
Letters From *Italy*

- to family and friends -

August 18, 2009

Malfa



My new study

On the island of *Salina*

Poste d'Italia – martedì 18 agosto 2009

I am sitting in my new study facing almost directly north. It is open on three sides, has a ceramic tile floor, and uses two pure white columns on the outside corners to hold up a lattice of bamboo serving as the roof. Just behind me on my left towers *Mount Porri*, the remains of an ancient volcano, and – unlike other extinct volcanoes in the Aeolian Islands – it is covered with vegetation. On my left is a vineyard: green and inviting. And directly in front of me is the Mediterranean blue of *Mar Tirreno* – as far as the eye can see.

I should also mention the hammock – this is not all work, you know – and the muslin curtains that can be pulled closed to shade my workspace from the brilliant afternoon sun. Unfortunately, I can't show you the breeze off the sea, nor the pungent aroma of the yellow *lantane* that line the walkways of this splendid villa. Nor can you sense the temperature which today is warm but comfortable in the breeze. It was this way yesterday, and the day before that, and will most likely be this way tomorrow. Nor can I share with you the blissful quiet of the afternoon when the town literally shuts down. It does however come back to life in a quite surprising fashion around 4:00pm and stays awake until much later than the law-abiding citizens of Rochester, NY, are accustomed to. Ann and I finished dinner last evening a little after 10:00pm.



library staff. She is certainly as friendly and as helpful as Antonio. Although I did not ask, I'm sure that Maria was brought on board to cover for

Antonio when he is traveling both as a professional photographer and as cultural attaché for the country of Italy. He is known best for his photographs of the Aeolian Islands. He was born in Malfa almost sixty years ago and



Today we walked to the *biblioteca comunale* near the top of our town, *Malfa*, to visit *Antonio Brundu*. He was the librarian when we stayed here a couple of years ago and to our delight remains in that position. He has a new assistant – *Maria Pia La Greca* – who appears to be a great addition to the

grew up in the islands. His photographic work is included in almost every publication about the Islands that you can find. His travels take him all over the world and he described some of his presentations in the United States and Canada to us. He recently spent time in Australia.



The library is not only a place to find a book or a detailed map of the region, but also serves as the cultural center for the entire island of *Salina* where *Malfa* is located. During the summer months and especially in August, you can find at least one cultural event taking place in the evening on the beautiful terrace

Down is always better than up

adjoining the library proper. The “library” also includes a *Pinacoteca* (art gallery) where the works of both aspiring and accomplished artists are on display. One of the best features of the library is the fact that it is fully air-conditioned. Most of the buildings on *Salina* are not. After hiking up to the top of the town to get to the library on a hot day, it's a great feeling to walk into air-conditioned comfort – at least for an hour or so.

When we visited this time, Antonio remembered that we requested to see the film *Il Postino* on our last visit – a request that he had promptly filled. He had led us to another room, found chairs for us in front of the TV, slid the tape cassette into the VCR, and left us to our own devices until we had seen what we came for. What we saw were scenes that were filmed on this island, specifically in the town of *Pollara* – a short but ah..., exhilarating bus ride to the other side of *Mount Porri*. All the bus rides on these narrow roads, which hug the sides of old volcanoes making up the island, are like that. *Il Postino* is an Italian film classic, by the way, and I highly recommend it to you. It was the last film made by the wonderful character actor *Massimo Troisi*.



Now we were headed down to the *frutta e verdure* truck that we spotted on the way up. This was to be no casual purchase of fruit and vegetables. The truck was parked under the shade of a very large tree, and the owner exited the cab when he heard Ann and I discussing his wares on the business side of the truck. Tomatoes – beautiful round red-ripe tomatoes a little bigger than a golf ball – sweet. Figs – green plump ready to pop in your mouth sweet savory delicious juicy figs you can eat the whole thing including the small stem sticky sweet so that you need to lick your fingers if you’re not careful which is almost impossible – I love them. Pears – they melt in your mouth not the least bit tart for having been picked too early so they won’t crush on their way to market –ripe. Grapes – white tangy sweet with one or two seeds that no one notices where you dispose of them. Peaches – from the Garden of Eden or maybe just East of it given their shape a delight to behold mouth watering succulent – be careful with these.

As *Giuseppe Dicarlo* greeted us you could see the consternation on his face. I returned his greeting in my best Italian (which at best is still lacking that essential *je ne sais quoi*; I wonder what could be the problem?) .

“Ha un peperoncino molto piccante?”, I said, which roughly translated means – politely – “Have You got a really hot pepper?” Giuseppe’s face broke into a big smile as recognition replaced consternation and he reached for my hand shouting “Amico, amico.” We gripped each others hands and arms truly like old friends – the memory of the day two years ago flashing through our minds when he offered me a hot pepper along with our other purchases, asking me to try it, and waiting

expectantly for Salina’s new volcano to erupt with a twinkle in his eye and a friend looking on totally taken aback by the offer and having to walk away because he couldn’t bear to watch. Not knowing, of course, that I had been living on Iguana Red and Mean Green for the past several years and no Italian hot pepper was any match for a Mexican jalapeño or chili habanero as I calmly ate it down to the stem.

“Forte!” he had said, and we were friends forever.

Garrett (dad) with Anna Marie (mom)