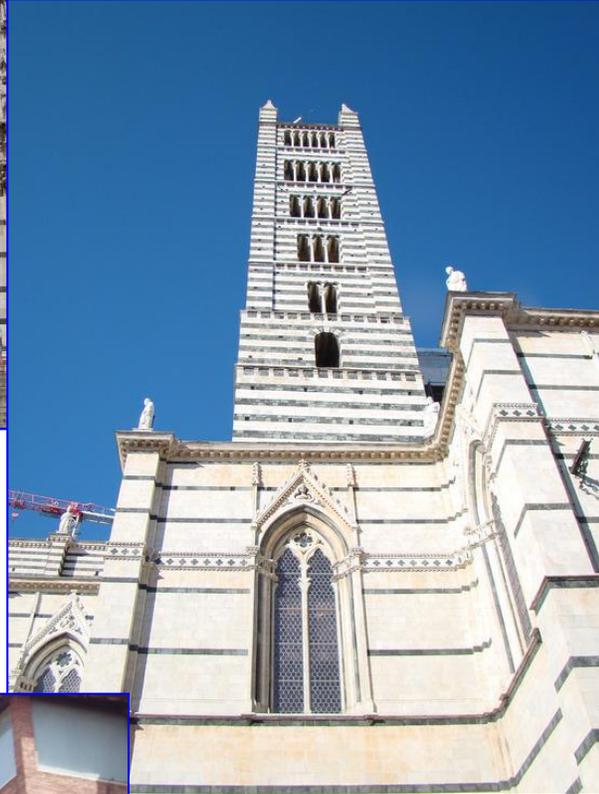
*Oh well, for today we*



*would be content in the superior position of arriving in the right spot ahead of our guide. We sat down on a rock. Well it was a step made of rock, but everything in these towns is made of rock.*

*There were others in the piazza waiting for the 10 a.m. opening of the Duomo, too. We all engaged in the same activity. Snap – Snap – Photo Op – Photo Op!*

**The Grand Facade**



***Romanesque Bell Tower***



***She-Wolf Feeding  
Romulus and Remus***

*We took lots of photos. Walking to. Walking fro. Walking up the steps of the Duomo. Walking down the steps of the Duomo. After all of this, only 10 minutes had gone by. We almost found it hard to kill a half-hour, since we had no previous experience in parking properly, negotiating local transportation and finally getting to any rendezvous spot ahead of a guide to that point in our tour. The combination of all of these successes led to momentary boredom.*



*At 5 minutes to 10, I called Margarita, and she answered her phone. “Look for my red umbrella.” Sure enough there was a red umbrella, on this sunny day, making its way across the piazza, and Margarita was attached below it. A perfect union.*

*I started our encounter by explaining that we had been ACOed (a new term we had learned - All Churchd Out) in the first week between Rome, Assisi and Florence, and that we were looking for more time in the secular parts of Siena, perhaps hearing a bit more about the politics of the last 2,000 years. This evidently is impossible. The secular and non-secular are so interwoven throughout the last 2,000 years of Italian history and especially in this city that she did the only thing she could to respond to my special*

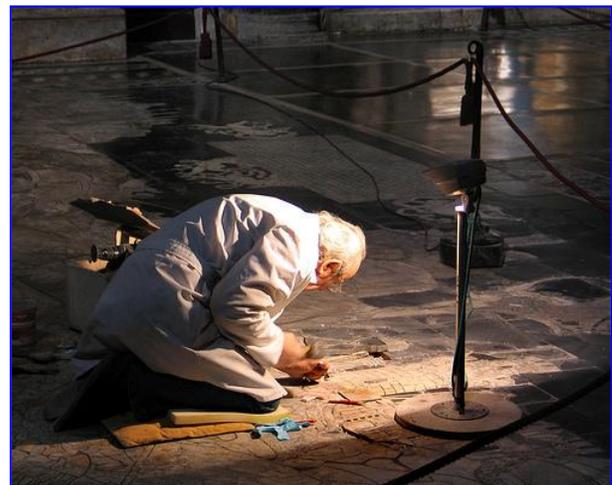


request. She smiled shook her head yes and took us right into the Duomo.

At least she was able to have us skirt the waiting crowd.

This hiring of private tour guides really had its advantages. We had become the people who get past the velvet rope while the other Partito dei Contadini d'Italia (roughly translated: Italian peasants) waited for us to pass. Surely we would be struck by a lightning bolt if we came to believe that we were worthy of this, especially entering one of His largest churches in Italy. Fortunately for us most of the people waiting in the line were English, American and German, they weren't Partito dei Contadini d'Italia at all, so no lightning bolts were issued except from the eyes of the waiting tourists. [Inside the Duomo was a wonder!](#)

We spent a good hour and a half inside studying the floors, the ceiling and the walls of frescoes. Just before we had entered the Duomo for the continuation of our doctoral study in non-secular Italian society and history, Margarita had flagged down an elderly gentleman in white work overalls to introduce us. As it turned out he was the





master craftsman of the mosaic tile restoration taking place on the floors of the Duomo. He was about 80 years old. After he departed she explained that he worked for no pay, at his choosing. It is too great an honor to be in this position to accept money for the work. He was a true Partito dei Contadini d'Italia. She carefully pointed out sections that he had restored and where he had led other workers in the restoration of the floor.

ACOed or not, I have to say, that I loved the tour of the Duomo. These structures are just overwhelming and evoke strong emotions as you consider the dedication of the hundreds or thousands of people over the centuries that crafted them, financed the work and fought for completion with efforts that had to be sustained through many generations. In the case of the Siena Duomo, Santa Maria Assunta the work began in the year 1058 and has continued for nearly 1,000 years to the present day.

Margarita finally led us out of the Duomo and into our secular tour. There was a lot to see. I later found out from friends that by playing the ACOed card we had by-passed the chance to see the 620 year-old relic finger and [mummified head of Catherine of Siena](#)

which are located in the Basilica of San Domenico. Wow! Tough break, but later in the week Diane and I would make up for this error with the face of St. Ubaldo! Oy! Into the neighborhoods we trudged back on the hill town circuit. There are 17 neighborhoods or [Contrade in Siena](#), down from 42 in the 14th century. The Black Plague forced consolidations when some neighborhoods were left with no people.

Here is Diane checking out the flags of the Contrada



della Selva or District of the Forest. These neighborhoods are all filled with Italians - all with the same backgrounds. All friends except when it comes to the Palio. [The Palio](#) is a horse race that occurs twice a year. Each neighborhood enters one horse, and there is such a competition over this that – well – you might as well move a neighborhood of Giants fans from NYC or North Jersey next to a neighborhood

*of Eagles fans from South Philly during the NFL season to get the feel for the intensity the Palio evokes! The week before Palio a man from ‘Snail’ might have had a friendly spaghetti dinner with his brother-in-law from ‘Little Owl,’ but this week of Palio – well it might just as well have been a family Thanksgiving Dinner in Siena. The two just can’t get along even for one dinner, especially if one is a Giants fan and the other is an Eagles fan! HA, Snails and Little Owls! Can they really be that serious?*

*We wandered the great streets of this town of Siena and saw beautiful buildings, made of rock, beautiful row homes, made of rock, lovely shops, made of rock and street after street festooned with brilliantly colored flags, made of silk, denoting whether this was Jet or Shark territory. The flags made it kind of fun and the streets of the neighborhoods were serene as we passed through. The most recent Palio, now long forgotten (by the losers), had been nearly two weeks earlier.*



*Then we dropped down a bit toward the rear of the Duomo and the heartbeat of the town started to quicken. We were back in the tourist, commercial zone. Margarita led us toward the Piazza del Campo which is the heartbeat location for both the secular part of Siena and the prime tourist destination.*



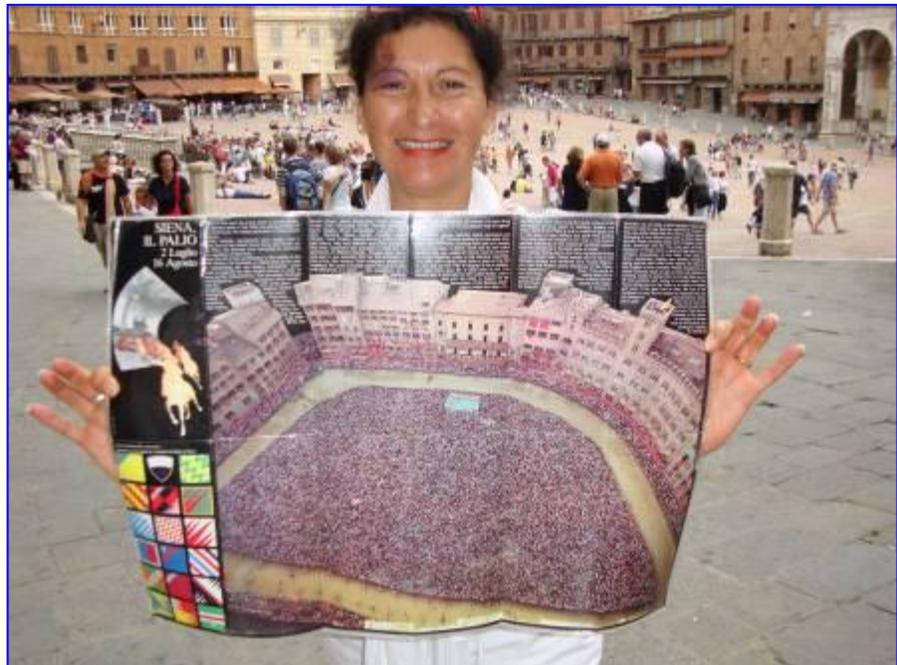
*If you see a picture of Siena in any media, 9 out of 10 times it is a picture of Piazza del Campo, and 7 out of those 9 times it is shot from an angle that includes the stupendous Torre del Mangia, the ‘Tower of the Eater.’ The tower got its name from its first guardian, [Giovanni di Balduccio](#), nicknamed Mangiaguadagni for his tendency to spend all his money for food. This*



*guy must have been a big eater. I wasn't able to find anything in the public record with his image – only his sculptures; so I don't know if he was one of these big-eating Italians with a skinny body or a chunkster. It was probably the second if his nickname was Mangiaguadagni! Just the nickname alone is chunky.*

*Margarita went on to describe the Palio, how it is run, how they prepare the cobblestones with about a foot of sand to protect the horse's hooves and where the Bishop of Siena stands when he blesses the horses and the riders. This again points out the difference between Italy and America. In the USA we can't even put a creche on the town square at Christmas time. Here the Bishop comes to the most public part of the town hall and takes charge of the most important event in Siena, twice a year. When everyone is properly blessed the race is run. According to Margarita, the blessed jockeys almost immediately start whipping each other when they get within an arms length of another jockey and his horse. So much for the blessing.*

*She then took us to a special spot in the piazza and gave us a real surprise as she held up a picture of the Piazza del Campo on Race Day taken from the same*



*direction. The contrast to what was happening on this relatively crowded tourist day was stunning.*

*On Palio Day the crowd in the piazza is estimated to be close to 35,000. This must thrill the tee shirt and trinket sellers along the perimeter of the piazza.*



*Winning this race at all costs is a big deal for the jockeys, who are ringers, brought in by each*

*neighborhood. That's right; the jockeys are not neighborhood boys. They are pros from all over Italy; sometimes from out of the country. The week leading up to the race the neighborhoods hide*

*the horses in their communities under guard, lest the other communities pull a fast one on the horse – no ASPCA oversight here. I can commiserate with this kind of activity having been in charge of putting hay in the basement of our fraternity house to make it more comfortable for the Fordham Ram when a group of my brothers stole it the week before the Fordham-*



*the horses in their communities under guard, lest the other communities pull a fast one on the horse – no ASPCA oversight here. I can commiserate with this kind of activity having been in charge of putting hay in the basement of our fraternity house to make it more comfortable for the Fordham Ram when a group of my brothers stole it the week before the Fordham-*

*NYU Football Game in 1966. I guess that was our little version of the Palio trickery in New York City.*

*Margarita then told us where to get lunch, where we would find the WC, where the best shopping was, and then the red umbrella crossed the Piazza del Campo and we lost sight of her in the crowd. We were on our own again and immediately went pizza shopping. This is cool; we went into this shop,*



*Spizzico on the piazza and found it to be an Italian version of a Taco Bell with a twist.*

*There were people lined up in several rows heading toward a wide counter with a bunch of teenagers in*

*uniforms with hats serving the lines. The only difference was there were no hamburgers shown on the combo signs over their heads. Instead there were about 6 different kinds of pizza combos. They consisted of pizza and water (no gas), pizza and water (with gas), pizza and soda, and pizza with fries and a soda – no kidding – pizza with a side order of fries. Dave got that one. He likes McDonald-style fries. These didn't quite cut the mustard for him, even with ketchup. We all decided to order pizza, since that was the only choice and was what we came in*

for to begin with. They served it up quick and hot - once again, just as good as anywhere else. After eating it I was looking for the WC when in the far reaches of the rear of the restaurant, I found a second fast food restaurant that was serving pasta and wild boar sauce with salads and real food. This was something like going into a McDonalds and finding a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse in the rear. We didn't know. If we had only known, but we were rookies eating in the shadow of the Torre del Mangia. I am sure Mangiaguadagni turned over in his grave when Dave ordered the pizza-fries combo. Given the chance Mangia would have recommended the wild board sauce on homemade tagliatelle, I'm sure.

From there we toured the various vendor stalls around the outskirts of the piazza and found a wonderful ITALIA tee shirt for our daughter, Suzanne in her favorite color, black – very stylish. It should go very well with the majolica ashtray from Orvieto.



The rest of the commercial side of town was fun with trinket shops, wine shops, expensive pottery, jewelry stores, pastry shops and a Ford Dealership.

*No, no, only kidding, Mercedes maybe, not Ford. American car dealerships are kept far out of town in all of these Italian cities.*

*We squandered our time and waistlines in gelato shops and cookie and wine wonderlands before getting serious about souvenirs.*



*We did enjoy ourselves looking for those items that would remind others that we had been to Italy when they rifled through their old piles of souvenirs in their basements. This is why we tend to buy refrigerator magnets. We can check on them each time we visit a loved-one's home. "Hey, where's the Siena magnet I got for you back in 2010?"*

*The day was dwindling and the early part of the afternoon flew by. It was time to wend our way to our next Tuscan destinations, San Gimignano and then Radda-in-Chianti. You will remember our visit to Ristorante Becattini in Poggio alla Croce during our first week after our day in Florence. A somewhat different dinner experience awaited us in Radda, but I can say the hill top was pretty similar.*

*We started walking back to our carefully remembered city wall gate where the bus had dropped us off. Before we left her, Margarita had warned us not to get on the orange bus with the Tuffi sign over the driver, since that would take us about 10 miles from our destination. We were to wait for the orange bus with another designation. I wondered, deep inside of myself, “Why don’t they have a second color bus?”*

*As we walked down the hillside of Siena we kept checking our location on the very good Siena map that I had purchased on the way into town. Checking does not necessarily guarantee that walking in the right direction will take place. We were only one street over from our original route into the city when we started down – but it’s not like New York or Philly – maybe it’s closer to Boston, where in 50 feet you can be lost looking through a chain link fence at the highway you wish you could get to.*



*We went down a road that dropped off a different side of the hilltop, so we inadvertently kept working our way further and further from our beloved original orange bus gate. I mean look at*

*this picture, there are no straight streets in this town.*

It was by dumb luck that we managed along the way to get the now quite famous “Dave and Judy in front of the saxophone billboard” photo (they both took sax in high school).

After many more map checks and a lot of lefts, we finally found our way out of the town and to our carefully remembered gate. Then we



waited and waited for the right orange bus. Even more importantly, we somehow got onto the right orange bus. When it arrived, we waved arms with the driver for a moment until we were certain it was going to our Parcheggio, and then we validated our bus tickets in the little machine in the back of the bus, out of the sight of the bus driver who seemingly couldn't care less if we had a ticket or not. Yes, yes, we had remembered this time to stop at a “T” shop (that's “T” for Tabacchi) and we had bus tickets, a small triumph in Italian transportation etiquette.



## [San Gimignano](#)

*When we got into our car, we were a little under 2 hours from our Ancient Treasure Chest in Casalina, but first we would drive another hour*



*further away to take in the mythical town of [San Gimignano](#) or as some call it, the Manhattan of Italy because of its skyline. There are 14 towers now. At the pinnacle of the town's wealth and power there were 72.*

*Somehow BB and Google Maps agreed that we would only be 2 hours and 15 minutes from Casalina when we arrived in San Gimignano, but that would not matter because we were going to stop off in Radda-in-Chianti for the view, the wine and dinner. Radda according to Google was an hour away from San Gimignano and almost on a straight line toward Casalina. Yet somehow the maps told us we would still be 2 hours away from Casalina from the heart of Radda. All of these times and distances seemed strange but they turned out to be true. This is just the continuing oddity of Italian roads and terrain. What looks the same on a good old flat paper map is anything but the same in mountainous road time. The switch-back roads leading up and down the hills*

between all of these towns were plentiful and had some new twists we had not experienced before, such as a 270 degree corkscrew, which seemed impossible, but that's the way the road felt.

We arrived in San Gimignano and drove up to the main entry gate to the Centro Storico. No cars allowed inside the town walls here at all, but I had made the drive up to this gate and into the town numerous times on [vpik.com](http://vpik.com) so I knew exactly where to go for the Parcheggio. I turned left and the first Parcheggio was full, so were the second and the third. We were now two-thirds of the way around the ring road circling the town and parking looked shaky. Finally, there was a Parcheggio with no roadblock out front! We pulled in and after waiting for only a few minutes someone pulled out of a space – otherwise this one was full too.

Our parking ticket entitled us to buy discount bus tickets to ride to the center of town. I got four from a vending machine – imagine that – not a Tabacchi shop. Would wonders never cease in Italy? We got in line at the entrance to the Parcheggio and the little orange bus came quite promptly. Only trouble we wound up 2 people from making it onto the already packed bus. We waited for the next bus, and we waited, and we waited... Needless to say it was a long time coming, but in the mean time we got to see the spectacle of desperate people attempting to park in the now full Parcheggio. The gate would no longer

go up and people kept pulling into the small driveway only to wait for 5 or 10 minutes and give up beeping their horn for others to get out of the way as they backed up. This happened a few times while we waited. Like I said the next shuttle bus must have been coming in from Cleveland.



Eventually the bus did show up and in a few minutes we were back at the old gate known as [Porta San Giovanni](#) at the entry to the town. Through the gate and up Via San Giovanni we went. I mean up and up this steeply inclined main street toward the town center. Along the way we could have purchased water, pizza, gelato,

holy cards, colorful postcards, a full dinner, pocketbooks, shoes and maybe even a goat if we had looked hard enough for it. In a few minutes we found ourselves in the Piazza Duomo in front of the unfinished façade of the Duomo, Santa



Maria Assunta. As you can see, the front of the Duomo has only a brick exterior. Through most of the

late Medieval period San Gimignano had been on the main road to Rome for most Western Europeans making it a major trading location and the seat of many wealthy families. This town fell on hard times when the plague hit in 1348. The population dropped from 13,000 to 4,000. After that the town's main rival Florence took over the town. They decimated the wealthy padroni of San Gimignano; donations to Santa Maria Assunta fell off; and the church was never completed. Most of the town's towers were ordered to be dismantled.

We arrived 3:30 in the afternoon at the foot of the Duomo a half hour too late for the final English-speaking group tour of the town so we were on our own. We continued defying gravity and walked out of the piazza to a smaller even higher piazza. This is where we met the lovely [Antonella Natangelo](#). The small piazza was filled with the [beautiful sounds of](#)



[her harp](#). She was dressed in medieval garb and was fluent in English. We stopped, chatted for a while and bought one of her CDs. We pressed onward up the hill toward the rocca.



When we reached the top we found ourselves surrounded by beautiful landscapes and towers. We took a few moments to drink it in. This view was



worth the climb to the [Rocca di Montestaffoli](#).

We also took a moment to drink in a few samples of the most famous local white wine, [Vernaccia di San Gimignano](#). This wine has been produced from grapes grown on or near this hill for nearly 800 years and was the first Italian white wine to obtain the [DOC](#) status. After the taste we took a few more panoramas and started our trek toward Radda-in-Chianti.

San Gimignano is worthy of a full day's visit. See the town with a guide. Eat lunch in one of the hilltop restaurants. Tour the Elsa Valley below the town and stop in one of the many wineries for a [tasting](#) of

*several local wines. When we left San Gimignano we successfully negotiated getting on the right shuttle bus after a no-English arm waving and pointing session with the driver. You must try this arm waving, and do it without reserve or conscience. It is a main menu item of fun on an Italian sojourn.*

*After finding ourselves in our car back at the Porta San Giovanni we should have been well oriented, but no, we took the wrong road just outside of town at one of the very tiny Italian traffic circles. Off we went into the surrounding rolling hills and valley below San Gimignano. Che Bello! What Beauty! What a fabulous, unplanned reward. From there we listened a bit more closely to BB and she put us on the right road to Radda.*



## **Radda-in-Chianti**

When we arrived in [Radda](#), we did not have a specific restaurant in mind, just anything we ran into. In the center of this very high hill top town



they were in the midst of their Annual Sagra so just forget the Parcheggio. It was jammed! Fortunately, everyone else was parked illegally. So we did, too.



The sagra is an annual town festival every town in Italy stages to celebrate what is important to them like the onion, the olive or the woodchuck, and we had not found any up to this point, any

sagra that is not woodchucks. Here in Radda they were celebrating the Festa del Perdona or The Party of the Pardon. Evidently someone had been pardoned for something 500 years ago, but no one could remember quite what or who it was. Of course that did not stop the annual celebration.

*There were all sorts of food booths and trinket sales going on. There were long lines for outdoor eating and hundreds of locals and touristic people like us, too. I bought dried pears, dried apricots, cashews and some*



*kind of hot crunchy things which I think were deep fried cece (chickpeas) coated with red-hot paprika. Delicious to me, but neither Diane, Judy nor Dave was willing to risk a taste. I had a ball talking pidgin-Italian with the vendors who, for the sake of a sale, would put up with any touristy chicanery and arm waving. I could have stayed right there and made a meal and a party out of the fun and the fruit.*

*Meanwhile Diane, Judy and Dave just wanted to find a restaurant, sit down and rest with a cool drink. So off we went in search of the right place. We found it on a back alley away from the sagra crush. From the outside it looked like an inactive horse stable, but it was a bar completely full of revelers. La Bottega Di*



*Giovannino had a small empty back room, 4 tables and the tiniest little wooden window in the rear wall. It looked more like a tobacco shop with a wine bar than a fine food establishment. What would we get in here? My traveling companions all had funny looks on their faces - perhaps fear - perhaps fatigue. Oh, what the hell; we went in.*

*We ordered and Judy and Dave had their usual, prosciutto and melon and soup, respectively. They both loved what they were served. I actually found two bucket-list foods I had*



*been on the lookout for since the beginning of the trip, ribollita and wild boar stew. With the order placed and the vino di*



*casa in my glass, we had a few minutes to wait. My eyes wandered and fixed on a little wooden window. I couldn't resist, approached and swung it open. The vast Chianti valley stretched out below. We were right on a cliff and for all we knew the back end of the restaurant could tumble into the valley during our first course. I shared the news with my companions and they all shrugged and took another sip of their water*

*with no gas. A few minutes later they brought out the ribollita and some salads and the window was forgotten. Oh, my God – Oh, my God, the ribollita was perhaps the best vegetable soup I had ever tasted. It was head and shoulders above and different from minestrone. I lathered up every last morsel with the wonderful chewy bread they served on the side. Next came the wild boar stew. This was another delicious dream of succulent flavors. Here we were on a back alley in what looked like a seedy bar on the edge of a mountain. You just can't get a bad meal in this part of Italy. La Bottega Di Giovannino turned out to be that little joint you all have in your home towns that you will eat at a few times a month, but when your family from New York or LA comes to visit, in a thousand years you would never dream of taking them to the place.*

*Dave was the perfect backup driver for our trip with oodles of experience at driving European roads and the calm of a supertanker captain to negotiate all of the twists and turns in the dark that lay between Radda and Casalina. He drove us home that night after I managed at least one wonderful glass (can't remember now – one, two??) of local chianti over my wild boar and ribollita. Once again, local house wine deep in the heart of Chianti Classico Country - HA! I fell asleep on the 2-hour ride home. BB did the rest.....*

## Chapter 19

*Fixing the Scratch in the Van  
and*

*An Umbrian Dinner with Anne Robichaud*



[\*Anne's Italy\*](#)

[\*Sicilian Cannoli Recipe\*](#)

## ***The Plan...***

*Tuesday, August 31*

*7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Tuscan and Umbrian countryside and towns of Cortona, Castiglione del Lago and Panicale. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.*

*7:30 p.m. Leave L'Antico Forziere for dinner (included) and Agriturismo Tour at the home of Anne Robichaud and Pino (her husband) on the outskirts of Assisi.*

## ***The Reality...***

*After a long day driving to and touring Siena and San Gimignano with dinner and wine in Radda-in-Chianti, I was really ready for a day off. When I planned this trip I had little understanding of how smart it was to have these rest days in between our touring days. As the vacation wore on it became more apparent. It would have been smarter if I had rested like the others on at least a few of these in-between days. Of course I also did not plan on scraping the van against a wall in Spoleto on my first day of driving in Italy.*

*So while this would be a day off for most of our tiny band, I had other plans for myself this Tuesday.*

*For nearly a week and a half I had contemplated how to repair the long scratches in the side of the van that were the less than mysterious reward for jamming between walls on a super narrow street in Spoleto. What a way to spend our first day with the car! The scratches weren't too, too deep though, and the metal was not bent. There was hope. In fact, after washing the car the scratches actually seemed to disappear, but when the car dried and dust stuck to the van again the scratches showed up like ever-so-fine comet trails across the night sky. Drat! I went back to Saint Samuele at the front desk of L'Antico Forziere right after breakfast and he supplied a copy of the Umbrian Yellow Pages. In short order I found a Chrysler dealer and decided to see if they could help in some way. More hope. I set BB for the Chrysler address and she took me right there in about 20 minutes. This was just the beginning of what would turn into an Italian-style auto body repair adventure.*

*I went into the dealership which was a big, bright showroom and began asking people if they spoke English. What do you think? A half-dozen smiles and shrugs later they fetched a nicely dressed fellow from the back offices and he walked toward me with hand extended and a broad smile. He was learning English, asked me to forgive his poor quality and probably hoped to sell me a Chrysler 300. I explained*

my plight and he made it clear they did no such repairs at the dealership. He advised me that if I went to a store named Dom Auto they would be able to help me. He did not have an address but proceeded to give me directions just like people on the street used to do on Candid Camera, pointing here, there and everywhere. As I left the dealership I found myself saying, "Dom Auto...Dom Auto...Dom Auto." Firmly printed in my mind was a cognitive map of leaving the rear of the dealership via an alley (wide alley - no stone walls), making a right when I got out to the rear street; heading straight for about 2 miles, making a left at a traffic light into a commercial area, and finally driving back into that area and around until I saw Dom Auto. No problem.

I thought I followed the directions pretty well as I repeated in my mind, "Dom Auto...Dom Auto...Dom Auto." Nope - no Dom Auto. That's right. There was no Dom Auto now nor would there ever be a Dom Auto in my life, but I didn't know this at that moment and still had faith. I came up to a corner inside the industrial area and needed to find some reassurance. On the corner was a bakery. I quickly developed a plan - my kind of plan. I would go into the bakery and ask for help. As I walked in the door there was a woman behind the counter smiling and three men off to one side. The men were talking in a very animated fashion. One was the old baker and the two others were his cronies - all 70+ years old. I thought quickly and decided it would be smart to buy

something first to ingratiate myself as a customer. I saw miniature sfogliatelle in the counter and pointed to them. The woman reached in and pointed as well. I nodded and quickly made the gesture for two and she handed over the crisp beauties in bakery waxed paper. I paid and turned toward the coffee machine inside the store. I got a wonderful latte from the machine and sat down to enjoy my sfogliatelle. These are the beautiful little pastries that look like a lobster shell.



As I bit into the first one chocolate cream oozed out the side which was a complete surprise. All my life these delightful pastries only had a sweetened ricotta cheese filling. I was dazzled by the chocolate. These Italians do like their chocolate. I nursed the second one not wanting it to end, but alas, in two bites it was gone, too. Soon my latte was gone and I had completed the first part of my cunning plan.

I cleaned my place and then turned to the three cronies with my customary opening Italian, ‘scusi.’ I proceeded to ask if any of them spoke English. Of course not – not in the middle of an industrial complex off the beaten path in Northern Umbria. They shrugged; they smiled. I continued undaunted because I had a plan, “Dove...eh, Dom Auto?” in my best Italian accent. I repeated, “Dom Auto.” Not a

chance. They all shrugged, shook their heads no, and the baker immediately called for another girl from the back of the bakery who spoke English. She appeared bright-faced, but her English was only at the pastry ordering level of expertise. When she found out I had already ordered and eaten pastry she was stumped. My plan was falling apart.

Next I pidgened out the idea that I needed help finding Dom Auto and she gave me a copy of the Umbrian Yellow Pages. I was back to square one where I had started the day right after breakfast with Samuele at the inn. I looked under auto. I looked under dom. I looked up in the air. I looked under the table, but there was no Dom Auto. I must have rubbed my forehead and looked distressed, because the bright-faced girl who was really concerned for my plight got an idea. With a 'scusi' and a hand wave, she ran back into the rear of the bakery and emerged with her brother, the bread baker. She explained that he could not speak English but understood everything about cars. We shook hands and he looked deeply into my eyes trying to bridge the language barrier with the same concern as his sister. Ah, a new plan popped into my head. I waved for him to follow me and we walked into the dusty parking lot to the scratched side of the car. I pointed to the scratches and made a swirling polishing motion with my hand over the scratches like I was polishing the car. He understood immediately and began speaking in Italian a mile a minute. In his enthusiasm I

understood that he was giving me directions on where to go to find a repair shop. "Grazie, Mille Grazie."

As I drove down the road I was confident that this cognitive map would be much easier to follow. Sure enough right nearby after going down the same road and turning left at another traffic light, I pulled right into an auto body shop - not Dom Auto, but a body shop nonetheless. There were banging and grinding noises coming out from the side garage door of the shop. I was really encouraged.

I stepped inside the garage door and saw a workman installing a new bumper on a smashed car. He looked up and smiled. I smiled. I stepped part of the way toward him and said, "English?" Ha, Ha, Ha! He lifted his index finger in the universal sign of wait just one moment.

He was but a minute more and came over with sincere eyes. We shook hands. I gave him the follow me wave and used the same sign language as I had used with the bread baker, since it was so successful. The body man looked down at the scratch and started to shake his head and speak in a tone that clearly said I had a problem. He placed his thumbnail in the scratch and ran it along its length and then threw both palms up indicating that the scratch may be too deep to polish out. Up went his index finger and I was waiting again as he ran back into the shop this time for two minutes.

He emerged with a professional polishing tool, a can of polishing paste and a long pneumatic hose. He plugged in the polisher and ran



the hose back into the shop. After repeated attempts it was clear that the scratches were more durable than the polishing paste and polisher. I thanked him and offered him some money saying my usual, “Per te, per te.” He steadfastly refused to accept any money. I shook his hand with a ‘grazie,’ and was on my way. I would have to return to L’Antico Forziere and work out some other genius path to solving the scratch dilemma.

When I got back Judy and Diane were rarin’ to go. Go, that is, to nearby Deruta to comb the majolica pottery shops. After a few minutes rest we headed over there. We could grab a snack for lunch in Deruta. Dave stayed at the inn with the laptop computer and his stash of Snickers.

In [Deruta](#) there are dozens of pottery shops and factories. There is even a world-famous [museum](#) dedicated to Deruta Ceramics.





When we looked inside of the shops we found every one of them had its own production area in the back room or in the basement. The artists were busy decorating plates, bowls

and other beautiful items right there, and the artistry was incredible with the medium of twice-fired majolica being a landing place for their paints and the genius of their ability. We walked through a few shops admiring everything and then in-between two shops we caught sight of an alley with a lot of activity occurring at the far end behind the buildings. We headed down the alley. It was a farmers market.

There was another wide street behind all of the shops and it was a beehive of activity with lots of dealer's stalls and many townspeople. It was time for another spontaneous moment. There were fresh fruits and vegetables galore and a whole bunch of pocketbooks, cloth merchants, electronic gear, shirts, pants, socks, underwear, kitchen utensils and sundries. It was at one of the sundries stalls where my car repair dream sprang back to life. I eyed a cosmetics counter with enamel nail polishes. They had about 100 color

choices all for 99 cents a bottle. I carefully resurrected the color of the van in my mind, found what I thought was the perfect polish to fill in the scratches and made my purchase.

I was feeling pretty good about my find, so I thought I would give myself a treat. I followed a familiar aroma down the line of stalls and next to another fruit and vegetable stand was a 'macellaio di maiale,' a pig butcher who was selling the Italian staple, porchetta sliced from a fully roasted pig. I moved closer trying to decide if I should get a porchetta on a panini when out of the corner of my eye I saw a second macellaio di maiale on the other side of the vegetable stand. It seemed odd that two of them should be so close together and both trying to sell a full roasted pig.

I crossed the veggie no-man's-land and found that the other guy had a different name on his stand. My guess was these were two brothers who were angry with each other, and after many years of bickering their parents let them open competing porchetta stands on either side of their fruit and vegetable stand. The second guy also had well-roasted items on a stick and what have I said before? If you see something roasted on a stick, ask no questions, just buy it and eat it. I did. It looked like roasted lamb and as my teeth sunk into the beautifully cooked flesh I anticipated all of the aromas and flavors of my childhood whenever we had leg of lamb at my Aunt Stasa's house on Greek Easter.

*Opps – not lamb!  
Good, maybe great, but  
it definitely was not  
lamb. The caramelized  
meat fell gently off of  
the stick and into my  
mouth. I searched for  
a definition of what I  
was eating. Finally I  
got it – roasted pork*



*liver. That made sense with a big pig lying roasted  
next to it in the case. I had another bite and ran off to  
find Diane.*

*As she chewed her bite from the stick she could not  
place the taste but liked it. I told her it was liver and  
she was surprised. She is not a liver fan, but the  
spices and roasting of this specimen gave liver a  
whole new dimension. We alternated bites until it  
was all gone and were getting thirsty. She had  
finished her pocketbook shopping for our daughter  
Suzanne, and I had my nail polish so we were almost  
ready to go back to the pottery shops.*

*We found Judy and as we walked out of the alley  
there was a bar to our left. As you already know,  
Italian bars have coffee, food, candy, pastry, booze  
and gelato – Ah! Gelato. This is how we quenched  
our thirst. We each had 3 flavors in a cup and were  
convinced that roasted pork liver with a multi-flavored  
gelato was a wholesome, a very wholesome lunch.*

*As we sat at our table finishing the gelati, we spied a pottery shop across the street we had not been in. Across we went and toured aisle after aisle of beautiful items.*

*This turned out to be the place where I found my oversized pasta bowl. The young lady running the store turned out to be the artist who had created the bowl. She spoke no English but I was now skilled at the*



*phrase, “Quanti costi?” She*



*responded with a smile, “Settanta.” I gulped and thought to myself “Seventy euros?” That was almost \$100! I began to politely back out of the transaction when I found out*

*that she, too had an index finger that meant wait just*

*a minute. So I waited while she rummaged in the middle of the store on a lower shelf. Back she came with what looked like the identical bowl. She looked at the bowl and pointed saying, "Imperfetto." That was easy enough to understand. I looked for the imperfection and could barely make out a smudge in one of the many flowers on the side of the bowl. Quanti costi? Venti. She was willing to sell this bowl for only 20 euros. Wow! I smiled and now I had my big bowl to serve 2 pounds of pasta with heaps of shrimp, crab and sun dried tomatoes for my traditional In-Between Christmas and New Year Holiday Pasta Party.*

*An hour later, I was in the parking lot of our Ancient Treasure Chest filling in the scratches on the van. The color was not a perfect match, but I thought not bad. Diane had another opinion about the match or lack thereof, and the fixing the scratch saga would have one more chapter, but that would have to wait a couple of more days....*

## **Dinner with Annie**

We had big plans for this night since we were going to the home of Anne Robichaud and her husband Pino Alagna. Annie is a California girl from the University of Santa Clara who came to Italy in the early 1970s and in a very chance meeting on an Italian train, fell in love with Pino from Sicily. They married, raised two children Keegan and Giulia, and poof 40 years has gone by for them living mostly in Umbria. [She is a renowned expert on the region, hill towns and Umbrian peasant life.](#) We weren't joining her for a tour just yet. Tonight we would have a genuine Umbrian home cooked meal with Annie and her family and what a dinner it would turn out to be.

I had been in correspondence with Annie since May of 2008. We were heading for dinner at her house on August 31, 2010. That was nearly 2 ½ years before we actually came face-to-face in Italy. Whoa! I exchanged so many e-mails and phone conversations with her that I thought of her as a dear friend in Italy who helped me understand the maze that is Italian tourism. Having dinner together in her home was almost like going to dinner at my cousin Connie's house. Connie lives around the corner from me in Ft. Lauderdale. We generally walk over to Connie's house. That is where the similarity ends.

We left the L'Antico Forziere parking lot with BB laying on the floor. Annie's address was so rural BB

*the GPS had no idea where she lived. Fortunately I had detailed instructions to her house from the heart of Assisi. Well we had been to that town only last week, and we knew the pitfalls of road construction just off of the main highway exit to Assisi. So we cruised on by to the next exit that gave us access to the south end of town. Boy oh boy, I thought I was becoming so skilled at getting around this area. We looped back under the highway and started up the road toward Assisi. What's this? The road quickly narrowed, but this was a bonafide route to the south end of town. We kept going along the road which was straight and narrow with farms on both sides. As we passed children playing I felt good. As our windshield was smacked alternately on both sides with branches from bushes growing alongside the road, I felt bad. After several kilometers on this straight road, we came to an intersection. The sign to Assisi pointed to the left. I turned and the road got a tiny bit wider but now it was curving all over the place and rising and falling. That's when I shouted to Judy who was right behind me, "I am sure St. Francis walked along this road!" Of course that was 800 years earlier and my bet was the blacktop was the only improvement they had made to the road in the last 8 centuries.*

*We broke through to the lower portion of Assisi and were now on the ring road. This was on the map – THIS WAS ON THE MAP! Emboldened with new confidence we approached a fork in the road. To our*

left was a curvy city street. To our right was a city gate with a curvy road leading out of town. Dave studied the map as I sat still at the fork. We went out the gate and wove our way switching back and forth up and around the back mountain behind Assisi.

From there we had no landmarks, just a distance and instructions to turn. We turned and immediately began climbing. We were in thick forest, but there – over there - was another landmark. It was a specially broken branch from Annie to steer our course. Only



kidding, but it seemed like that. We turned left and up the unpaved road we bumped.

Now this road should rightfully only be taken by 4-wheel drive vehicles. We had a Dodge Van. About ½ mile up the road I was beginning to doubt the landmark but suddenly in the road was a guy walking 2 dogs. Unlike everyone else in Umbria this guy spoke perfectly clear English. I thought I was hallucinating. He was from Connecticut and turned out to be Annie's cousin, Tom. He was eating dinner with us tonight. I cannot describe the relief it was to meet this stranger with perfect credentials for our quest. He introduced himself and pointed us up the road. Of course the only other direction was off the cliff next to the road

so we took his advice and continued on. In a minute we were parking in a not-to-well defined area next to their house. I hoped I was not on top of potatoes or some other root vegetable.

As we walked to the front door we took a careful look around. This was a really rural mountain farm. There was a cat running around watching us warily and a few barnyard animals. The house was pretty and made of stone and wood. We found out later from Anne that it was originally a barn building and



in their first year or so living there back in the early 1970s, the animals shared the space with them in the winter. We knocked and Anne shouted for us to come right in.

The table was set and



waiting for us to arrive. A few items were already on the table including bruschetta and strufoli.



I knew what Anne looked like from her many pictures on the web and from the

previous March when I met her in suburban

*Philadelphia for one of her cooking demonstrations, so when a new face came toward me, I realized this must be another guest. It was her cousin's wife, Carol. She introduced herself and quickly led us into the kitchen where Anne was at work with big pots steaming away on the stove. A few more delectable treats of meat and cheeses were on the kitchen table with sliced bread ready for us to eat and take the edge off of our hunger. The whole atmosphere felt to me like walking into one of my Italian aunt's kitchens in Brooklyn. Anne and I immediately embraced like long-lost cousins. I introduced Diane, Judy and Dave and we instantly had glasses of wine in our hands. We excitedly chattered about our experiences in the first week in Umbria and Anne was a font of knowledge about Umbrian life. I offered to jump right in and stir the pots with her since I had cooked with her back in March. She waved me off saying that the four of us were guests that night and would do nothing but eat.*

*Anne wanted to show us around the tiny stone house so we all piled out of the kitchen. She was quick to point out that Pino was not home from work yet. She went on to tell us how Pino knew nothing about home building or masonry work when they first decided to settle in Umbria in 1974. His first attempts at do-it-yourself were on this very structure. In the years since, he has built a stone masonry business and is known far and wide as an excellent restoration mason. He has several crews working under his*

direction in the immediate Assisi area and in other locales around Italy. The workmanship on his personal castle was impeccable. The interior and exterior of the little house was beautiful. Since they were planted on the side of a mountain the views were impressive. This is a nice place to live, and only 10 minutes outside of the heart of Assisi.

We returned to the dinner table and she said sit anywhere. The food started to come. First, antipasto came out. The cheeses, salume, sweet red peppers, homemade bread and olive oil were all top notch. We chowed down. By this time cousin Tom was back from walking the dogs and we had reintroduced ourselves. The wine glasses were re-filled. A few minutes later Anne's college-age daughter, Giulia popped in the door and sat down to join us. The table was filling up fast. While we didn't take any pictures during that night I found this one floating around the web that shows a similar party in Anne's dining room. You can see she really knows how to make people smile.





Next she brought out her pasta, followed by her special chicken cacciatore made Umbrian style, sausages and several fresh vegetables. We ate and ate and ate. We drank and drank and drank. We talked, laughed, told stories and acted just like a family who had eaten together hundreds of times before.

The delicious desserts were homemade cake, pie, cookies, fruit, nuts and coffee. We had some limoncello and



sambuca to top off the night and everyone was more than satisfied. Genuine Umbrian peasant cooking was substantial and delicious. Enjoy a few of [Anne's recipes](#).



Dave drove home that night for reasons previously explained after the Radda dinner. I will say that Annie's hillside road seemed much wider when Dave drove down it compared to my drive up at the beginning of the evening. Maybe the difference was

*Tom and the dogs were not clogging up the road. The road home to our Ancient Treasure Chest was straight and clear. Odd....*

*This was a fantastic experience, both from a culinary standpoint and a social event. While it was our most expensive dinner of the entire trip, it was worth every penny and I would not hesitate to go running back to Annie's house for dinner on my next trip to Umbria. It was also a great introduction for the rest of our group to Anne before we toured together.*

## *Chapter 20*

*Narni*

*and*

*The Nera River Valley Phone Call*



[Marmore Falls, Nera River Valley](#)

## *The Plan...*

*Wednesday, September 1*

*7:00 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*9:00 a.m. Rendezvous with Anne's Italy private tour guide at L'Antico Forziere and depart for Narni.*

*10:30 a.m. Arrive for morning tour of Narni (included).*

*Noon At your option you may join us for lunch in Narni or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location to complete our tour of Narni.*

*1:30 p.m. Rendezvous at appointed location to complete the tour of Narni.*

*2:30 p.m. Depart Narni for Nera River Valley. Tour Nera River Valley.*

*6 p.m. Arrive back at L'Antico Forziere.*

*8 p.m. Dinner (freelance). You can remain at L'Antico Forziere for dinner on your own or join John and Diane for a visit to a restaurant in a nearby town.*

## *The Reality...*

*Sometimes plans work out. On Wednesday we found ourselves in the capable hands of Marco Cioccoloni. He was the first guide to come all the way to our beautiful country inn giving us an extra hour to sleep-in. Marco was a well-spoken, slim, upright Italian gentleman of about 55 years. Of course he could have been 80 for all I know given our other experiences at trying to guess people's ages in this country. He reminded me of a volunteer docent who escorts you through a landmark museum when you visit cities around the USA. You know, those people who do the work from a perspective of love of the subject rather than the financial reward.*

*Marco was eager to see us and to show us his beautiful Umbria. He succeeded in taking us to some of the most striking locations of our trip. We jumped on the E45 and took the expressway an hour south to the tiny town of [Narni](#). The last 10 or 15 miles were off the expressway and off the beaten path so there was a sense of remoteness to the place.*



*With Marco in the van we were able to drive without getting lost right up to the summit of the town to the rocca, site of another Cardinal Albornoza Castle from the 14th Century.*



*He told us the story of Edigio Albornoza, or as I like to call him, "Edgi." He was a fighting man's cardinal working with various armies to*

*consolidate the Pope's authority in central and northern Italy. Each time Edgi's army knocked off another town they would install some secular leader*



*in their rocca or castle on the top of the town mountain. If there was no rocca he would order one to be built - so much for "...turn the other cheek".*



*Here we stood at the top and something was noticeably different from all of our other tours. The view of the valley and the quaint town of Narni from the rocca was majestic just as it had*



*been in several other towns prior to this. Marco was very informative just as a number of other guides had been prior to this. So what was the big difference? A cold front had swept down from the north on the previous night and the temperature was about 65 degrees which was a completely new experience for us in Italy compared to every previous day to this point and especially compared to the 100 degrees we suffered only one week earlier in Florence.*



*We were in this gorgeous spot with a slight breeze and it was so comfortable we didn't want to move. Marco did not push hard to move us. He let us soak it in. Lots of pictures and words later we finally agreed to get into the van and move down the mountain to the Centro Storico of the town, a delightful experiment on our part. Halfway down we*

*were passing this lovely children's playground and I just had to stop and take a snap shot. Notice the nice 30-inch high safety fence to protect the children from a 300-foot drop down the side of the*



*mountain! Obviously their standards are a bit loose like the USA's from the 1950s when I was growing up on monkey bars and visiting Niagara Falls. No one cared. The kids will be fine. Let them go out and play. Yeah, just give 'em a parachute!*

*When we descended from the rocca to the Centro Storico of Narni we found this town to be a charming albeit smaller version of the towns we had seen elsewhere, but there*



*were some things obviously and subtly different about Narni. Some we could see and some we could not. The obvious - there were fewer tourists in this town. In fact, the four of us may*

*have doubled the tourism trade for the day. The main piazza was tiny and had plenty of townspeople walking about or sitting in outdoor cafés, but almost no tourists - certainly no large tour groups. In fact the largest group we saw was a bunch of 1<sup>st</sup> grade children linked hand-in-hand as they were escorted down one of the streets of town by their teacher.*





*We toured the Duomo and some nearby streets - charming, but we had seen so many by this point that we were a bit jaded.*



*Then Marco said, "Follow me." He had a surprise for us. We marched downhill a bit, around a corner to a stone staircase and toward the subtly*

*different that we could not see standing in the middle of town or from the rocca. We passed a small sign that read [NARNI SOTTERRANEA](#), roughly translated Narni Underground.*



Well I had been in Atlanta Underground and the Crystal City Underground Shopping Mall in Arlington, Virginia. Jaded Johnny thought, “Would this be any different?” Oh, yes, this was different – ever hear of The Inquisition?



We were escorted by Marco down more steps, around a corner and into a small walled yard.

The iron barred door at the corner of the yard



afforded me my first glimpse of the [Abbey of San Cassiano](#), sitting way down in the valley

on an opposing mountainside. I quickly dubbed it, “Best Monastery of Our Trip” and took about a half-dozen photos from all different angles - through the bars, through the trees, with a telephoto lens and without. I had real fun with this one subject. Was this the treat Marco was leading us toward?



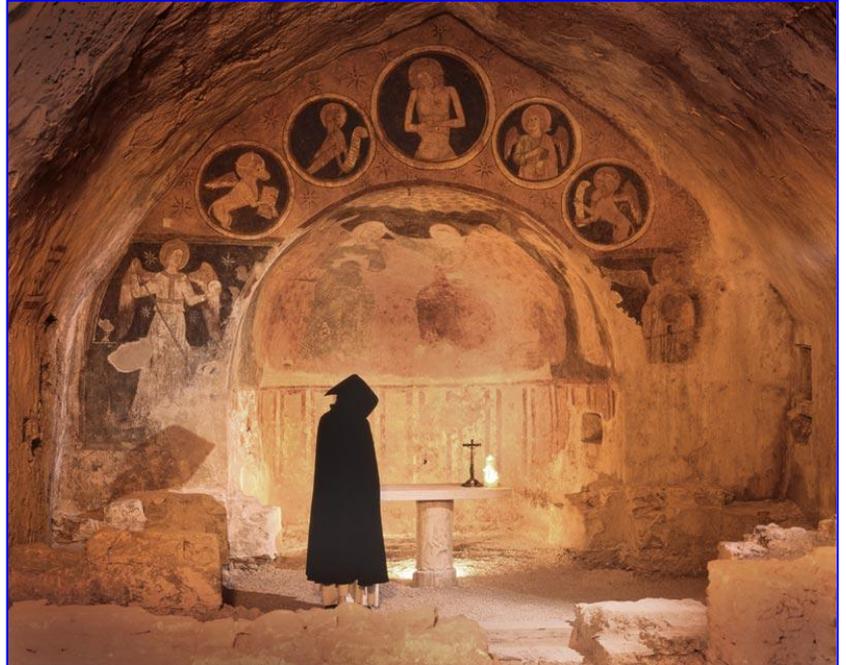


*He continued through the small yard to the opposite side and pushed open another door. It was time to pay another entry fee. Okay, no problem.*

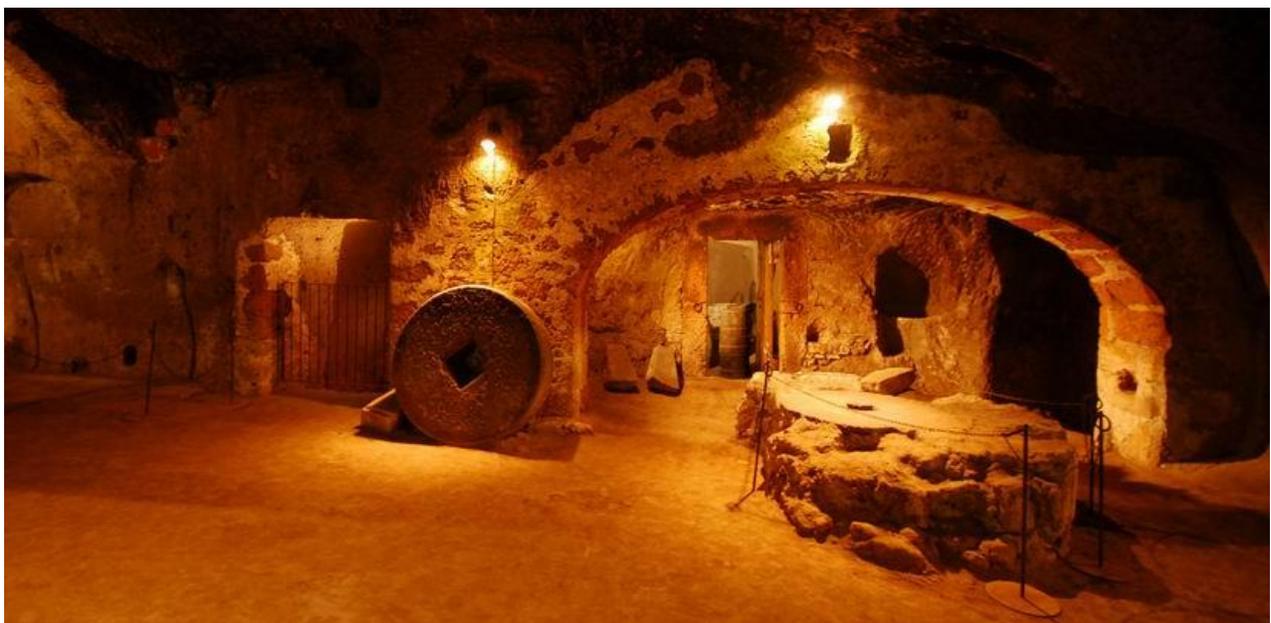
*There was a young woman waiting in a small room with a number of pictures and captions written in Italian. She would lead us around. Pointing to my lips I asked her, "English?" She just smiled, shrugged and shook her head no as she made the "little bit" gesture with her thumb and forefinger. Marco would be our translator. We descended down even more stairs and found ourselves deep below the 13th century church now above our heads inside another church that dated even further back, perhaps 5 centuries further back. The overhead ceiling in the earlier church was adorned with frescoes and the walls were simple, white, but beautiful. Wow, this was cool and a bit different – "...over 1,000 years old," he said. We hadn't seen the likes of this before. "Thanks Marco - Oh what's that? This isn't what we paid the entry fee to see? There is still more?" Gee.*



Through some more heavy doors and along a few subterranean paths, we were headed down even more steps. There was something further down. We came upon a series of chambers with recreations of what had been discovered here only 30 years earlier in the late 1970s.

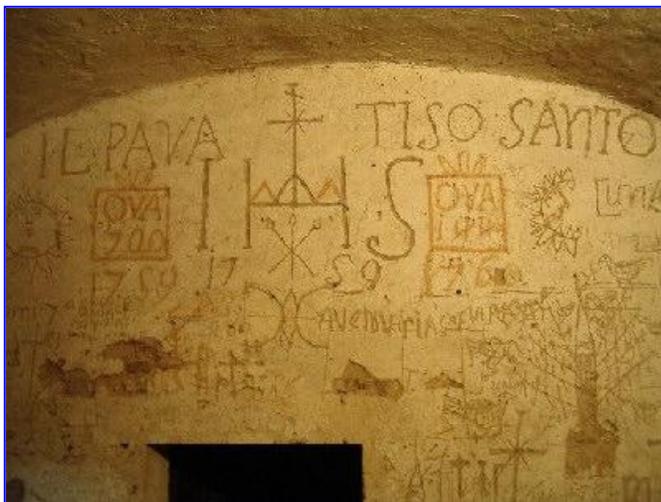


These were archeological findings indicating that these chambers had been used as recently as 150 years earlier for the Inquisition. Inqui-what? Wait a minute; I thought the Inquisition was back in the 15th



century; maybe in the 1600s, too; but were they still running it 50 years after Robert Fulton had demonstrated his steamboat up and down the Hudson River? Come-on! ...Yup!

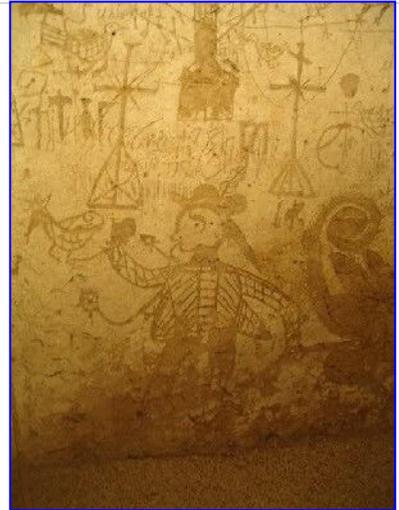
In the chambers were recreations of the tools and devices that had been used down here to extract “the truth” from uncooperative people who had been accused of all sorts of heresies and anti-social behavior. Men and women alike had been put through some heinous torture in these very chambers in the 1850s when Abe Lincoln was a brand new congressman.



Well, Marco had produced a winner. Something completely new, not experienced anywhere else during our previous two weeks of Italy trotting. The subject was serious, and it was a bit creepy

down in those chambers, especially standing next to the actual remains of one woman who had the misfortune of expiring during questioning. Nearby there were scratchings in the wall of a man who had been retained for extended torture in the 1850s. This tour had captured our imaginations in a new way.

We emerged from the underground hungry and ready for lunch. We were shown several places by Marco and settled on a fast-eat kind of place with pizza and other stuff. This place produced the first negative review of food on our trip after 2 weeks – not mine, but Judy and Dave. They ordered some calzones that had sat there too long and were dried out. I continued with the advice of LA Law’s Michael



Tucker, who now lives in Umbria, that if you see something on a stick, buy it and eat it. Don’t ask any questions, just eat it. Doing that, I managed to find a wonderful kabob right next to the dry calzone that contained roasted pork, sausages and sweet peppers. By this time I was 44 for 44 in really good meals. Not a bad batting average.

After lunch and on our way to our car Marco pointed out some great views and interesting antiquities, but nothing could top the Inquisition Chambers. We were satisfied and ready to move on to another unique experience. We piled into the van and descended the Narni mountain into Terni which is a plain industrial city in the plain below Narni. Terni was just a by-way and we continued out of town to smaller roads

that wound their way toward the Nera River and the valley. There we were entering the foothills of the great Umbrian mountain chain, the Sibilinis. Needless to say, whatever we were heading for would be up.

## ***The Nera River Valley***

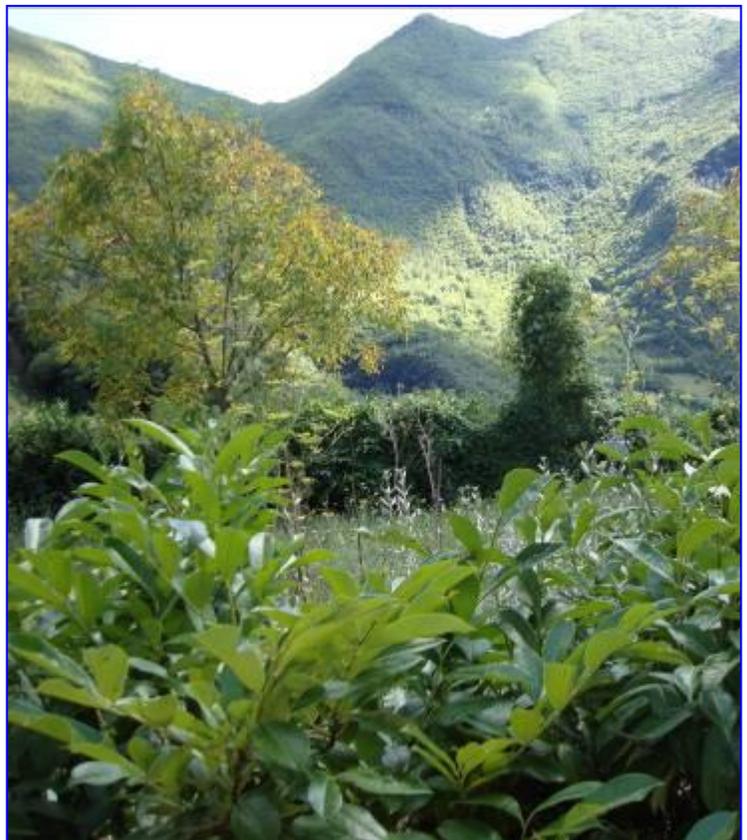
We drove for quite a while squeezed between the river on one side and a mountain on the other. Then Marco indicated to turn left off the road smack dab into the mountain. One quick switchback, then another and a third and we were suddenly going up a steep inclined pathway (I really can't call it a road) of mostly dirt and stones. The diesel engine of the van pulled hard and we kept climbing. After the driveway in Poggio alla Croce that led us to the Becattini Restaurant in Chianti Country, this was the steepest climb we had made on the trip. I kept looking out the window to my left and could barely see the edge of the road next to the van. We had about 2 feet to the left and one foot to the right. On the left was a cliff down into the valley. On the right was the side of the mountain. Had I rented a donkey and cart instead of a van I may have been closer to the original intent of this road built by monks in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.



*After several minutes of climbing we found ourselves rather high up in the mountains and in a small parking lot of a monastery, now converted into a Bed and Breakfast. These monks of the*

*12th and 13th century found the darnedest places to haul rocks and build churches. I pity the donkeys.*

*We got out of the van and found ourselves looking at the greenest mountains and greenest valley (way below) that we had seen on the entire visit to Italy. Marco was scoring again in the great guide contest. It was breath-taking and I stood in awe of the landscape that seemed to drop away forever to a river far, far below. It was then that the most surprising thing happened during our entire trip.*

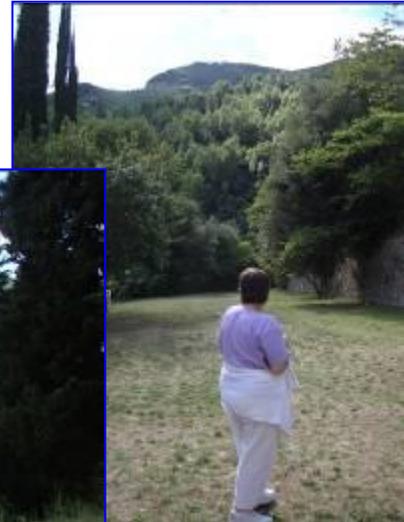


*My cell phone rang and it was my auto mechanic back in New Jersey calling from 4,000 miles away to tell me we could pick up our Buick. The air conditioner was fixed. I said, “Neil, you are not going to believe where I am standing,” and to record the moment I took a photo of the view. He was honored to know I was naming this the ‘Neil Glenn Calls Next to the Lamp Post in Eastern Umbria High on a Sibilini Mountainside at a Monastery Picture.’ I also told him that we would pick up the Buick the day after Labor Day.*



*After we hung up, I realized that at home if I move from our living room to the kitchen, Verizon drops my call because the signal is lost. Home is New Jersey where Verizon was born! Here I was at a monastery on a mountain in the far reaches of Umbria and Verizon was coming through loud and clear at \$1.00 per minute. You gotta love technology!*

We worked our way past the residence of the monastery which we found out had become a bed and breakfast with the best view in Umbria, and toward the church. It turned out to be



another one of those amazing places that was 700 to 800 years old, under restoration and would likely not be seen by 99.99% of the touristic visitors to Italy. We made our donations to the effort and walked through the building. Once again, there were amazing frescos - very in need of restoration. That process was very slow and would probably last for generations if they could sustain the desire and donations from generation to generation.



*The real miracle was how the monks got everything to this spot to even build a church to begin with. That was impressive - almost as impressive as hearing from 4,000 miles that my Buick a/c was fixed. Just before we left I asked Diane to go out on the quasi-road for a picture to show the pressed stone and dirt surface. Near the monastery the cliff next to the road was guarded by a row of Lombardy Poplars. A little bit further down the poplars disappeared providing a great (gulp!) view from the road. In the picture, Marco is way down the road making sure no cars were coming up.*



*On the ride home we continued north along the river through parts of Umbria we had not seen before. Heading west to Foligno we went through another one of those amazing tunnels drilled straight through the base of a range of mountains. This time the tunnel complex extended several miles. That was fun, but the big parts of the day had been seeing the Abbey of San Cassiano, even if it was from a distance, the torture chambers in Narni and the lush green Nera River Valley.*

Within 2 hours of the heart of Umbria there are so many different natural wonders and ancient treasures you could spend years in central Italy and not see them all. I guess that's why Michael Tucker and Jill Eikenberry decided to live here, learn the language and eat stuff roasted on a stick after their LA Law days were over.

Marco was given a round of A-Pluses from all of the members of our group for his very well-done tour of some of the more obscure but very entertaining places in Umbria. We parted company when we returned to the L'Antico Forziere parking lot with many thanks and a good tip. He was off and we retired to the pool.



After an hour's rest we followed The Plan and went into Deruta to find any restaurant we could find. By chance we stumbled upon [Scappini](#). It was billed as a pizzeria and rotisserie, and as usual they had a very complete menu. I had one of my favorites, pasta with porcini mushrooms. What a great finish to a great day....

## *Chapter 21*

### *Santa Maria degli Angeli*

#### *The Fix Is In*



*The City of Los Angeles, California was named for this tiny chapel building.*

## ***The Plan...***

*Thursday, September 2*

*7 to 9 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*10 a.m. At your option you may do anything you want the rest of the day. Relax at the pool. Walk the hills and valleys around L'Antico Forziere. You are welcome to join John and Diane in freelance exploring of the Umbrian countryside and nearby towns. There is a bus stop in Casalina (very near L'Antico Forziere). The buses can take you north to Deruta, Assisi or Perugia and south to Todi and Terni.*

*8 p.m. Dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

## ***The Reality...***

*From the title of this chapter it may sound like Saint Mary of the Angels was in on the fix of the van. Let me assure you that these were two separate events on the same day. In fact I can also assure you that my prayers in the impressive basilica that final Thursday morning of our trip did not include asking Mary to intercede with her son to fix the car while I slept. I was willing to do my part of the work.*

We had been passing by [Santa Maria degli Angeli](#) from our very first day in Umbria. When you drive the northern part of the SS75 beltway road around the valley that stretches from Spoleto to Perugia and cruise past Lower Assisi you can't help seeing the very tall dome of the church standing high over the one and two-story



buildings on the valley floor. On our first evening in Umbria as we sped from Spoleto toward our country inn, L'Antico Forziere in Casalina, the dome rose on our right and was lit up. We knew what it was and since Judy and I would be doing a special program on the life of St. Francis at our church when we got home, it was always in our plan to spend one of our days of Rest and Relaxation inside this church.

As our time in Umbria progressed, our minds were reinforced over and over again to fulfill our original commitment to visit the church. When we went to pick up Isabella Bellucci, our guide for that first day of touring in Umbria, it was at the Santa Maria degli Angeli train station. There was the church looming only a few hundred yards away from the station. When we stood in the piazza in front of the Chiesa di Santa Clara in Assisi with a clear view over the plain below Assisi, there below was the church dominating the valley. As we drove from Casalina to Todi, to

Spoleto, to Foligno, to Spello, to Perugia, to Le Marche, repeatedly, there was the church looming above us. I felt like Odysseus hearing the Song of the Sirens as he passed by their Isle. The call was irresistible but our schedule called for other things first.

Finally it was our second week and the last Thursday in Umbria, another Day of Rest. Being ACOed (All Churchd Out), Dave chose the Song of the Snickers and the inn pool over the siren call of 'another church.' Right after breakfast Judy, Diane and I sped up the E45 and east on the SS75. We three were all hepped up and ready to go to Santa Maria. This was not just another church, this was the exact spot where St. Francis hung with his homeys when he was in the hood. The valley was very sparsely populated in those early days of the 1200s and this was the spot where legend has it the first band of his followers and St. Francis, the Lesser Brothers as they humbly referred to themselves, placed their first chapel, the [Porziuncola](#) (a.k.a. Portiuncula) or Little Portion. Right there on the SS75 there is a big exit sign for Santa Maria degli Angeli that we had seen over a half-dozen times on our earlier drives around Umbria. We and BB couldn't go wrong driving to this place, right? Wrong! The Italian National Highway Department had other ideas for us. Road work was underway at the exit and sand bags and roadblocks diverted us away from the turn toward the church. Instead we were detoured into the farms of the

valley. This time was different though. As we meandered left and right and left again in the flatlands we could always make out the huge dome in the distance. We were like small children in a department store wandering from their mother, but always keeping her in sight. We were comfortable this time. The detour ordeal would not be unnerving.



In the last stretch we drove alongside the huge wall of the building that is the basilica of the church and pulled up to the small front parking lot which is about 100 yards or so from the

front door. The long, long front patio provides an extra special walk-up to the façade of the church. We began snapping pictures immediately. Diane was excited by all of the trinket sales booths along the north street bordering the church. When she spotted them she knew she would find exactly what she was looking



for at one of those sanctioned religious articles outlets. On the front patio there were several large groups of children who had been let out of nearby school busses. How interesting. The kids were not dressed in parochial school garb, and back home we all know that there would never be a public school field trip to such an overtly religious location. Later, inside we saw several of the groups of children lined up at the Italian language confessionals. I can't remember a single instance of going to confession during public school hours on Long Island.

We were dwarfed by the stupendous front doors as we walked through just like little ants going into a crack in the foundation of a home. We were surprised by the immensity of this structure. It was reminiscent of walking into the front doors of St.



Peter's in Rome and the Duomo of Siena. The interior was white, bright and beautiful but not quite as large as those other two churches. The walls were adorned with frescos that were the equal of everything else we had seen in Italy.



Immediately ahead our eyes were drawn far down the aisle to



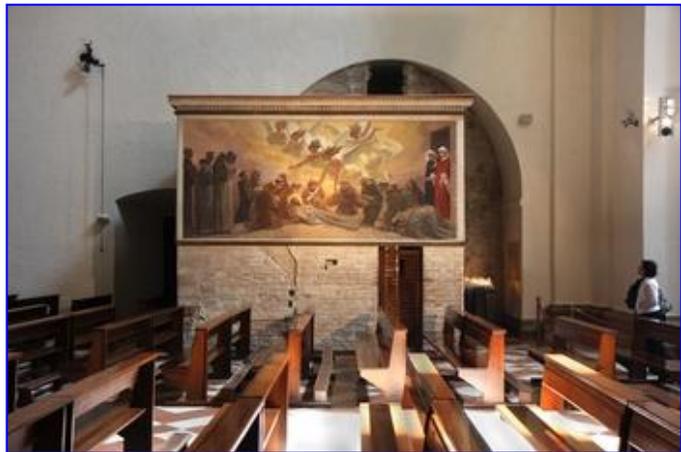
*the Porziuncola. It was in the center of the church directly under the high-vaulted dome. While it was a modest building, it was still large enough to block the view of the main altar from most of the rear of the church. I guess it is such a revered site, people who attend mass on weekends who find themselves back there don't mind having their view blocked by such an important edifice, but in my mind's ear I could hear our friend Millie back home saying, "This is stupid, I can't see a thing," if we were all attending a mass here together.*



*Of course, the Porziuncola is the reason for any church being on this spot, so it makes sense on some level. We wandered slowly up the aisle. To our left and right there were people seated in devotional, silent prayer. When we got to the little building I suddenly felt compelled to do as I had done in Loreto at the Santa Casa, Holy Family's House. I went all around the Porziuncola rubbing my hand along all of the foundation stones. I was thinking, St. Francis must have touched at least one of these stones as he*

and his followers began the restoration. Judy and Diane saw what I was doing and knew at once that I was not deranged. I can't speak for the other people milling about or watching from the pews. They might have been getting ready to call in some men in white coats, a carabinieri or at least a nun.

I stopped my foundation rubbing to read an English version of the story of the Porziuncola posted just outside the little building and found that there was a second, even tinier building only a few yards away. This was the small infirmary hut that the Lesser Brothers had built shortly after the Porziuncola. It was called the Transito and was the building in which St. Francis died on October 3, 1226. I looked up from my reading when I heard a bell. Daily mass had just begun at the main altar in back of the Porziuncola. I slipped into a pew with Diane. Judy joined us a moment later. I was



at the end of the pew, and I could reach out and touch the wall of the Transito as the mass proceeded. I found myself repeatedly reaching out to the cool wall the entire time. When mass was concluded we all went directly to the entrance of the Porziuncola and went in. Just like the Santa Casa a gaggle of people were packed inside both standing and seated in

*narrow pews, but there was complete silence. Not a soul spoke. I remained for a few more moments and worked my way out the small side door and back into the huge church. The three of us spilt up at this point each going toward different side altars and frescos. They were spectacular. I found a hallway out of the*



*south side of the main church and followed it to additional adventure. It transitioned to outside gardens, going from an enclosed indoor hallway to a covered portico and then an uncovered walk in the sunshine.*

*Under the cover of the portico there was a statue of St. Francis on a pedestal with live doves in a basket*



*he held in his arms. It appeared miraculous and the sight of it produced squeals of delight from a few nearby youngsters. Noticing that*

*there were seed feeders strategically located in the basket on the statue did not diminish from its intent of demonstrating Francis' love for animals. I continued into the garden where*



*there were beautifully kept fruit trees and other ornamental shrubs.*



*On the wall there was a majolica tile art piece depicting Francis standing in front of the Porziuncola. It was a beautiful spot to stop and pray. A moment or so later Judy appeared at my side excited by the live doves on the statue. She commented that the movement of the doves seemed to animate the statue of Francis. As I worked my way back to the inside of the church I turned once again toward the doves and the statue and could feel the effect Judy spoke of.*

*I arrived back inside of the church and continued my walk around. During this slow journey around the church I came across a group of ornate wooden*

confessionals in front of several of the side altars. Each was marked with a different language, Italiano, English, Francaise, Deutch and others. There were several Italiano confessionals and this is where the teenage school children were lined up. I noticed a man in plain clothes sitting casually on the raised marble floor of the side altar just outside of one of the Italiano confessionals. He was wearing an alb. This priest was sitting almost on the floor in a very unintimidating position, not dressed in scary clothes. This was the priest the teenagers were going to one at a time and sitting next to for confession. I ran and found Diane. I suggested that she, too, should go to the Italian priest sitting on the floor but confess in English. The language barrier might help her get over her fear of confession. She declined the bright idea.

Soon afterward we were reunited with Judy and walking out of the massive main doors. We were back on the front patio and wandering toward the trinket booths. I needed just one more photo of this beautiful place and the golden statue of Mary at the top. Happy shopping ensued with just the right gifts being found for loved ones at home.



*As we left, I was determined to prove to Judy and Diane that there was a McDonalds in this valley section of Assisi. I knew it was near the train station and had discovered it on the internet long ago. My first attempt to find it when we picked up Isabella Bellucci on our first Monday in Umbria at the Assisi Train Station was thwarted by road blocks and construction. This time I drove down the street to the left of Santa Maria degli Angeli and after only one small detour there it stood complete with other American customers about to Ingresso.*



*Judy was so happy because she wanted to bring Dave a Quarter Pounder with fries. Judy and Dave hold one of those obscure achievements in the*

Guinness Book of World Records having eaten in or from a McDonalds in every country they have visited in Europe during Dave's military career - dubious, but a record none-the-less. Diane and Judy chowed down and ordered Dave's Happy Meal. Afraid I might die eating a quarter-pounder, I decided to cross the street to the building shown in the background of the Ingresso Sign Picture and go to a small coffee bar. Using all of my acquired skill in Italian dialect I pointed to a half-sandwich in the showcase and ordered a latte. I motioned for the counterman to heat the sandwich. He shook his head and refused. I gave him the palms up, and he showed me why. It turned out to be a tuna with mayo on white. I was good, but it was no hot panini! Afterwards I rejoined the ladies and BB took us back to Our Ancient Treasure Chest without a hitch.

## **The Final Fix**

It was on the ride home that I came up with what would be the final fix for the scratches in the side of the van. I did not lay this issue at the feet of St. Francis, but I must say the visit to Santa Maria degli Angeli helped me relax to the extent that my mind was set free. A creative moment occurred while zipping down the E45. We passed by the only car accessory shop in the local region which we had found more than a week ago, but it was still closed

and pitch black inside. The darkness of the windows may have been the right inspiration. I thought black. Hey, black! Black is what we use when we want to hide something like a lumpy body. Maybe black could help the wrongly-colored enamel nail polish now filling the scratch lines.

When we got back to the inn I went to the front desk. Samuele was there with his usual inviting smile. I asked for a Magic Marker. His smile quavered a bit. His eyes became quizzical. I guess that is not an Italian brand. Next I tried a black pen. He quickly extended a black ball point pen. I shook my head quietly - no. I followed with black felt tipped pen. His eyes narrowed a bit and he squinted. His brain was translating the request into 'annerire la penna sentito rovesciata,' which loosely translates to 'to blacken the pen heard overturned.' Then his eyes widened as his brain processed it a little bit more. He reached into his desk drawer and came out with a black felt-tipped beauty. I grasped it from his hand and smiled broadly indicating this was the exact thing I needed. He went back to his broad smile as if I had just complimented the kitchen on its wonderful gnocchi tartufo.

My feet floated out to the parking lot carrying me along on a magic carpet of hope. I started to work the pen tip on top of the nail polish. The heat from the sun on the metal side of the van quickly dried up the ink flow. I could see from my first few dabs that a

perfect result was occurring. If I could only keep the ink flowing. I grabbed a paper towel from inside the van and started dabbing the pen into it. The ink began to flow again. For the next 30 minutes I alternately dabbed the scratches and the paper towel. The result approached an Auto Body Picasso. I walked to the back of the van and looked. I walked to the front of the van and looked. I stood directly next to the van and stared straight at it. It looked pretty damned good...excuse me Francis....I was satisfied.

Gubbio would be tomorrow with Anne Robichaud and finally on Saturday the great test of the fix would occur when we would return to the airport to hand over the van and fly home. The next morning as we loaded ourselves into the van for the Gubbio trip, I asked my art critic spouse for her impression of the new paint job I had done on the van. She was impressed. I relaxed. If only it would go so well with the folks at the car rental agency.

## Chapter 22

### *Gubbio, The Ceri and St. Ubaldo's Face*



## *The Plan...Friday, September 3*

*7 to 8 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

*8:30 a.m. Depart for Assisi.*

*9:15 a.m. Pick up Anne Robichaud at Santa Maria degli Angeli Train Station in Assisi. Anne will act as our personal tour guide of Gubbio (included).*

*9:30 a.m. Depart for Gubbio. Explore the northern part of Umbria with some surprise stops and snacks along the way to Gubbio.*

*1:30 p.m. At your option you may join us for a lunch in Gubbio or go off on your own and rendezvous with us at an appointed location for our tour of Gubbio.*

*3 p.m. Continue tour of Gubbio. Ride funicular (included) up to the top of Mt. Ingino.*

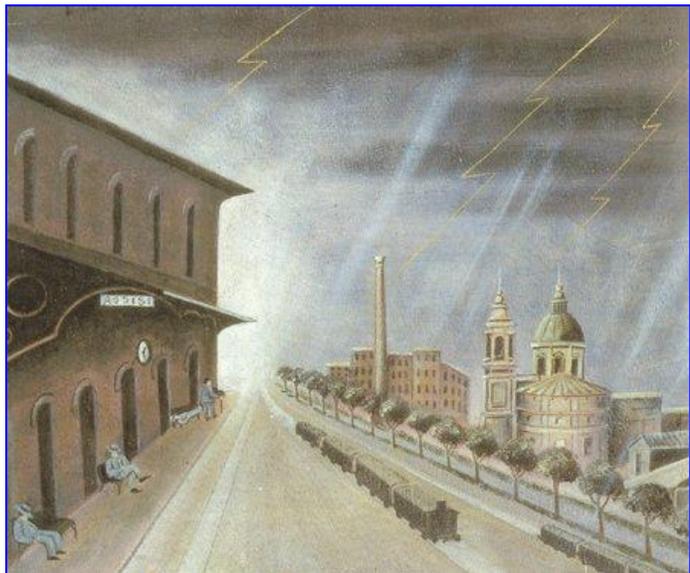
*5 p.m. Depart for L'Antico Forziere*

*8 p.m. Farewell dinner (included) at L'Antico Forziere.*

## *The Reality...*

*Friday was the last of our seventeen days on the Che Bello! Tour. We had saved the best for last, Annie Robichaud of Anne's Italy Tours. She is a renowned expert on the region, hill towns and Umbrian peasant life. She is also one of the most expensive guides in the region, but worth every penny. This was the main reason I had to save her for last. On the preceding Tuesday, we went to a dinner at her house which is tucked up in the hills behind Assisi. That was a fantastic experience, from a culinary standpoint and as a social event, since she had family attending the dinner from both Italy and the USA. On Wednesday, we used her colleague, Marco, obtained through Anne's Italy Tours to take us to Narni and the Nera River Valley. He was great and going with her colleague saved us 100 Euros, but I just had to experience at least one tour with Annie at the helm.*

*Since we were traveling north to Gubbio, we agreed during the Tuesday night dinner to meet at a good landmark, the Assisi train station next to Santa Maria degli Angeli. The cathedral has such a*



high dome it cannot be missed from anywhere in the Assisi region. It was easy to find again, since we had been there the day before, and Annie was exactly on time. We were 30 minutes early, but it wasn't hard to wait this time.

The weather had taken a turn for the better. It was a cool morning in the low 60s – just perfect for touring a stone city. She rolled up in a little red VW that looked just like my VW Rabbit from way back in the day. Hers looked like it was from way back in the day too, but as she showed; she voraciously consumes the hills of Umbria with that tiny car. She told me to follow her and it was like the fox chasing the agile rabbit through the forest. We rolled. She was



going to leave her car part way up the back roads to Gubbio at her printer's shop where she would also pick up some new brochures for her touring business when we got back. As I followed her in the van, I realized that she was being kind and could have buried me on those switchback roads of Umbria. We got to the drop off point and she popped into our van. Once again I was at ease. I knew I would not get lost this day.

*Annie took us on the roads less-traveled in Northern Umbria up to Gubbio. Her website says that this ride would go through some of the most breathtaking scenery in all of Umbria. We had seen a lot in the two weeks we had been there, but this ride was up to her promise. As we traveled north the hills seemed to get*



*higher and were spaced a bit further apart. The valleys in between added more definition to the mountains, and we had several nice perches to see everything as we whipped around the curves. She was a fountain of knowledge sharing tidbit after tidbit while we cruised through small town after small town, some on hills, and many in the valleys.*

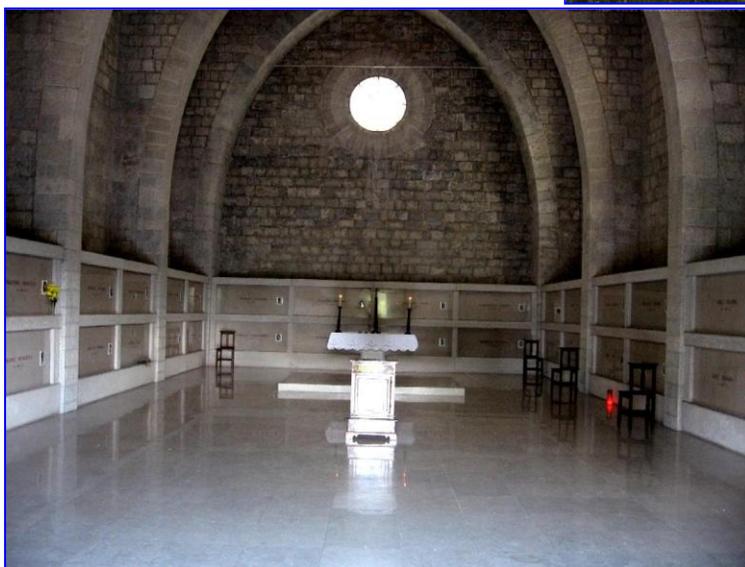
We learned why the region looks as sparsely populated as it does after several thousand years of settlement. You just can't get building permits to build new stuff in most of Umbria. Sure there are a few towns where more modern construction and density is evident, but in 95% of the land, planners have specifically worked to have time stand still. This applies not only to the density, but also to the exteriors of existing buildings. Modern appointments



can be put inside of buildings as the owners see fit, but the exteriors can only be restored, not renovated, and must maintain the exact same look as the original ancient

building. New second or third stories are almost never approved. If you want multiple floors you have to start out with a building that has multiple floors. It is almost as difficult to expand the footprint of a building. When one is approved, those kinds of expansions must be "built new to look old." The only other place I had ever encountered such a philosophy was on mainland China. I guess Marco Polo had a bigger impact in connecting these two cultures than I had ever figured.

*With that curiosity answered, we enjoyed the countryside journey even more, knowing we were looking at genuine 400 to 800 year-old architectural exteriors that may have been built or restored last week, but genuine none-the-less. As we approached Gubbio, Annie indicated that she wanted to start someplace special. We thought, “Oh boy, here comes another church,” but no. She said to us that since we had been in Italy for two weeks that we were probably ACOed (All Churched Out) already, so she would be concentrating on a secular tour. Wow, this is exactly what we had asked Margarita to do in Siena on*



*Monday and were summarily ignored. Annie knew and understood. That was a pleasure. She then took us to a shrine and burial place that was more recent and very humbling.*

*During World War II, especially as the war was drawing to a close, the residents of Gubbio tried to quietly host a number of anti-Nazi partisan groups. The Nazis suspected this but were unable to prove it. Then an incident occurred where a German officer was killed in the town. Up to that point in time, it had been rumored throughout Italy that the Nazis had in place a “40 to 1” rule. The residents of Gubbio found out it was more than a rumor.*

*On June 22, 1944, the Nazis immediately rounded up 38 men from the ages of 17 to over 60 and 2 women, and with no trial or hearing, lined them up along the low stone wall*



*shown in the picture and shot them all to death.*

*This shook the town to its core, since in an ancient and small village such as Gubbio, everyone knew everyone else. Every remaining resident of the town was likely related to someone who had fallen in that*



*murderous act. So Annie started our tour of Gubbio on a solemn note at the Mausoleum of the 40 Martyrs – still lovingly maintained by the townspeople of Gubbio. We spent some quiet time in the*

*mausoleum and memorial finding brothers, fathers and sons, and brothers and sisters, and in saying some quiet prayers for the departed.*

We then relocated the van to a Parcheggio on the edge of town right next to the 2,000 year-old Roman amphitheater. Once again I felt the joy of having the tour guide right in the van with us, as Annie pointed this way and that bringing us right to a free parking place with no difficulty at all. I was happy as a lark. The first place she brought us was Piazza Quaranta Martiri in the lower part of Gubbio, this city's version of Central Park except it has a big monument dedicated to Mussolini. This many trees in one spot inside of an Italian



hill town is quite unusual and a welcome relief for



residents and visitors alike. There were many benches beneath old-growth leafy trees. Other than Il Campo in Siena this was as large a piazza as we had seen in



any hill town of central Italy. Once again we were immersed in a population of more home town people than tourists, especially in this part of town.

We walked beneath a covered extension in front a series of shops at the edge of the piazza and found the town's farmer's market. There were brilliant splashes of color, reds, greens, and yellows – all fresh, all delicious looking. Obviously the nice lady in the picture was not an American tourist. As I looked over the colorful vegetables I was ready to whip out a sauté pan and chopping board to get started right beside her. Get me some olive oil!



We walked among the veggies and fruits and found a whole display of potted herbs. There right in front of Diane was the exact variety of rosemary we have in our front yard garden. I snatched off a rosemary leaf (you know, the pointy evergreenie thing) and snapped it between my thumb and forefinger. Squeezing it and rolling it around released the pungent and refreshing aroma that immediately transported me 4,000 miles to my front yard and kitchen. It was a moment. I thrust my fingers towards Diane's nose, and as



*usual she jerked her head back. Still after 40 years, I am not totally trustworthy. She then leaned in and recognized the fragrance of home.*

*Annie busied herself buying some onions and garlic for her family's dinner that night. I wonder if I should have back-charged her for using some of our tour time for personal reasons – only kidding. The chance to see her bargain for the fresh foods with the old farmer's wives was entertaining enough.*



*We popped into one of the stores, used the facilities and got our ration of caffeine and bottled water for our walk-about. Here, there and everywhere we went, they all knew Annie. It is kind of fun to see Italians (after 40 years here, she is officially Italian) greet each other. It might only be yesterday since they last saw each other and yet the hello is as big as if it had been a year with arms waving overhead, loud voices and an ecstatic timbre to the sounds they make.*

*Off we went now journeying uphill, but at a different pace than on our other hill town visits. Annie had so much information to give that we stopped every few feet in front of a wall, a door, a dried up stream bed,*

*just about anything in the town. It was a whole new catalog of touristic information – not a repetition of previous tours. We learned the truth about the term “Death’s Door.”*

*One of the “modern” defenses the 3,000 year-old hill towns used was to have very limited access to homes and buildings on the first floor.*



*This made it more likely that groups of outsiders whose turn it was to sack the town – there was a lot of sacking going on from 500 AD to 1600 AD – would likely pass your home by in favor of one that could be sacked with less trouble. The entry doors to most of the homes were placed up about 4 to 8 feet above street level with a retractable wooden staircase. The width of the doorway and entry hallway was too narrow for an armored sacker to pass through. Unarmored sackers would find it difficult to move forward down a narrow hall entryway against a phalanx of long, pointy spears. Between the sacking years there were years of plague. During the plague years sackers stayed away and passed on murdering people because they didn’t want to catch the cooties, and town residents obliged them by just dying of the plague in great numbers. In the more sophisticated towns, there*

were men who drove carts like sanitation workers to collect plague-ridden bodies on a regular basis. I wonder what the pay for that job was! They would pull up in front of each house and the bodies were tossed out via the “Death Door,” and off to the local bonfire they would go. Hence the modern term, “He is at Death’s Door.” Annie strongly made the point that the doors were not really built as “Death Doors,” but originally built for defensive purposes. Enough already with the Death Doors!

As we strolled along one of the streets next to a dry stream, Annie pointed out the bottom of the stream was made out of cement. When the stream beds were natural, and in times of plenty of water, the flora in and around the stream



would grow lushly and have to be removed to prevent flooding. The city fathers eventually got the bright idea to pave the streams that ran through the town. This idea made Dave pause and really scratch his head, but this is not so strange in Italian cities. Everything seems to be paved.

During dry seasons in Gubbio when the water levels would drop the old city fathers busied themselves paving the streams



section by section. The entire paving of the in-town streams was accomplished over a number of years, so it was a sustained effort – a bright idea that now has modern conservationists turning in their graves. Evidently this is not too good for eco-systems. To the modern day conservationists, I say, “Take a look at every city or town in Italy.” The old Gubbians were just staying in step with all of the Italians of antiquity who loved working with rock and cement. Current



Gubbio planners like most Italian Planning Boards are not prone to changing the old standards, leaving things as they looked 800 years ago, so the cement stream beds remain.

As we turned up one street after another we saw wonderful architecture and interesting sight after sight after sight, some very unique to this town. We came upon the Piazza di Bargello which contains the Fontana dei Matti with the official symbol of Gubbio. There is also a [tale of madness](#) connected with the fountain, not to be taken lightly.





Finally we made it to 5th Avenue. Well the Gubbio version of 5th Avenue, Via dei Consoli. This district in the heart of the upper town had all sorts of boutique shops. It was here that Dave found his

Bucchero treasure. Earlier in our trip we had gone to see the majolica pottery that is so popular in Umbria, especially in our neighboring town of Deruta where I bought my family-size pasta serving bowl. Well the Etruscans were not satisfied with just firing clay pottery as had been the tradition for about



25,000 years of civilization. They instead, around 700 BC decided to fuss around with the fire so they could make this fancy black pottery. It just so happens that one of the shops on Gubbio's 5<sup>th</sup> Ave





is operated by a fantastic artist, Sabrina Matteucci who along with her ceramicist husband, Raimondo Baffoni still makes this pottery 2,700 years later. She produces it with some of the most astounding artwork to be found anywhere.

Dave loved it and returned to Via dei Consoli during our lunch break to buy a one-of-a-kind bucchero piece.

After the shops we scrambled up the stairs to the top of the Palazzo dei Consoli.



This very elaborate building was constructed for the duly-selected leaders of public government in Gubbio. It was constructed with a 3-hopper latrine on the top floor for use by the current governor and his friends. It is reputed to be the first indoor toilet in Italy. Interesting fact – when a leader was selected by whatever means they used in those days, he would go into this building

and not emerge again until his term was completed, sometimes months, sometimes years later. Evidently, there were negative popularity issues. So for life and

limb, the official would be protected and sealed off from direct contact with the public – but – the public did get regular monthly audiences with the official.

The public would crowd into a very large public hall on the bottom floor of the building and the leader would stand about 3 floors up behind a wall at a



small megaphone-type hole and shout responses down to their questions and points of order. It was a sort of a take-it-or-leave-it approach to government with no insurrections permitted. Since the

official could not leave the building for a year or so they installed the three-story high latrine. I imagine the same guys who collected the dead bodies during the plague had the cleanup job on the first floor below the 3-hatcher. On the top floor there was a really nice stone balcony that ran the length of the building. It commanded a great view of the lower town and the piazza at the entrance of the palazzo. I guess if the city official was feeling okay about himself and his ruling he would occasionally peek over the edge and down to the waiting, fist-waving mobs below.

*We got some great photos from that big balcony.*



*When we left the palazzo, we split up for lunch. Diane and I went to the funivar to get up to the top of Mt. Ingino and the Monastery dei St. Ubaldo. Judy, Dave and Annie went back to the bucchero shop and lunch together in the lower town.*

*The ride up the funivar was fun. We each had an individual cage. There is Diane in hers. To get on the funivar you waited at a loading station and then ran alongside of the cage until you could jump in. I was in mine in a twinkling of an eye much to the surprise of the two guys who were spotting.*



*Diane was next. She froze a bit, but these guys are pros. They simply lifted her up and tossed her into the cage. She landed on her feet – no harm, no foul. Up, up, up to the top of Mt. Ingino we rode.*

*It felt like our days back in the 1960s and 70s when we would grab a ski lift to the top of some pretty big hills. When we popped off the funivar we found ourselves at a really nice mountaintop open air*



*restaurant. So we ate lunch. Grilled zucchini, gnocchi with porcini mushrooms and pizza topped with prosciutto. It just didn't matter – backstreet bar or mountaintop monastery, you just can't get a bad meal in this country.*

*After lunch we hiked up a bit further to the [Basilica of St. Ubaldo](#) and sure enough, as promised, there was*

[St. Ubaldo](#) laying there in a golden robe inside a glass case under the church altar. You can see his face on the title page of this chapter. I guess he didn't look bad for a guy who had been dead for 850 years. Most times they put a decorative mask over these "preserved" saint's faces – not so for Ubaldo. We didn't stay very long. As we left the church there were the three Ceri standing by the exit door just waiting for next May 15 and the next race up the mountain by the citizens of Gubbio. Those things were pretty big.



It was already time to hop the funivar to the lower town and rejoin our friends. The hop was not as sprightly with a dish of gnocchi



and half a pizza making the jump along with me, but Diane and I each managed to get aloft for the beautiful ride down the mountain.

When we reunited I found that Dave, Judy and Annie had developed a real mutual admiration and friendship in the time we were gone. That was great! We collected ourselves and the last glass of wine from their bottle from lunch. We shook hands with the proprietor who also runs a restaurant in [Jessup, Pennsylvania](#), the sister city for Gubbio in the States, and then we were off descending the streets back down to the Roman Amphitheater and our Parcheggio.

Of course Annie kept regaling us with great Gubbio facts and stories, but we were already happy and satisfied. This had been a fine last day for our vacation. The weather was perfect, the town beautiful and our guide superb. Besides that, lunch was great! We drove back through the stunning landscape of the Northern Umbrian mountains and valleys and soon found ourselves bidding farewell to Annie and our wonderful Gubbian Day. As her little red VW put up a cloud of dust, we set BB for the ride home and cruised in a sated state to our Ancient Treasure Chest, our final dinner and our packing. Pretty nice vacation....



## Chapter 23

### The Dash to Roma Airport Uscita 30

*Did the fix work?*



## *The Plan...*

Saturday, September 4

6:30 a.m. Breakfast (included) at L'Antico Forziere.

7:30 a.m. Dave, Judy, Diane and John rendezvous in L'Antico Forziere lobby for departure and return trip to Fiumicino Airport.

10:00 a.m. Arrive Fiumicino Airport Departures Terminal 5. John drops group at departures curbside, returns rental car and rejoins group at Terminal.

11:50 a.m. US Airways Flight 719 to U.S.

## *The Reality...*

Saturday soon came. We settled all accounts with L'Antico Forziere the night before. Smiles, handshakes, hugs and thousands of Euros were all exchanged. Gratitude was in the air from all parties. Samuele gifted us with genuine extra virgin olive oil from Spello. Very nice. We set BB for the Fiumicino Airport and then eased out of the parking lot and along the dirt road for the last time.

Soon we were zipping south on the refined, recently repaved E45 trying to drink in all of the scenery for one last time. Sure there would be plenty of pictures to look at and thoughts to be recalled, but remember,

*as I said earlier, “A photograph can never duplicate what the human eye perceives.” The depth and scope of the surrounding mountains and valleys were presenting themselves in their full glory and dependable haze for the final time. We quietly looked as the road melted beneath our wheels. When we*



*arrived at the airport, I knew the secret roads that took us back to Terminal 5 and dropped off Diane, Judy and Dave along with the luggage. I told Diane that I should be back in about a half hour. It was very pleasant outside so I asked her to wait on a bench and I would help get our luggage inside when I returned. Judy and Dave went ahead to grab a bite and do some last-minute shopping. We agreed to meet inside at the gate.*

*I eased back onto the airport road looking for the Rental Car Return sign. No problem. I slowly exited and worked my way along a road with vertical parking lots on both sides. These were short-term parking, long-term parking and various autonoleggio (car-hire agencies) all combined. I could not find the right name for my agency, so I took a chance and lo and behold it was the right chance. Soon I was climbing the driveway ramp up one floor...two floors...three floors and there on the fourth floor was my agency. There were company men waving at everyone who drove in this way in the universal manner of 'Don't stop! Come this way! Come this way!' So I went this way. Soon I was pointed toward a parking space. Next to me, on the scratched side, was a big vehicle. I pulled in, backed up and snuggled a little bit closer to the big vehicle. A really skinny guy might have been able to squeeze down between the two cars but it was tight.*

*I jumped out of the van before anyone parked next to me. Made one last check of the seats, glove box, under the seats and the trunk, and I was good to go. I took two steps over and peered down the scratched side of the van in a very casual way with the tension rising in my neck. It looked good. I momentarily had a flash thought of going into the auto body repair business when I returned home, but quickly suppressed the idea. There was a central computer station in the middle of the parking area. I stood on the long line watching how people did their final*

return. When it was my turn I handed the original agreement to the skinny (ugh!) company guy, said clearly in English, “Good morning,” and he responded in accented, but clear English. “Gooda morning, owa wuz thee cah for you?” I responded earnestly and honestly, “It was great. It did everything we had hoped.” He smiled and waved for me to follow him for the final inspection.

With so many people returning cars he rushed over to my vehicle, stuck the key in the ignition, checked the mileage and gas level, looked inside, walked to the front, the driver’s side, rear and finally the scratched side. He leaned over to look down the side of the car preferring not to squeeze between the two vehicles. The crowd hushed and held its breath (actually it was just me). He stood straight up and marked his sheet OK and said to follow him back to the computer station.

Bada bing, bada boop, he printed out a statement and directed me to the sales booth to pay for the extra mileage. Bada boop, bada beep, I paid for the extra mileage and the next thing I knew I was at the bus stop headed for Terminal 5. It has now been almost a year since our return from Italy, more importantly it has been many credit card statements since our return, and it all seems to have worked out okay. I may yet go into the auto body repair business....

*Epilogue...Thanks.*



*....Thank you for following along with our 2010 trip to Rome, Umbria and Tuscany.*

*I hope you had fun with the accounts of our trip. You have inspired me to create this diary of events for which I am very grateful. I have been reorganizing and editing my original notes for several months now and have added lots more photographs, many travel and information links and a bunch of useful tips for those traveling to Italy for the first time, especially the Umbria and Tuscany regions.*

*In the time I have been writing and editing this tome I have come to realize that in many ways this trip was the fulfillment of a dream my parents had but never completed. I carried their memories on my shoulder as we traveled through each adventure on the roads and in the restaurants of Rome, Umbria and Tuscany. I encourage you to make a similar trip either for the first time or again if you've been elsewhere in Italy. There are so many things to experience in places like Rome, Umbria and Tuscany that are different from any place in the USA. The whole country is manageable and exciting, and the people are grand. Have a joyous time and toss caution to the wind. You won't regret it.*

*Let your friends know they can find this eBook on my website, [www.homecookingparties.com](http://www.homecookingparties.com), for a very reasonable price. It will unravel some of the mystery of travel in Italy. Hey, they might even want to try my cookbook Home Cooking Parties and have some fun with their friends. Enjoy!*