

Going Home Again for the First Time

Memories are Made of This

By Salvatore Martoche



Salvatore Martoche

Recently I completed two journeys that I had thought about, fantasized about and longed for many years. First, I became an Italian citizen. Of course, I would never have entertained the idea if it had

meant relinquishing or jeopardizing my United States citizenship because I know where my first allegiance will always be. I love being an American and acquiring my Italian citizenship doesn't change that but expresses the fact that I also love being Italian. I was happy to discover that the process of establishing dual citizenship, while cumbersome, expensive and difficult, can be successful for many.

Once I had obtained my Italian citizenship, I applied for and received my Italian passport. I also wanted to claim my Italian birth certificate and have my name entered in the town registry next to those of my grandfather, Salvatore Martocchia, and my great-grandfather, Carlo Martocchia, both of whom were shoemakers from the small town of Popoli in the Pescara region of Abruzzo in the beautiful Gran Sasso Mountains.

The second journey was physical. I really wanted to go to the Abruzzo with Mary Dee, my beautiful and patient wife, and then have our children and grandchildren join us in some irresistible place in order to meet as many our Italian family members as I could gather. This undertaking was not without its logistical and financial challenges. First we had to nail down

the availability of the children, their spouses and our three grandchildren, making sure that work and school obligations would not be an impediment.

That done, Mary Dee planned a once-in-a-lifetime experience to make my dream come true. We rented a villa in the village of Sant'Agata sui due Golfi, just outside Sorrento. The villa slept 10 which was perfect for us because we were joined by our Italian daughter Manuela Astro who lived with us at an exchange student for a year when she attended the Buffalo Seminary.

But before we got to the villa, we spent a few days in Abruzzo. We stayed for two nights at the Villa Maiella, a lovely bed-and-breakfast with a one star Michelin restaurant that is extraordinary and one of the great bargains left in Italy. It's in the town of Guardiagrele in the beautiful Maiella mountains, near the Gran Sasso National Park. From there I was able to



Conducting a reading with cousins at a villa in Sorrento

travel comfortably into Popoli. There I saw for the first time my name in the official registry next to that of my grandfather Salvatore Martocchia and his father Carlo. I'm not ashamed to say it was a very moving experience for me. I came away with a copy of my official Italian birth certificate showing me as a foreign born Italian entitled to all of the rights and privileges of any other Italian citizen. I was able to do all of this and to maintain my precious US citizenship and identity. We had a lovely dinner with a cousin, Enrico Campone, a lawyer in Pescara. It was a great win-win day for me.

We enjoyed our time there immensely and then it was on to Sorrento to get ready for the children and grandchildren who would be arriving over the next few days. Although we had seen pictures of the villa we knew that pictures don't always tell the whole story and that was true here. In this case, however, the place was actually better, more beautiful and more accommodating than the photographs. It has a lovely swimming pool and five bedrooms which accommodated everybody comfortably. Because Italy was in the midst of a heat wave it was great that the bedroom air-conditioners worked pretty well.

Our days were filled with visits to the old city of Pompeii and Vesuvius. We spent a day on a boat traveling around the wondrous Isle of Capri and swimming in the Mediterranean. We enjoyed biking and hiking and sightseeing and eating and drinking and one another's company. What can I say? It was the trip of a lifetime and it was even better than I had hoped.

After about five days, 15 Italian relatives I had invited joined us for a couple of days. We had a great party in a great setting. Everybody ate and drank and got to know one another. Please believe me that the language differences are no barrier when love, accompanied by a good app on your telephone, is



Celebrating with Italian family in a Sorrento courtyard.

available. Manuela was a skillful translator throughout this process and invaluable. She is a beautiful, successful young woman and was very patient with all of us. Although Mary Dee and I had seen her a couple of years ago, the kids hadn't seen her in years. They had a great time getting to know one another again and reminiscing about their year in America together.

We said goodbye to Amy, Tim and Juliana who went on to Venice and then Amsterdam on their own adventure. Chris, Katie and the boys accompanied us to Apice, a small town near Benevento in Campania. My relatives could not



Cousin, Felice with Mary Dee Martoche

(Continued on page 8)



Surrounded by cousins in Apice

have been more welcoming hosts and guides for the next 3 days. They are wonderful people who showed the kind of hospitality that I expected of them because they are, after all, Italians and they love us. Did I mention that they are also great cooks?

The biggest problem was the heat. The temperatures approached and sometimes surpassed 100°F. Italians have a different concept about ice in beverages and adequate air conditioning. However, we managed and it did not put even the slightest damper on our adventure.

My American family seemed to love every moment of this cultural and familial meshing. Chris was particularly moved by seeing the home of his maternal great-grandmother and gazing up and seeing the inaccessible but slightly visible remnants of what had been the home of his maternal great-grandfather and being able to share that with his wife Katie and two young sons, Sal and Charlie. He agreed they were clearly poor farmers without much in the way of worldly possessions, but they also grew up in a part of the world with breath-taking vistas.

I've traveled a lot in my life and seen a lot. But there will never again be a trip as glorious as this one. Going home again for the first time with my family to meet my family.



Martoche grand children : Charlie - Juliana - Sal, at the Italian home of authors maternal family



The Old Castle courtyard in Apice Vecchia

Photo; by 9 year old Salvatore Daniel Martoche