

## Italy and Belgium 2003

Written on the plane April 27, 2003 flight home.

The sentences in parentheses were added at the time of transcription.

When I close my eyes and think about this trip to Europe, the first thing I see is Cataldo and Concetta's house and Luigi's kind face, but I will try to start from the beginning.

The beginning starts with Lisa deciding to go to Belgium for her junior year and our desire to see her between January 18, 2003 and June 28, 2003.

We booked the trip in September having to send Teresa back early, so not to have her miss her college classes. Who would know she'd get straight A's there the first semester.

I left our house around 10 AM to pick Teresa up at Scranton peeing lovely spring day. I spent some time biting my nails with a lane closings for construction on the north east extension arriving around 12:30. I called up to Teresa before arriving getting her voicemail. I asked for a cup of coffee. I could have slept more the days before but much preparation for the trip. She came to the parking lot with her usual bright smile. Many students were in shorts and sandals. She brought her little suitcase and a big white bag of food with salad dressing dripping out. It was an easy drive to the airport. We had a nice talk in the car. Like we could when we did so much driving during the bishop Eustis high school years.

We parked the car in the parking lot J. D was all filled up. We got to the check-in line the same time Claudette Steve and Regina arrived in the limo. I called my mom and dad and Bud Palumbo and spoke with Theo. They're going to Italy in December.

The flight wasn't eventful. I tried to study Italian and slept pretty well. Regina and Steve sat behind Claudette and I in the back of the airbus 300. Good individual TV sets.

The weight for the baggage was long and anxious since they didn't arrive for a while and also wondering when we would meet up with Lisa and where. Very excited and relieved to see hug and kiss Lisa outside of the customs area. Lisa showed us the way to the car rental. The site of everyone getting reacquainted was pleasing. I waited in line for the rental car. We all had a good laugh on seeing the car which was more like a small bus. The car just barely fit in the garage. The first sound we heard was the aerial hitting the ceiling.

It was a sunny slightly, cool day in Rome. Some heavy local traffic which gave way to clear roads before the hills. The drive was easy and beautiful. Many slept having been awake much of the night. I felt slightly sleepy towards the end. We stopped halfway since Claudette needed some water. She wasn't feeling too well with the flight. We used the Macy's Credit Card since we only had about €10 of Lisa's to pay the toll until we found a Bancomat. I left without signing thinking I didn't have to, and the lady came

running after me. The credit card was denied. Great! Switched to MBNA, which worked. The drive into Chieti and the hotel was easy and no wrong turns. We just kept going up the hill.

(when paying the toll getting off the autostrada, I handed the toll taker €20 but he gave me change only for €10. I brought it to his attention by saying in my best Italian, do venti. He made an interesting face shrug his shoulders and gave me more change. Going up the hill was quite a challenge with that large transit. When we first stopped at a red light on a steep hill, I thought I was surely going to roll backwards into the car behind me, but I managed.)

No one spoke English at the hotel desk. I managed with my Italian. We registered left the car on the street and we all sat down in the hotel restaurant for our first meal in Italy together. We could hardly understand the menu. A little white wine. Short waiter with no English. The waiter said 'posso' to clear the plates each time. We parked the car. I thought I had gotten locked in. The garage door closed behind me not knowing I could turn into the first level because of our giant Ford transit. Three rooms, Steve and I together. Lisa and Teresa next-door and Mom and Regina across the hall. There was an incredible view from being so high up. We went to explore Chieti. The church and Luigi's office. The highlight was the fountain in the park. The children on their bikes. The twin girls and their dolls and the patient father. They would fall often running into the boy on the two wheeler, laughing, looking up to the sky and waiting for their father to set them straight. A small crowd of women and grandmothers. Our kids were on the seesaw. Some gelato. We walked all very tired now. Dinner at a little pizzeria. We were the first ones in of course. Many people out for the evening passeggiata. It was cool, crisp and clear. I called Luigi at his home. He invited us for Easter lunch! He will meet us after his office hours 1215 tomorrow! I go to bed very happy but restless with excitement. Nervous about communicating in Italian.

Easter, Friday, April 18, 2003 Lisa's birthday.

Another beautiful day. We slept late. Breakfast of cappuccino biscuit, yogurt and rolls. (The young lady making the cappuccino was quite cute in a tight white top and black skirt. Steve went back for about three cappuccinos, I believe to get a good close-up look of this little Italian beauty)

We went to hear the music at the Cathedral, but it's starts at 12 and we're supposed to meet Luigi at 12:15. I left to meet Luigi leaving the rest to listen to the music. I got lost going the wrong way to arrive the office at 12:22. I waited and waited for Luigi. His car is outside. I finally gave up and left at 13:00 and down the street. He is coming with a bag. He had waited till 1220. To the cathedral while trying to communicate in both English and Italian. The square is empty. Claudette waiting, the children have gone to look for us. We go to find them. The sun is pouring down while I do the introduction. The kids get the Luigi kiss. We go to the café for tea, hot chocolate, and coffee. Luigi gets a lemon cake and we sing for Lisa's birthday in Italian. Tanti auguri a te. Luigi is off from work. We have a nice chat with two black men sitting behind us. We buy some CDs from them. (preparing to leave, I said to Luigi in my best Italian allow me to pay and he shook his head and put his finger up wagging it back-and-forth emphatically telling me that he was not letting me pay.)

At 1730 hours Good Friday mass at the Cathedral with The Bishop Cardinal in a red hat. Before this, we went to the church and saw all (I thought) of the "props" for the procession. The cross the dice, the grieving Mary and Moore. The mass and passion for me were very moving. The procession was the winding up and we went to the bottom of the steps watching as they all came down in near total silence. The corpse of Jesus was the last to come out. He was not displayed before. He was covered with sheer white linen. It was very moving. Then the music started stopping my breath. Off went the procession. We thought we could out flank the procession to the front but we lost it. Just as well. We were all hungry and went to the restaurant Luigi had showed us earlier that day. A very nice dinner indeed for Lisa's 21st birthday. We had to change Hotel plans and called Hotel Fortezza in Civitella del Tronto to cancel after all the energy spent to fax them and call from the US to talk twice in Italian.

Saturday, April 19

Another beautiful day. Headed south on A14 to a town on the hill with a great views and a monastery. This was Vasto. When we pulled in there, there was so much traffic. An hour later the place was deserted. Everyone taking the midday break. This is an Italian vacation town. We found a great little restaurant. Claudette and I ordered frutte del Mare for appetizer. It was mussels and clams to Claudette surprise. We all shared. It was so good to all be together sharing another meal. It was very reasonably priced I might add. We headed up the coast north. We stopped a little beach town. Regina frolicked in the water. Some of us (Steve and I) took a nap on the beach. Lisa went to work with the camera.

Going back a little bit. Pulling out of the Avis garage I saw a man who I had noticed in line at the Avis desk. He said he was going to Chieti. I shook his hand to say hello and have a good trip. Guess who checked in at the Grand Hotel Abruzzo with us. Yes sir, there he was with his wife, two daughters and father and mother in law visiting the wife's family at a town very close to Giuliano. I bring this up because the grandfather says go to Pescara. You'll enjoy it.  
(his family was from Boston. The wife's grandfather had made the coffin into which the dead Christ was placed for the procession in their town, Crecchio.)

So we head up to Pescara through Frank Villa. It's getting more crowded and dirtier with no beach in sight. I had originally thought we would go to Chi Videl Toronto for a visit even though we were no longer staying there. So out of frustration with the poor result at Pescara I decided to head north to Chi Villa. It was late. The sun was starting to go down behind the mountains, making quite a beautiful scene. But the race was on to get there before it got dark. Well, I lost the race but what a view looking back to a Scarlet Pucino. We passed the sign for Fore Yano, the cortisone Towne. Just a few miles from my grandpa. Dinner was so so at the hotel for Teza. The gelato was good. Ride back was OK but it got late.  
The roads were so dark and winding!

Easter day.

Kind of hectic packing and loading the car and going to mass. It was the cardinal again. Boy was he long winded. Worked himself up to quite a fever pitch. I left early to check out and bring up the car. The Flacco's invited us for 1230 and knowing Luigi's punctuality and his emphasis on my father's lunch is at 12:30, I thought I'd better make the effort. Lively drive through the small towns and vineyards. I burned the map into my brain and was proud to arrive on time and remembered the house from my visit there with Joyce the year before.

The Ricciuti's were leaving the Flacco's home. I saw Carlo, Romero and others. We brought in Ang's pictures. Two tables were put together the length of the room. Present where Grazia Bucci(Concetta's mother), who married uncle Nick's brother Luigi(deceased). Cataldo Flacco, 80, Concetta Andreacola (Cataldo's wife), Luigi Flacco and his wife Valerie Anna from Pescara. Both are internist. He specializes in geriatrics and she in endocrinology. Valerie Anna's parents were also there. Luigi and Valerie Anna are both only children. Valerie Anna's name comes from the name of a wild Mountain flower. I told her I have a cousin named Valerie Ann. She said this was the only other person she knew of with the same name.

We ate the women served as before in my prior visit. First soup. Two bowls one of which Cataldo wanted me to serve. Egg drop soup with tiny noodles and tiny cut up fried polenta in a chicken broth. Then boiled chicken. Cannelloni stuffed with finally cut up meat and mushrooms. Rabbit roasted around egg and roasted lamb. Luigi said "the same thing for 40 years". Very tasty!. A little bit of salad. Red and white wine. The white was made by Cataldo. Desserts started with fresh fruit. Excellent pear, which Regina and I had. Italian rum cake. Fiona cookies and a lemon fruit like cake. All baked by Gracia with exception of the last cake espresso.

After many hours (2 1/2 to 3) we stretched. Luigi brought out a giant hollow chocolate egg wrapped in pretty wrapping. He helped Regina break it open where she found a stuffed animal inside. They also gave out little pins for our kids. Ballerinas for the girls. Motorcycle for Steve. Valerie Anna made a fuss over Regina and wanted hugs from her for Regina's thank you. We gave the Flacco's a little vase which we purchased in Chieti. I gave a little flowering plant to Gracia, who seemed genuinely appreciative. We talked pictures with all. I asked Luigi if he could take us to the Cemetery for me to look for my great grandparents. Luigi made a plan. First the Cemetery then to his and Valerie Ann's house then to the Ricciuti's.

The cemetery was very close to the church and to Luigi's house. Most are buried mausoleum style. The ground in the graveyard was very small. I was disappointed not to find the great grandparents. There were not many old graves as Steve astutely pointed out. I saw Filomeno Andreacola's born in 1860 undoubtedly the person who came to the US with my grandfather in 1906. Carlo Nanni, my mom's uncle was there. I took pictures.(it turns out after looking at the pictures that Rosalinda Di Cesare my mom's grandmother is buried with her son Carlo Nanni)

Then to Luigi and Valerie's apartment building. Six apartments built on Cataldo's land by Cataldo. Other lands have old olive trees on them. The apartment was spacious all marble floors. Very modern decorations with modern paintings. Coke and dessert were served with grappa. You can see mountains and ocean and snow covered mountains with the sun setting on it. Luigi has a laptop. Valerie Anna's Crystal collection what is notable. The cooperative is next to their apartment and Cataldo was president of it for many years. Several trophies for tennis competition on display at Cataldo's house.

The Ricciuti's house was very busy. We sat with Romeo who was governor of Abruzzo. He comes often to the US and advises NIAF(National Italian, American Federation). He knows persons who run the Italian radio stations in the US out of the main cities. He has a niece who teaches Spanish at a local college near us. Angelo knows where. He's well spoken and knows a little English. He gave me a wine liquor. His father's house was destroyed in World War II. Angelosanto Andreacola's house was occupied by Germans. This is why Concetta and Grazia went to Chieti for two years during the war. Romeo said he'd look into if his grandmother was Irene Paolini my great grandmother.

Just before leaving standing on Cataldo's landing, he took my hands in his two hands and said to me "quando ritorna"? I told him I needed a new Uncle and I asked him to be it. We drove away as the sun set. What a day!

We drove to Fiumicino with only one missed turn, not so bad. We checked into a dumpy Hotel. There was a man sprawled out on the floor next to the stairway door on our floor. He was unconscious or sleeping surrounded by cigarettes. I asked Lisa and Teresa to put a chair in front of their door since it had no deadbolt all to bed. It was late.

Monday, April 21, 2003.

Bad day.

Our flight was changed from 10 o'clock to 9:30 AM combined with Alitalia, to make long story short, we missed the flight and finally changed tickets to 1230 on Alitalia. While doing this, we said goodbye to Teresa who Lisa sends off. Relieved we now have a flight, Lisa goes to check in. Her flight is full and her reservation was made for two days later! Back to the Alitalia ticket agent. They have a seat for her for \$700. OK, they print the ticket for the 330 flight. We take another half hour to get that changed.

Yay! We are finally off to Brussels. With Lisa as our guide and leader, everything goes well with taking two trains to Leuven. We got our plane tickets changed for the flight home. We took a cab when we got to Leuven. Lisa walked. We arrived to the Begijnhof Congress Hotel. It was a beautiful day around 4:30. The room was very nice with a garden in the back. We relaxed. Lisa came back to get us. How exciting to have her lead us to her room. The town was very clean. We met her friends. Her room was the messiest of course but we are so happy to be there. It all finally seemed real to me. After all the digital pictures that she had sent us to now see all those same things with my own eyes. We walked through town and then to dinner. Late to bed again. Dinner by ourselves. We learned "der reconing". We all slept well.

Tuesday, April 22, 2003.

We went to Brugge by train the next day. Lisa had classes most of the day. 1033 train. Beautiful countryside. The town was very touristy but good. We took a boat ride. A nice lunch outside. (I had the local Triple which almost knocked me on my butt, despite eating a lot of food, including Steve's leftover ham and eggs.) Next to the restaurant was the church with The Michelangelo Madonna and child. It is the only Michelangelo statue outside of Italy. The church was unkept dark and half of it was a museum with paintings. We got chocolate for dessert. We bought lace for our moms. The store owner came to Bruce 10 years ago and was treated as an outsider because of their wrong accent. Her daughter has the correct accent, which is a help. First pay toilet we encountered at the station.

I slept most of the way back on the train. 759 train. We met Lisa late. We waited at the wrong place at first. We had dinner with two of her friends. Lauren Wochele from Loyola and a Belgium Leeven graduate student Laura. We were looking for mussels, but that restaurant was closed. Did Italian. Back home again late. It was a restful night.

Wednesday, April 23, 2003.

We had a restful morning. Lisa had classes till noon. We had a nice leisurely breakfast and read and relaxed mostly in the garden. We met Lisa at her dorm, we brought an extra suitcase for her to pack and give back to us. We got big good unique sandwiches at a sandwich shop. They were on long baguettes for two euro each. We went to the botanical gardens. Another beautiful day, of course, and many pictures. Then to a second Park, which was a long walk with many geese and tucks. We read relaxed and Regina did cartwheels. Then to dinner. This night with Molly and Lauren Smith. Looking for muscles again the Restaurant was open, but muscles were out of season! We had a nice dinner though. We had free after dinner drinks. Good dessert at a café in a little plaza. Hot chocolate cookies. Chocolate cake for Claudette. To bed. A wonderful relaxing day with the family. We pack for a return to Italy.

Thursday, April 27, 2003.

We met Leese for breakfast then went to Brussels airport by Cab for €52 remember for Teresa. (it is planned for Teresa to visit Lisa when Scranton classes are finished at the end of the semester since she couldn't come this time.)

Had to switch planes because of engine problem. Sat next to little old Italian lady. The Airline stewardess did the directions in three languages, but not in Italian and we're going to Rome!?

We missed our driver at the airport and took a free cab which cost €70. We ate in a little restaurant and walked to the forum. It was a noisy night in Rome. Cramped quarters, but we all got along well.

Friday, April 28, 2003.

Boy Rome is so crowded as compared to January 2002 when Joyce and I went. Took a bus to the Vatican number 64 it was packed, but I pushed our way on. It was an

experience getting jolted around. Saint Peter's was very crowded. We got on one of those free tours Joyce and I did. It was good. We were going to do their Vatican museum tour but missed the 12 o'clock and didn't want to wait until 1 o'clock. We got the CD guided tour instead, which was very good. Especially for the last judgment in the Sistine chapel. I missed having my regular glasses for the ceiling. We were very ready for lunch. Next up to the Coppola of the dome. Well worth the wait. I think the inside view was as good as the outside. Went again in the Basilica and down underneath. Cab to the Campo di Fiore. Lots of people in the marketplace. Across the street to Piazza Novana. We were treated with a mime show. Fountain of Bernini and a nice dinner next to the fountain. Best gelato of the trip next to Campo di Fiore. Leisurely walk to the Hotel Bolivar. Long tiring but very rewarding day.

Saturday, April 26, 2003.

Had to go buy the tickets for the Borghese museum in person. Easily caught a cab to the museum. I had the cab driver wait for me which I asked him in my best Italian to return with the tickets. Then breakfast. It was so easy for me to catch a cab on the Villa nationality at 9 AM but at 10:30 it was very busy and had to return to the hotel for them to call a cab for us. Enjoyed the museum. Cab to the Colosseum and lunched on the lawn. It seemed they moved the entrance so we walked 360° around the building. Very long line so we jumped into a tour for seven euro extra bypassing the line and we're treated to an incredible tour by Stefano. He sent us up to the Scala Sancta, which we didn't go up because it was so crowded. Steve noted the nuns even skipped them saying prayer is heard equally wherever you are. Long walk back to the forum to be disappointed because of a strike we could not go in. Thank God it didn't affect the Colosseum. Stop to the room to change shoes get jackets. To the Trevi fountain, Spanish steps. Took a while to find a restaurant near the fountain. Gelato. Hotel. Back to sleep.

Sunday, April 27, 2003.

Mixed feelings driving to the airport. Roads were very empty it being early again. I left the camera bag in the Taxi! US AIR people were very helpful. They called the hotel who called the taxi who returned with all intact. (I had the Taxi cab driver wait while I went to get €50 from a bancomat as a thank you.) All is well on the plane. Anxious to land. Not anxious to return to work.