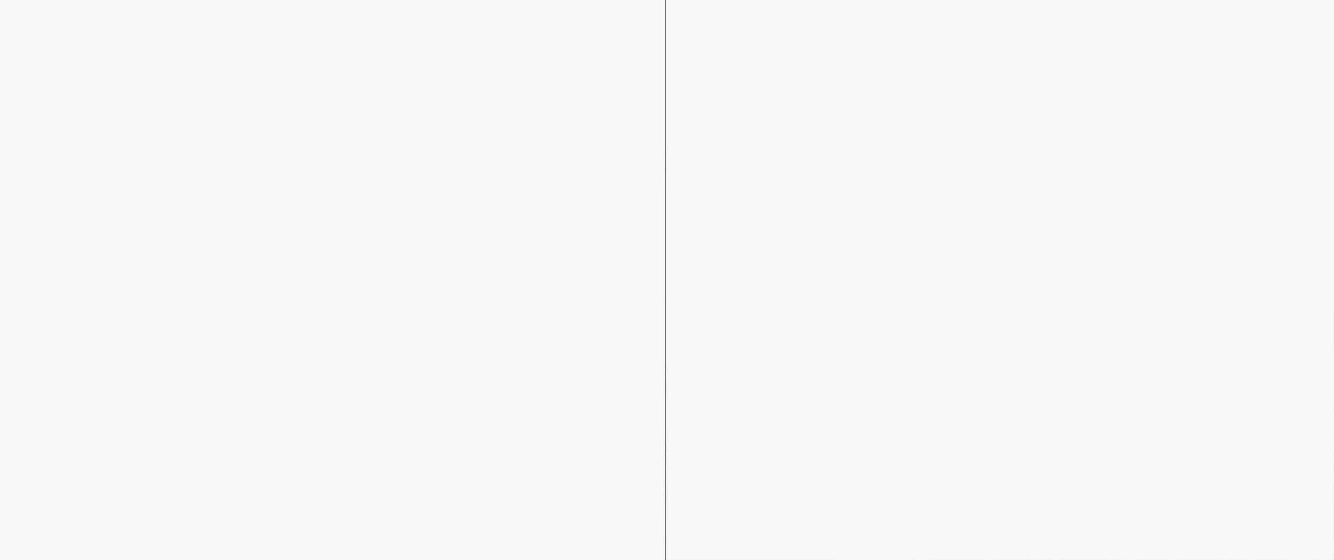




*Aritim*  
*Arretium*  
*Arezzo*

*Reminiscenze di una Città Toscana*

*Words and Photographs by R. Elynn Marr*





*Aritim      Arretium      Arezzo*

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R. Flynn Marr  
Burnaby, British Columbia



This book is dedicated to Susan who first took  
me to see her town and to meet her family. The  
adventure she took me on has been a never  
ending surprise and joy.



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## *La Prefazione*

When I met my wife Susan in 1999 I had no idea of the adventure that lay ahead. I was solidly Canadian raised in a Scottish-Irish household by very traditional parents. I had no experience with immigrants or their communities or their experiences. All through public and high school I don't remember any students of color or who spoke with an accent of any kind. I was a true WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant).

Susan and I met at the Hot Jazz Club in Vancouver which at the time was a popular dance venue. We were both separated from our spouses and neither of us was looking to find new partners. But we both shared an interest in ballroom dancing. I was tending the bar at the Club that night and Susan came in with several of her friends to dance. I remember how pretty she was and her lovely accent when she spoke. She was dark featured, beautiful, and a much better dancer than I. So smitten with her was I that I did not think ahead to where she might lead me or what adventures lay ahead.

*Arezzo is set on a hill in the floodplain of the Arno River in the heart of Tuscany. The old town was on the hill but in our modern age it has spread out into the valley. At the top of the hill can be seen the bell tower of the San Donato Cathedral and the walls of the Medicean fortress constructed there in the 1400 and 1500's.*



Susan was born in Italy into a family of 13 children and was raised on a farm until she was sixteen years old when she came to Canada as a young bride. Her husband, Guido, had gotten established in Canada and then went home to Italy to find a wife. In those years in Italy her only language was Italian which left her speaking with a delightful accented English. She was raised in and around the City of Arezzo in Tuscany. I had no idea that falling in love with her would lead to a passion for the land and people of Italy.

If you drive south from Firenze, Florence to those of you who speak only British, on Highway 222 you will pass through the center of the Chianti region and end up in Siena 50 km away. If you go South East on the Autostrada A1 or wander more leisurely along Highway 69, more or less following the Arno River you will come to Arezzo, about 70 km away. It is a pretty town of about 100,000 inhabitants, built on and around a hill in the flood plain of the Arno River.

Susan was the only one of her siblings to leave home and so there was a large extended family for me to meet in the old country. She spoke to me often of these people and of things and places in her town but I could make little sense of it. I imagined what her world had been like but with no experience of Italy I was in the dark. I eventually found the reality of her world to far exceeded anything I could have imagined. Although she had been

back several times we did not go together until 2003 when she took me home to meet the folks. It was my first trip to Italy.

From the time I met her I have been trying to learn Italian but I am afraid my language skills are not strong. After years of occasional effort I am still unable to get beyond a basic vocabulary. Sure, I can buy train tickets or order an espresso but when trying to speak with someone I am too shy and I forget all the words. As a result that first trip was personally terrifying but, at the same time, wonderful.

I quickly learned that Arezzo is off the well worn tourist path and as a result English is not widely spoken. And being shy about my language skills, I did not have a lot to say on that visit. But the welcome I received was warmer and more generous than I could have expected. And in that first three weeks, living with her family, traveling about Tuscany, going to outdoor markets and indoor supermarkets, eating in restaurants and simply wandering the streets of her town I came to appreciate a people and a way of life that was new and different to me. A whole new world opened up before me.

It was not just in Italy that I learned about Italians. At home in Canada, after we had met, I became immersed in immigrant Italian society and I learned

what being an immigrant did to that first generation who came to a new country not speaking the language and without social status of any kind. The Italians I have met here are some of the finest people I have encountered anywhere. They are hard working, honest, clever people.

It was my good fortune to take up the hobby of photography in my high school years and I am seldom without a camera within easy reach. Here and in Italy I have taken pictures of everyone and everything. Now I can look back on tens of thousands of photographs of my experiences.

I have been to Italian weddings, Italian funerals, banquets, dances, I've played bocce in the park and briscola at the kitchen table with wine, biscotti and espresso at hand. I have walked in the hills of Tuscany, wandered the back streets of Arezzo in the rain, and sat silently in the Duomo giving thanks for these experiences. When I met Susan I expected none of this. How could I?

*Old Arezzo is a medieval city which makes it a fascinating place to walk. The buildings are ancient, the streets narrow, and the pavement is made of slate tiles. And it echoes with the sounds of people living their lives. Quite wonderful!*



Looking at my pictures I began to think of creating a book about my Italian adventure. But what to write about? There was so much. Should I write about Lago di Como so blue among its mountains? Or perhaps the village of Tremosine sul Garda with its amazing view of Lago di Garda? Or how about "La Serenissima", Venezia? No, maybe Firenze? How could I leave out Roma or Porto Fino? Maybe one day I will get to writing of those places. But not this time. There is something else that I want to share this time.

Italians are funny in their view of their country. When they meet they ask each other, "What is your town?" The people are very town or city oriented. That is how they define themselves. And so I asked myself about my adopted country, "What is my town?" And the answer was simple: Arezzo. La mia citta' e' Arezzo. My town is Arezzo. It was here I came first. It was here that I was so warmly welcomed. It is here that my Italian family lives. And so it is about my town that I write.

A word about the photographs in this volume. All of these pictures are mine and taken by me. Not all of them are excellent examples of photography but that is not why I have chosen them. I have, instead, tried to chose pictures that capture the feeling of a place and the way it impacts the senses. This book is not a travel guide! I don't name hotels or restaurants, I don't mention addresses, I don't suggest walking tours. I just want to talk about my

town, and, I hope these images give a glimpse, an impression, a hint of the richness and depth of this city and its people.

I have to thank all of those who have made these experiences what they have been. Egidio, Benito, Franco, Franca, Celso, Agosto, Adelmo, Armando, Vittorio, Pierina, and so many others, their children, their friends. With their kindness they have blessed me and welcomed me. I could not be writing these pages had I been like a tourist on the outside looking in. But I was invited in. I have looked out the window at tourists in the street as I was sitting inside with family and friends at diner. I walk the streets of the old town but I know that at the end of the day I will go home. Being in Arezzo is being home.

And then there is my wife Susan to thank. Assunta is her proper Italian name, and she is called Assuntina in the family, little Assunta. She is my constant teacher and my guide. To her my impressions of Italy seem as nothing. They are just life. She does not see her Italy as I do any more than the fish sees the water. But when we go to her home, she opens up like a flower and drinks it in. She is a different person when her feet are in her native soil. Above all I have her to thank because without her I would have done and written none of this.



*Corso Italia is the shopping street that runs up the hill from the modern city to the top of the old histoic center and Santa Maria della Pieve and the Piazza Grande. Half way up is Via Oberdan where I found this image. The street is paved with slate tiles and the buildings are hundreds of years old. Scenes like this can be found around every corner in old Arezzo.*



A word about the use of Italian words and phrases: just as Chinese food is better with chopsticks, Italy is better in Italian! Or maybe I am just showing off? I explain some of the words or phrases, some you will understand from the context or the similarity of the words between languages, and for some you may have to resort to Google. But think how much you will learn.

And a final note. As I write this we have lost some of Susan's family. Age is creeping up on all of us. But I have written of them as if they were still with us. Time enough later for sadness and memorial.

Alora, andiamo!

*Arezzo lies in the valley of the Arno River and is surrounded by the hills of central Tuscany. From this viewpoint near a house Susan lived in as a very young child you can see the communities of Capolona and Subbianno which are about 10 km north of Arezzo.*







Susan is standing by a copy of the Chimera of Arezzo on display in the central arch of the Porta San Lorentino. During construction of the Medici walls close to the San Lorentino Gate on 15 October 1553 diggers uncovered a trove of bronze figures including the Chimera. The paws of the lion were missing as was the tail. It was taken to Florence where Cosimo I de Medici had Benvenuto Cellini repair the broken feet. It was deposited in the Uffizi in 1785 where the tail was later restored and where it reside to this day.

## La Storia

This is not a history book. But when you are presented with a city, when you wander through the streets and visit the churches, the question of origins is inevitable. What am I looking at? Why is it the way it is? Where did it all come from? It increases the pleasure of a place to know something about its origins.



The only remaining Roman ruins visible are those of the Amphitheater. Just the roots of the construction exist above ground but they mark out the original oval shape of the structure.

I would like to begin at the beginning but, unfortunately, the beginnings of Arezzo are lost to memory. They are as obscure as the people who lived in this land long before the Romans put their mark on it. Tuscany was occupied by a people known to history as the Etruscans. Clear evidence of their presence is found as early as 900 BC. However, they well may have been the original stone age inhabitants. We simply do not know. The region they occupied was centered on what is now known as Tuscany but their influence was felt well beyond that small land. The Etruscans built a loosely federated 'empire' which reached the peak of its power around 750 BC and continued until they were subsumed by the rising power of a younger Rome.

Archeological evidence suggests that their culture was heavily influenced by that of classical Greece. They traded widely with the Mediterranean world and grew rich and powerful. According to legends a loose alliance of 12 Etruscan cities formed a League or Federation. Which those cities were is not certain but it is believed that Arezzo, Aritim to the Etruscans, was one of them. Apparently these cities remained independent city states but entered into alliances with each other to defend their territory.

*Much of the old historic center of Arezzo, the "Centro Storico", is still surrounded by its medieval Medici walls. In some sections they are in an excellent state of repair. The old town is medieval in origins and many of the buildings are several centuries old. This section of the old wall is still in excellent repair five hundred years after it was built.*

That Arezzo was an Etruscan city is not doubted. Buried ruins, graves and artifacts attest to that. The Etruscans built their cities on a hilltop with a defensive walls and it is likely that the hill on which the historical center of Arezzo is built has been fortified for thousands of years.

It appears that Rome itself was founded by the Etruscans, but, again that is conjecture. It certainly appears that some early Roman kings were Etruscan but Rome eventually ran them off when it created its Republic. However there is evidence that Rome held the Etruscans in a special place of respect and there were always strong Etruscan influences in Roman culture, art and literature.

Rome was originally one tribe among many but by war and negotiation she gained ascendancy over her neighbours. Arezzo itself, called Arretium by the Romans, fell under Roman domination in 311 BC. One by one the Etruscan cities fell and by 295 Rome was master of all Tuscia, as they called the lands of the Etruscans.

The Romans referred to the Etruscans as the



Tusci or Etrusci. Arezzo became a leading city of the Roman Republic and Empire, being the third largest city in Italy during the Augustan period.

The Roman city grew up and over the Etruscan one almost obliterating its remains. In the long decline of the Roman Empire in the west many battles were fought through this part of Italy in the 6th and 7th centuries and the Roman city of Arretium was largely destroyed or laid waste.

Slowly as central Italy arose from the ashes of the dark ages Arretium became an independent City State from about 1098 through to 1384 and as the city rebuilt itself the inhabitants used the building blocks of the old ruined Roman city to build the new. As a result the Roman city of Arretium ceased to exist. The only visible remains of old Arretium are the foundations of the Roman amphitheater which today barely rise above ground level.

In 1384 Arezzo fell under Florentine domination and that of the Medicean Grand Duchy of Tuscany. It is during this medieval period that the old center of Arezzo was created and that is largely what we see today. The walls surrounding the town were rebuilt and strengthened by the Medici as was the fortress, la Fortezza Medicea, that survives on the top of the hill behind the Duomo. Those walls

*The old Medicean walls are gone in places and just ruins in others. Here you can see a gap in the old walls that was filled in with brick and a window where Susan is sitting. This part of the wall was obviously adapted for some other purpose which has long since crumbled away.*







are still in excellent condition in many places as they were originally and in other places they have been restored. Some portions are in ruins or even gone totally.

Many houses and public buildings and churches date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As time has gone on they have been upgraded, restored and repaired but to walk in the 'Centro Storico', the historic center of the city, is to walk in Renaissance Italy.

As you come down from the hill on which old Arezzo is centered you walk into the modern city with its office buildings, banks, stores and apartment blocks. You have walked out of the middle ages and into the modern

*The Palazzo Pretorio was built in the 13th century and used as a headquarters for the ruling families of Arezzo who put their family crests on the face of the building over the centuries. Today the building is used as a City library.*

world. It is not a long walk but it spans centuries.

History surrounds the people of modern Arezzo. They live in its buildings, have their coffee in its piazzas and worship in its churches. As you walk through this city take the time to look carefully. The history of Italy lives here for those with the eyes to see it.

*There are many old Florentine buildings in Arezzo. This one currently houses the Accademia Petrarca di Lettere Arti e Scienza. Legend has it that the famous poet and writer Petrarch was born in this house in 1304 to Florentine parents living in Arezzo.*

*This is a typical home, or palazzo, of the period. Note how the ground floor is built like a fortress: few windows and those that exist are small, and the doors are stout. Society in those centuries was violent and a man's home was, in every sense, his castle. It had to be.*



## La Città

We have always traveled to Italy from Vancouver with KLM, the Royal Dutch Airline. The flight is direct to Amsterdam with a connecting flight to Roma. Sure, they squeeze everyone in and the seats have little padding but they are no worse than any other airline. And the aircraft seem cleaner and the staff on board more attentive than I have found with others. But, maybe, that is all subjective. Any way you fly, it is less than pleasant in Economy where you will find us.



*The train station, "la stazione", is a door into all Italian cities. It is a hub through which most travel into and out of a city passes. From la stazione all Italy is within reach. No, all of Europe is at our feet! Above, the tracks go North towards Firenze about 70 km away and the other way the tracks go South towards Roma.*





Another reason we have traveled KLM is that the trip to Rome is via Schiphol, the airport for Amsterdam. This is the best airport I have ever been in, well Vancouver is pretty nice too, and KLM allows us to break our trip and spend time in Amsterdam, a city I love, at no extra cost. It is called the Venice of the North for very good reasons. But that is another book.

The trip is exhausting. From Vancouver about nine hours to Amsterdam and you arrive with a sore bottom and an upset stomach. Then you wait for the flight to Rome for a few hours. I don't like to cut the connections close because you could miss the last leg of the trip if the first flight from Vancouver is late or if you have trouble finding the gate for the flight to Rome. So I like to book at least an hour or two at Schiphol. But the hours pass pleasantly. Schiphol has good shops, decent restaurants, and it is clean and modern. And, as I say, we can stay over if we chose.

The flight to Rome is easy. About two and a half hours and we're there. I don't understand why it happens but when I arrive in Rome, walking into that terminal, I feel that I am arriving home. The same feeling I get returning to Vancouver. Those are the only two airports where I get this feeling of familiarity and comfort. From there on, while I am in Italy, I'm at ease. Not in France, not in England, not in Austria, but here in Italy!

It is fun to arrive on a plane full of young Italians. As the wheels touch the ground a cheer goes up through the airplane, people clap, and on occasion several break out singing the Inno di Mameli, the Italian National Anthem. The Italians are patriotic and like to express their joy at being Italians. They do this not in a bombastic way as the Americans do but simply out of enthusiasm.

We go through customs in Holland at our entry point into the EU. As Italy is a member country we have no such checks in Rome. We simply collect our bags and walk into the main concourse. Fiumicino International Airport lies outside the City of Rome and it is necessary to catch the train for a thirty minute ride into Rome's main train station, Roma Termini. Cabs are an option but they are so expensive and Roman traffic is not pretty. We go to a vending machine, credit card in hand, and purchase a ticket and then take the stairs down to the train station. Yes, it's right there under the airport terminal.

Dragging our luggage behind us, bless the man who put wheels on the bottom of bags, we find a seat on the next train into Rome. The trains are local transportation and stop at every station on our way. The seats are plastic, the colors bright and it seems more a streetcar than a train. Thirty minutes later we step onto the platform of Roma Termini. It is busy and it is big! If you are unfamiliar with this train station it can be a challenge. But we know where we're going.



*When we are in Arezzo we stay with Susan's sister and her husband Franco at their home in Via Genova. When Franco was a young man he and a partner began a wholesale electrical parts business and as the business grew they built this store and warehouse with residences on top. Franca's apartment is the top two floors and that is her patio with all the greenery. Our bedroom is the window on the left on the front of the building overlooking the street.*

We walk over to the Departures Board that lists all of the trains departing that day and we find the local time on it and then run our finger down to find the next train to Arezzo. That train will probably be going to Florence so that is really what we look for. They almost all stop in Arezzo. The trains run often so our wait is usually only an hour at most. But be careful. Don't chose the local train that stops at every little community along the way. That can add hours to our journey.

I love Rome and the temptation to stay a few days is strong. Standing here in Roma Termini we are already down town and there are hotels nearby. The Colosseum, the Forum, the Pantheon, St. Peter's, and a hundred great restaurants are just through those doors. It is tempting! But not today. Maybe on our way back.

We chose our train and again find a kiosk and select First Class tickets to Arezzo. They are printed for us and we're set. At least we are after we validate our tickets in the little green machine at the end of the platform. This train with first class carriages is much more comfortable than the one from Fumicino. Large upholstered seats, big windows, a bar car up ahead; nothing to do but settle in and enjoy the next three and a half hours as we travel through the Italian countryside.

*(Con't on Page 32)*

*The powerful Medici family of Florence had the City defences improved and the walls strengthen. There were four gates into the city one of which was the Porta San Lorentino. The location of the gate was fixed in the earlier wall of the fourteenth century. The present gate probably dates to reconstructions in 1664. In the 1930's to improve traffic flow, two arches near the gate were opened in the wall and the wall to the right in the picture was restored and crowned with false Ghibelline battlements.*





Once through the gate the street straight ahead winds its way up through the old historical center, the "Centro Storico", to the "Duomo", the cathedral, at the top of the hill. It is an interesting walk amongst buildings many centuries old and it is obvious that the streets were laid out before the advent of the automobile.





Arezzo is not a large town, about 100,000 residents, and it is compact. Arriving at the station we are already in the middle of the city. Normally Susan's brother-in-law, Franco who is married to her sister Franca, picks us up at the station but, today, we walk from there to Franco and Franca's home which is only a few blocks away. As usual, we will stay with them for the duration of our visit.

Once we are there we can finally relax and recover from the rigours of air travel. Franca always has a good meal ready for us. And then a nap. It feels so good not to be moving!

Arezzo is divided into two areas. There is the modern city where you find office buildings and apartment blocks that spread out from the city core and merge into the countryside. And then there is the old historical center, 'il Centro Storico', which lies within the old city walls on its fortified hill. This is largely a medieval city to this day.

The powerful Medici family of Florence held sway over Arezzo in the middle ages and they had the City defences improved and the walls strengthened in the 15th century. Much of that ancient wall still exists. There were four gates into the city one of which was the Porta San Lorentino. The location of the gate was fixed in the earlier wall of the 13th century and was probably there even before that. The present gate

*(Con't on Page 41)*

*Looking up the Via San Lorentino from the Porta San Lorentino the street rises as it starts up the Colle San Donato. The city is traditionally divided into quarters or neighbourhoods and they compete annually in the Giostra del Saracino which is a jousting tournament that has gone on for centuries. The crimson and yellow banners are the flag of this quarter, being the Porta Foro which is the old name for the Porta San Lorentino. Except for the automobiles, not much has changed on this street since the middle ages.*







On the previous page is the Piazza Grande, the very heart of the 'Centro Storico'. This picture was taken in January of 2019 and Susan can be seen sitting on the right side of the image by the old pillory post.

This town square is ancient, the present buildings and layout going back to the 12th and 13th centuries. It is thought that the original Roman Forum was built here but that memory is tenuous at best. The present buildings are still in use as they have always been and over the years have been modified, repaired and added to. What you see now is a veritable architectural history lesson.

On the left of the picture is the Torre Faggiolana built in the 13th century and named for Uguccione della Faggiola who wielded power in Arezzo at the time.

Just to the left of center is the Church of Santa Maria della Pieve built in the 12th century over an earlier Christian church. To the right of center is the Palazzo del Tribunale built in the 18th century to house court offices.

To the right of the Tribunale is the Palazzo della Fraternita dei Laici built in several stages beginning in 1375. The clock in the clock tower on top is from the 16th century and it is still working.

Finally on the right edge of the page are the arches of the Loggia Vasari designed by Arezzo writer and architect Giorgio Vasari who died in 1574.

But don't get hung up on names and dates. Rather sit down at a table in the Loggia Vasari, have an espresso, and think about being in a square that has seen human comings and goings for millennia. Etruscan tribal leaders, Roman soldiers and statesmen, officials from the Court of Cosimo de Medici in Firenze, German troops from the Third Reich have all tread these stones. Think on it as you sip your coffee.





*On the previous page is the Piazza Grande at night. To the right of center is the Palazzo del Tribunale, then in the center is the Palazzo della Fraternita dei Laici and on the right is the Loggia Vasari with its restaurant awnings under the arches.*

*On the right Susan and I are standing behind a picture frame set up in front of the Palazzo del Tribunale in the Piazza Grande for people to do exactly what we are doing; taking a selfie in the Piazza. It is the middle of January 2019 and we are alone in the Piazza. In summer this space is busy with tourists and city events and celebrations.*

*On the left Susan is standing in front of the Palazzo del Tribunale next to the church of Santa Maria della Pieve. The architecture in the Piazza Grande bears close examination as it ranges in age from 800 years to 100 years and is an instruction book of architectural styles through the ages.*



**Fiera  
Antiquaria  
di Arezzo**

**Arezzo  
Antiques  
Market**



dates to reconstructions in 1664. In the 1930's to improve traffic flow, two arches were opened in the wall on either side of the original gate and the adjacent walls on either side were restored and crowned with false battlements.

From Franca's the Porta San Lorentino is only a short walk away and is our entrance to il Centro Storico. Once through the gate if we walk up the street and keep going straight we will make our way to the top of the hill on which the old town is built, the 'Colle di San Donato'.

*(Con't on Page 44)*

*Under the 16th century arches of the Loggia Vasari are an excellent restaurant and trattoria. It is not possible to find a better place to sit, sip a coffee or have your lunch, and think about the centuries that have come and gone in this very place. That is what Susan and I were doing here in September of 2014.*

*Unlike our Vancouver, the summer evenings in Italy are warm and you can sit outside in comfort. Dinner at the Ristorante Logge Vasari sitting under the arches on an Italian summer evening is magical.*







Corso Italia is the main shopping street in the Centro Storico and it runs from almost the top of the Colle San Donato down to the Medici walls and out into the modern Arezzo. On the left is the view up the hill. The tower is the 'Campanile' or bell tower for the church of Santa Maria della Pieve. It is mentioned in documents as existing in the 11th century. The campanile was finished in 1330.

On the right the view is down the hill. The awnings of the Caffè Stefano, pictured above, can be seen on the left side of the street about half way down the hill. A great spot for lunch, or just coffee and people watching.





Crowning the hill is the Duomo or Cattedrale di San Donato. To walk up here is to literally walk back eight hundred years into history.

In the Centro Storico the streets are narrow having been laid down centuries before the automobile. They are surfaced with large slate pavers that have been scored with grooves to aid in water runoff and to provide traction for pedestrians and vehicles. The buildings on either side are old, some built five and six hundred years ago. Except for the cars we would think that we have been transported back in time.

At the top of the hill, behind the Duomo, is a park with a large memorial to Petrarch the poet and writer of the 14th century and a native of Arezzo. From the park there are beautiful vistas out across the Tuscan countryside where Susan grew up as a child. You can almost see her father's house in the distance out past San Fabbiano.

As we came up the hill to the Duomo we walked past streets that lead

off to the right going to the center of the old town, the Piazza Grande. This is the heart of old Arezzo. It is thought that the Piazza is built on the site of the old Roman Forum and even earlier Etruscan structures. Around the Piazza in every direction are buildings of the 14th and 15th centuries which are still in use today.

To wander here is a joy. There are shops of all types, restaurants, small museums, nooks

*The Centro Storico is not so large that you fear getting lost. It is small enough to feel intimate and friendly. And one need not fear going hungry while walking through the winding streets. There are good restaurants in almost every street. And with the Italian custom of posting the menus, if there is one, outside it is possible to choose a place for lunch based on what you want to order. Of course there are Italian restaurants with no menus in which case you have what is being offered that day. It is in such places that I have had the best food I have found in Italy. From May through October the air in Tuscany is warm all day and late into the evening. Many restaurants take advantage of this fact and offer outdoor seating. It is wonderful to sit out in the warm evening air surrounded by a medieval city while you enjoy a meal.*





and crannies to explore. Churches here date back centuries and some as far back as the 12th century. These are full of art and wonderful to visit. Most days they welcome visitors and worshipers alike to enjoy their beauty and find a few minutes of quiet in a turbulent world. But more than that, these churches are full of ancient piety and peace that I find perfect for a little restorative contemplation.

From the Piazza Grande we walk to the front of Santa Maria della Pieve where we enter Corso Italia. If we turn down the hill we have a long view of Arezzo's best shopping street which runs down towards the train station and modern center of the city. It is here that we find the high end shops and stores of commercial Arezzo. This is the place for window shopping!

As we approach the bottom of the street we cross the Via Roma which is in the center of the modern city. Turning left and going a couple of blocks we come to the ancient Roman amphitheater. There is not much left now but it is the only visible ruins from the old Roman city of Arretium.

*A "trattoria" is a small restaurant. The stand outside the door holds the menu so that you know before you go in if they serve something you would like to have and what it will cost. Reading the menu does not commit you to going in, although, you may be met by an eager owner who will try to entice you in. This street scene is a typical narrow street in the center of the old medieval city. The cars look out of place but donkey carts would fit right in. Notice the pavers that surface the roadway. This is typical of all streets in the old town. It would take months of eating out to try all of the eating places in Arezzo's historical center.*





But, our walk has been long and Franca will have dinner ready for us so we head towards the Piazza Monaco where there is a statue of Guido Monaco. He was a Benedictine Monk born around 991 or 992. He arrived in Arezzo around 1025 and while teaching music to the Arezzo Cathedral singers he developed a theory of modern music teaching which developed into modern musical notation. Such was his influence that there is a statue of Guido Monaco, also known as Guido Aretino, in the Loggiato of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

But we have to get home so we pass through the Piazza and take a shortcut down the Via Petrarca, walk across a local

*A very typical street in the Centro Storico of Arezzo outside the Ristorante "La Curia". Nothing much has changed in this street for over five hundred years. Well, the cars are a recent addition!*

park and end up back at Franca's. The evening will involve food, probably visits from family, maybe a walk and a gelato, and finally to bed and a good sleep.

I watch tourists running here and there trying to see everything in their allotted eight hours before their bus leaves. I wish I could slow them down and tell them about Arezzo. How can they see everything? How can they see anything? The city does not reveal itself until you have sat through several days, thinking, watching, sipping your espresso, eating your pasta in the local restaurants, walking out into the countryside. Only then will Arezzo speak to you of her history, her people, and the treasures she holds.

*At night, in the rain, the streets of Arezzo become moody and mysterious. This is the time when thoughts of people long ago who passed by here walk easily into your mind. Their homes are all around you.*





*At night the old city takes on a strangely quiet quality and any sound goes echoing down the empty slate clad streets. I have walked here in the winter rain and on warm dry summer nights and always the history of the buildings presses in on you. I don't see other visitors feeling the same vibrations. I must be tuned into this city differently. But then others don't take the time to simply clear their minds and walk quietly up one street and down the other trying to feel the place they are in. The connection is definitely through feeling.*





*In January of 2019 we were in Arezzo for a few weeks, having spent Christmas in Budapest and New Years in Vienna, and we were so lucky with the weather. It was pleasant enough several days running to sit outside and have coffee and a 'dolce'. The sun was low in the sky and it cast long shadows. But sitting outdoors is a European fetish even in the chill of winter. Notice the jackets and scarves on the ladies to guard against the cold.*



*A block up from the Train Station (around the corner to the right in this picture) is the Piazza Guido Monaco. We are looking East towards the Via Roma which is the main financial and business center of Arezzo. The statue commemorates one of Arezzo's native son, Guido Monaco, who developed modern musical notation in the 11th century..*



*When we come out of the train station we walk into the Piazza Della Repubblica which, in truth, is a parking lot for the station. But once across it we can go straight into the Via Guido Monaco. Looking up ahead is visible the City's Duomo or Cathedral which is at the top of the "Colle di San Donato" or Hill of Saint Donato. The street leads us a block further on into the Piazza Monaco which is a beautiful traffic roundabout with gardens and dominated by a statue of Guido Monaco, often called Guido Aretino.*

*This Guido Aretino was a Benedictine Monk born about 991. He came to Arezzo in 1025 where he resided for the rest of his life. He is remembered because, while teaching singing and music to the Cathedral Choir of the day he developed a system of notation that became the basis of our modern musical notation. If you think about "The Sound of Music" and the song about Do-Re-Me-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do you can thank Guido Monaco. He came up with this way of describing the musical notes.*

*In this image we are looking across the Piazza Monaco, past the statue, and on up the Via Guido Monaco to the 12th century Duomo di San Donato at the top of the hill.*

*On the next page is a street artist I found one day walking in the old town. We did not speak. He seemed so intent on his work I did not want to disturb him. And I wanted this picture. I don't think he was even aware of my presence. But if you wanted a souvenir from Tuscany and Arezzo one of his paintings would be perfect and so much better than a Chinese made coffee cup !*





## *La Cattedrale di S. Donato di Arezzo*

Arezzo is built on a hill. That was a Etruscan habit because hills are easier to defend. And driving through Tuscany today it seems as if every hill has a small town at its summit with a church at the highest point.

Excavations on the Colle di San Donato have found evidence of Etruscan and Roman constructions and today 14th and 15th century works are everywhere. And dominating the hill and old historical center of the city is the Cattedrale di San Donato di Arezzo. It is built on the probable site of the original acropolis of the Etruscan city of Aritim.

A cathedral is a church that contains the 'cathedra' or 'seat' of a Bishop in the Catholic Church. It is his home church and the place where he resides and exercises his authority. Arezzo has been the home of a Bishop of the Church since the middle of the 4th century. The second Bishop to make Arezzo the capital of his diocese, his territory, was Donatus. Tradition ascribes miracles to him during his lifetime. However Donatus was arrested during the persecutions of Emperor Julian the Apostate and we are told he was beheaded in Arezzo on August 7th, 362.

About a kilometer South West of the present Duomo lies the hill of Pionta, sometimes called Old Cathedral Hill. It is located beside the city's current 'Hospital San Donato'. This is a site of ancient origin and had been a graveyard for wealthy Etruscan families thousands of years ago. Donatus was buried on the hill and the first Cathedral of Arretium, dedicated to Saints Stephen and Mary, was built over it. To this day the ruins of that church are visible.

*The "Cattedrale di San Donato di Arezzo" sits on the site of what was probably the original acropolis of Aritim.  
The building dominates the old historic center of the town.*





For almost a thousand years this old Cathedral was an important center for pilgrimage and veneration of Saint Donatus. However, during the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and through the dark ages this part of Italy had been the site of constant turmoil and fighting which posed a danger to the Church and people who worshipped there. In 1203 Pope Innocent III ordered the Cathedral be moved inside the walls of the City and its present location was chosen. Construction of the new Cathedral began in 1278 and was worked on in different phases until 1511. But Cathedrals are living things and never seem to be finished. For instance, the façade was never properly finished and it was in 1901 thru 1914 that the exterior was finally completed.

There is a large chapel on the North wall, the Cappella della Madonna del Conforto, which was constructed in neoclassical style around 1796. It is large enough to be a church in its own right and is truly beautiful. It was in this chapel that Susan was married to her first husband, Guido, when she was sixteen.

The Campanile or Bell Tower is the third on the site. The first was constructed with the Cathedral but too close to it and the vibration of the bells was damaging the original stained glass. The tower was moved further from the church but subsurface conditions made it unstable and construction was not finished. The current one is the third and was built apart from the church but later joined to it by construction of living quarters for the church caretaker.

(Con't on Page 64)

*The rather plain exterior of the Duomo hides a rich and complex historic treasure inside. From the intricately painted ceiling to the Renaissance stained glass in the walls to the carvings and paintings of centuries long ago the Cattedrale is a living museum. And after all of the centuries since its creation it is still used for weddings, baptisms, communions and funerals as a working church. Piety comes easily in the presence of such beauty.*



*The Duomo, like all of the old magnificent churches of Italy, is a working church used daily by the people of Arezzo. The Italians live amongst their history. They have their weddings, their baptisms, their first communions and their funerals in these grand buildings. Before coming to Canada Susan was married in this church, in the Cappella (Chapel) della Madonna dei Conforto located off camera to the left in this picture.*

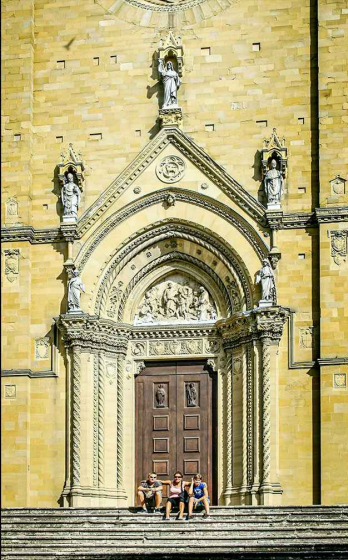
*This picture was made while a wedding was taking place at the high altar where young people have been married for eight hundred years. It seems a grand way to begin one's married life!*



*Churches of the Middle Ages and Renaissance were full of color with almost every surface covered in paintings and frescoes. Much of that artwork has worn off over the years leaving the bare stone work. But here we can see the magnificent scenes painted on the ceiling of the Duomo where that artwork has survived. You do not have to stand in long lines at museums to see the art of Italy. Much of it is still in the churches where entrance is mostly free.*

*As an example on the right is a wooden Madonna and Child carved in the 13th century and preserved in the Duomo. It is surrounded by equally ancient remains of frescoes of the type that once adorned the interior of the cathedral.*





But enough history. From Franca's home, where we usually stay, it is an easy walk to the Duomo. The Porta San Lorentino is a few minutes away by foot and walking through the gate you continue straight up the hill on Via S. Lorentino. The street name changes along the way but just going straight up you arrive in the piazza in front of the Duomo. It is an amazing walk through 15th century buildings, narrow streets and centuries of history. I never tire of it.

Entering the Duomo the first impression is

*On the left Susan sits on the steps of the Duomo with grand children Nico and Samantha during a visit in 2014. The façade of the church was not completed when the building was first constructed. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that this final stone work was done. Throughout Italy these grand churches are living structures and they are being repaired and renovated constantly. They are never really finished.*

*On the right Susan, Nico and Samantha are standing in front of the Duomo and behind them is the Piazza della Libertà and the street leading to the Piazza Grande. The statue on the right is of Cosimo I di Medici who was responsible for so much of the Arezzo we see today. The building behind them is the Palazzo dei Priori constructed originally in 1333 and which was the seat of government in Arezzo in the Middle Ages. Like all of these old buildings, it has undergone several renovations over the years, the most recent being in 1930.*







that it is dark. And then you notice the silence. The air is heavy with history and I never fail to sit for a while and take it all in. The Church and the Chapel are full of ancient art. For me the art offers a connection to a time and people long ago. The roof overhead is painted with marvelous biblical scenes, the windows on the side isles are from the 15th and 16th centuries, frescos and sculpture from years past surround us. This is a working church. There are weddings, baptisms and funerals performed here continually in an unbroken chain through centuries past. There is much to contemplate about our lives sitting here. This is our common history. I may be Irish Canadian, but it is the same Church and the same history. We are all tied together by our past.

The Duomo is not the only church in Arezzo. It is only one of many. It was good to be a stone mason in the middle ages. There were churches going up everywhere and good workmen were in demand.

Backing on the Piazza Grande is the church of Santa Maria della Pieve which is mentioned in early historical records as far back as 1008. Work on it was ongoing through the 11th and 12th centuries. In fact, these old buildings are living structures and are always undergoing some repair, renovation or reconstruction. The bell tower was finished in 1330. The curved form of the apse is easily identifiable as it intrudes into the Piazza Grande which is behind the church.

Another ancient church is La Chiesa della Santissima Annunziata which dates from the 15th and 16th centuries. I found this church quite by accident as I was walking along the street in front of it. It is on a modest narrow street and you would almost miss it if it were not for a modern glass entrance that invites you in. Inside it is exceptionally beautiful.

When I found it I had my cameras with me and there was no one about. No tourists, no one. I was

*Santa Maria del Pieve is older than the Duomo. Older both in age and in style of architecture. The unique façade and bell tower at the top of Corso Italia is a landmark in the old historical center. Backing onto the Piazza Grande as it does it is central to the ancient history of Arezzo. And yet it is a working church as the wedding shown here will attest. This is another example of Italians not only having history but actually living in their history.*



*La Chiesa della Santissima Annunziata in Via Giuseppe Garibaldi is not as old as the Duomo or Santa Maria della Pieve but it is equally fascinating. The impression it makes as you walk in is that it is bright and massive. From the street you would not know that this beautiful church is there. It amazes me how such beautiful structures can be tucked away behind unassuming facades.*

*On the right, in the same church, Susan lights a candle and says a prayer for her beloved Sandro, a grandson who died much too soon. It is a ritual she has followed in every church we have visited from Barcelona to Rome to Helsinki and everywhere in between. Ritual is so important in life. It gives us roots and a place to stand when events threaten and decisions are difficult, or when we simply need comfort.*

alone in the silence of this wonderful building. I spent an hour using my tripod and taking my pictures as I wished. It was a wonderful experience.

There are many other churches throughout the city and they all contain treasures of past art and artifacts

and they deserve a comment but I leave that for another time and another book. Arezzo is full of history and it is accessible so much more easily than in larger centers. Being off the tourist circuit there are no line ups, no appointments, no crush of people. One can relax as they get to know the city as it really is.



## *La Fortezza Medicea*

The top of the Colle di San Donato, Arezzo's hill, has been fortified as far back as memory can see and probably for thousands of years before that. Lying in the valley of the Arno River the land about is fertile and flat. The rich valley gave food and the hill gave protection. It was a natural for human occupation.

Hill tops were easier to defend and gave the occupants great advantage in any conflict. And the height gave the defenders a view of any approaching danger. How the hill was fortified in Etruscan and Roman times is not well known. However, when the town began its rebuilding as it came out of the dark ages around 1000 AD we know that it had walls located about where the present walls are. In the continual fighting of the time those fortifications were damaged and rebuilt constantly.

In 1337 work was begun on a new larger fortification to defend the city. Around 1384 Arezzo fell under the control of the City of Florence and eventually the Medici family and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. It was in the 1550's that extensive works were done to improve the city's defences which was required because of advances in siege warfare.

In 1535, as part of these upgrades, Cosimo I de Medici ordered construction of a new fortress and much of the older works were destroyed in the process. Work on this fortress continued through 1538 to 1560 and the results are what we see today. In form it is a five pointed star with five bastions on the corners. In the 1800's Napoleon's French did much damage to the

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*Susan with two of her grandchildren, Nico and Samantha, on the wall of the Fortezza looking out across the valley of the Arno River towards Capolona. Out beyond the hills in the distance, about 70 kilometers away, is the City of Florence that so long dominated the history of Arezzo.*







structure but restoration work was undertaken in the early 20th century.

The current entrance was originally a gate with a 7 meter moat but that is gone now. The door leads into a long corridor, large enough for men and horses three abreast to pass that leads up into the fort. We come out on the grounds which are now largely grass and shrubbery. It is beautiful to walk the walls of the old fort and look out over the city and valley of the Arno river.

Recently work has been done in the Fortezza to create meeting rooms and offices in the structure to take advantage of this unique site. In 2019 we found the Fortezza being used to display an extensive collection of sculpture from Mexico. But there is much of the original stone work in its ruined condition from the 16th century where one can see the true size and complexity of this old fortress.

*On the previous page is the view from the top of the Fortezza walls towards the North West. On the left of the picture the bell tower of the Duomo is visible just beyond the park that lies between the church and the fortress. From the top of the Fortezza it is possible to walk around the old walls and look in every direction. By doing this you can see that Arezzo is ringed by low hills just beyond farmers' fields and gently rolling countryside.*

*On the right is the view out over the old historic center of Arezzo from the walls of the Fortezza. The tall square tower is the campanile of Santa Maria della Pieve which fronts on Corso Italia and backs on the Piazza Grande. Beyond the town you can see the valley of the Arno ringed by the hills of Tuscany.*





*Above Susan is standing on a walkway built through the old Fortezza Medicea. You can see in the image the massive stonework of the fortress.*

*In January of 2019 we found an exhibit of Mexican artwork on display in throughout the Fortezza. Here Susan is standing with two large horse head sculptures which were a part of that exhibit.*







*Most of the medieval walls, much reinforced and rebuilt by the Medici in the fifteenth century, still exists around the old city. Like here, the stone work is impressive and after five centuries shows no signs of deterioration. Where the walls have been destroyed is usually the result of early residents mining them for building materials. This section behind Susan, Sam and Nico has not suffered that fate.*

## *Fare la Spesa*

'Fare la spesa' means 'to do the shopping'. I love to shop in Italy because it is so different. For me it is not the chore it seems to be at home. The Italian taste is for quality and if the quality is not there they will tell the vendor so! As a result, restaurants and stores tend to be of a higher standard than in North America. Here we don't seem to care what we eat or wear so long as it is cheap and there is lots of it. Not so in Italy.

In Arezzo they have big box stores just as we do. But with a difference. The one I know and like is a short

walk from Franca's and is called simply "the Coop". This is much like a Costco at home with groceries, furniture, wine, liquor, it is all there. But that is where the similarity ends.

The one near Franca's house is a big store. Bigger than any Safeway I have ever seen, even bigger than my local Costco. And the selection of foods is unbelievable. In the back is a wood burning oven where they are turning out pizza and bread cooked the old fashioned way. The cheese counter is immense with



every imaginable Italian and European cheese. No Kraft cheddar cheese slices here! The liquor section stands out for two reasons: it is extensive, but, not only that, it is affordable. Tax on alcohol in Italy is a fraction of what it is here in Canada.

The fish counter is amazing! Actually, fish counters are amazing all over Italy. I have counted five kinds of octopus and squid varieties on one display. And the varieties of fish defy description. Why is it that we in Vancouver live on the Pacific Ocean, we have a fishing fleet, yet all we can buy is salmon, trout, cod and halibut, maybe some prawns, and occasionally a few squid? Not so in Italy. If it swims it is available in the market! No wonder Italian cooking is the envy of the world!

But for me, the highlight is the prepared "ready to go" foods counter. We don't have much ready to go stuff at

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*The mall outside the Coop (upper left) is as modern as you will find anywhere with several high end stores. One wall of the Coop is open to the mall (lower left).*

Now this will take some explaining. We are in the Coop, which is a super large food floor and department store, much like a Costco. In the picture below Susan is standing with a display of "prosciutti". Not our little packages of smoked bacon for the Italians! No, they like their ham by the hind leg, hand rubbed with spices, and slow aged in temperature controlled cellars and then, after several months, sliced thin. I have seen recipes at home that say you can substitute bacon if you have no prosciutto: not bloody likely!

And in the picture on the right we have Susan looking at the "mortadella". Now this one is larger than you normally find, but it is real and they are selling it by the kilo or even by the 100 grams. I don't know what this weighs but look at the sturdy table they felt necessary to hold it. That's one big baloney, except, mortadella tastes so much better!







Safeway and less at Costco. At the Coop there are counters of pasta, lasagne, beans, lamb, chicken, pork, all cooked and beautifully presented. If you are in a hurry you can stop here, buy a few things, and serve an amazing meal to your family. And of course, down at the back, don't forget fresh pizza or bread just out of the "forno a legna", the wood oven, to go with it.

This sounds crazy but when I go to Italy the stop at the Coop is a must. I just enjoy the experience. And, well ... the pizza!

However, shopping in Italy does not end there. Not at all. Italy is a land of little shops. The butcher, the baker, and the candle stick maker are all still there and thriving. And these too are wonderful experiences. Susan's two brothers, Franco and Benito, both have butcher shops which are now run by their sons. They both made their own prosciutto, they sold beef that had been raised for them by local farmers, they both made their own sausage. They could tell you where the meat came from and who raised it. For them no large anonymous meat conglomerate. The meat in their shops was local. The people of the town could



*When shopping in the historical centers of old Italian towns take the time to look at the building the shops are in. There have been shops in these old buildings for centuries and when you walk into one of them you are walking into the history of the place. Look at the stonework around these store entrances. We can't build this kind of building today. If we tried we would have to wait several centuries for our poor handiwork to age. Don't just look at the tourist trinkets; look at where you are!*



connect with the source of their food.

They too had "ready to go" food but this they made themselves; lasagnas, pastas, sauces. And I know from experience that these were delicious dishes because I have had them at their dinner tables. And it wasn't just Franco and Benito. I have found the same quality and attention to detail all over Italy. The vendors are proud of their shops and be it a tourist shop or a butcher, or a fruit and vegetable store, that pride shows.

Traditionally, the shopper does not touch the produce. Not sanitary. It is a no-no. You get the grocer who comes with a bag and you chose the items you want by pointing and he puts them in a bag for you. At the Coop they place boxes of plastic gloves at the end of the isle and you are expected to wear them when selecting your veggies. Italians care about what they eat!

Before supermarkets, before there were shops, in the middle ages and before, people bought and sold the goods they made or needed in public markets usually set up along the roads in the towns or in some common field

*The buildings that line the streets in the old town are old by any standard and ancient by North American ones. But they are full of wonderful shops that sell everything from tourist trinkets to high end expensive art, antiques and jewellery. It is a window shopper's paradise.*

or meadow. People would trade, haggle, barter and come away with the things they needed and did not make for themselves. Well, that is still a thing in modern Italy.

To live in Italy is to live immersed in the past. You can't get away from it. It is everywhere around you. And market day, "il Mercato", a tradition that goes back before time, happens every week in Arezzo. Some days there are special markets. Arezzo is famous for its antique market which is held monthly in the summer. But I am talking of a weekly market where the Aretini do much of their shopping. There are no tables of cheap Chinese junk, well those are everywhere, but the majority of the booths are selling kitchen ware, men's and women's clothing, bedding, cutlery, as well as meat, cheese, vegetables and fruit. Oh yes, and flowers. And the goods are first class quality and farm fresh.

The merchants have mostly invested in trucks with awnings folded into compartments on the roof. They can pull into the market, drive to their assigned location, open the side of the truck, put out tables, spread the awning, and they are in business. The markets are weekly and they can reserve the same spot for each market day.

But here is why it is viable: market day today in Arezzo, tomorrow in Sansepolcro, next day in Cortona, next day in Montevarchi. You get the point. They can sell every day of the week if they want to. And because so many people shop

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*In 2012 we travelled in Italy with our friends Katie and Jimmy and we took them to Arezzo. Susan is standing with them at the Mercato. The street has been closed for market day and the centerline of the roadway is visible at their feet. The merchandise visible is a typical clothing section of an outdoor market. The quality of the products available is very high and many people do most of their clothing, kitchenware, and shoe shopping there.*







Above is what the Italians call a food truck. It is a complete butcher shop on wheels. And this one sells my favorite snack food in Italy, porchetta on a bun. Imagine a whole pig deboned, stuffed and rolled and then BBQ'd. Then when you order your porchetta the man opens a fresh Italian roll, removes some of the bread to make a pocket which he fills with fresh sliced pork, a little crispy skin, and spicy stuffing and he hands it to you still warm! I am getting tears in my eyes just thinking about it!



regularly at the market there is enough income to justify the fancy trucks. Even if it rains a little bit, with the awnings, it is business as usual.

Susan's sister Pierina and her husband Mario had a truck and sold in the markets for years and made a very good living. I met them for the first time at their stand in the weekly Mercato in Arezzo. Susan and I both have clothing we bought in the Arezzo market. The table cloths we use daily on the kitchen table come from the Mercato.

So shopping in Italy today is a combination of the old and the new, from the Mercato to the Coop. I do not know if the markets are going to continue into the future but they certainly seem healthy enough to a casual observer. I hope they do continue. This mixing of the old traditions with modern living is so special and is something the Italians do so well!

*This is the Mercato this past January 2019. The winter sun is low in the sky and the air is chilled. But the outdoor shopping goes as far as the eye can see and still further and then around the corner. It takes a couple of hours to walk all of it and take in what each stall is selling. The merchandise is displayed like it would be in any store and clothing vendors have change rooms in the backs of their trucks.*

*Notice that the street has been closed and will be so from early morning to late afternoon. The Mercato is an important institution in all Italian towns and it makes shopping fun. The merchandise is first class, there is good snack food, you run into friends and catch up on all the gossip. At the end of the day the unsold goods are packed back into the trucks, the sides close and the awnings are folded into containers on the roof of the vehicles. The vendor can be ready to pull out in just a few minutes. The city then sends in cleaners to tidy the street and everything goes back to normal. It is an amazing system.*







At il mercato the assortment of snack foods to complete meals is amazing and the quality is equivalent to that of any delicatessen in Vancouver. These two vans show what can be had. Not only are they offering meats and cheeses to go home but they will make you a panino on the spot with the freshest of breads, meats and cheeses. Both shops have whole prosciutti hanging up, the one above has a large mortadella on the counter and on the right I can see porchetta in the case and fresh buns above it. For me, one of the best parts of the mercato is to have my lunch sitting outside with the noise and swirl of activity around me. Or we can take our meal and find a quiet corner in a park somewhere close by as the spirit moves us. It is really special!







*In this last picture from the Mercato Susan is looking at the farm fresh produce. This picture is taken in the late summer of 2014 when the farms are at their peak. The produce is the freshest that can be found anywhere. Italian laws don't require the kind of inspections that slow the trip from farm to market. It is easy for local farmers to get their output into local stores and markets. So, as a result, the food is fresher and it is not forced in hot houses which produce watery tasteless veggies.*

*If there is a secret to Italian cooking it is to use farm fresh products that have matured in rich soil in the hot sun. The flavours are deeper and richer than we can get in North America. That truck drive from California or Mexico requires fruit and vegetables to be picked green and forced to ripped as they travel the highway. You cannot get good flavors with such methods. But North Americans don't care. Well, I care.*



## *Le Frazioni*

Arezzo lies in a valley, at the convergence of three valleys actually, in the flood plain of the River Arno. The city is small but it is surrounded by dozens of still smaller communities, called 'frazione', and in between are farms, some small and some large, and beautiful homes on small acreages. The city seems to melt away into the country very quickly as you walk out. There appears to be no urban sprawl here like we have at home. It is but a short walk from the center of the city and you are in the country. It is a wonder how the Italians have been able to marry urban life with the countryside. They co-exist side by side and are somehow mixed together.

This unique form of land use derives from the custom of people collecting in small

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*This local rail line runs from the countryside on one side of Arezzo into the country on the other joining a few dozen small communities along the way. It is a version of 'rapid transit' from another age. If you walk along this track in this direction you will come to Capolona and eventually on to Prato Vedio.*



*The country between the 'frazioni' is farmland interspersed with homes on large lots or small acreages. Susan's nephew Davide bought a house on this small lane. There are houses set back on the left side of the lane but the land on the right and at the end is a large acreage planted in grape vines.*





towns in the midst of farm land for protection from brigands, marauders and moving armies. The result is small communities of a few buildings to small towns dotted along the roads leading from Arezzo. They cluster close to the roads that were once little more than donkey cart trails. Now the speed of automobiles makes their proximity to the road seem strange but in the old days, before the car, the positioning made perfect sense.

The outlying communities are linked by an excellent road system of two lane rural roads with grass and crops growing to the edge of the pavement. They run through small clusters of buildings hugging the road, over stone bridges, past orchards and vineyards and the ever present olive trees.

I find this style of land use peaceful and relaxing. It is a pleasure to walk or drive from community to community on these little roads. It is here that you can see the real rural Italy. Imagine a warm day, you are walking along a narrow road with no lane markings, the air is alive with the sound of insects, and the fragrance of olives,

grapes or a hundred other crops as they crowd the edge of the road. There are few fences but many hedges. Here and there through the gaps you can see rolling country away into the blue distance. Driveways lead from the road and disappear around leafy corners. Here a red tiled roof, there a laundry line with the wash drying in the sun. It sounds like another time in a world determined to rush on but it exists still. I know because I have walked there. But it takes time for Italy to reveal herself; you have to do the walking, you have to take the time that most tourists never have. If you sit there quietly by our road and wait, Italy will find you.

Besides the roads, some of the communities outside of Arezzo are connected by local trains. These are closer to trams than trains and they stop in every little community along the line. They are inexpensive and run often making local travel extremely convenient.

North of Arezzo by about ten kilometers, on the banks of the Arno River, are the communities of Capolona and Subbiano. They were once separate towns but they

*(Previous Page) Susan's bothers Franco and Benito have their homes on a hillside above Capolona which is surrounded by hills. From the top of Benito's driveway you can look across the valley to a home on the other side set in an olive grove. This picture is so typical of the Tuscan countryside: rolling hills, blue skies with white clouds, olive trees. In the foreground are the tops of Benito's olive trees. The two things everyone seems to have are grape vines and olive trees.*

*(Opposite Page) Again from Benito's property, looking south towards Arezzo, you can see the Castello della Fioraia at Castelnuovo which is across the Arno from Capolona. This building can be traced back to 1022 but its present form dates from the 15th century. It is a typical heavily fortified Florentine castello of the period.*



have actually grown together over the years. It was here that Susan's parents lived for the early years of her life and much of the family still lives there to this day. Set amongst the hills and surrounded by farms and forest it is a delightful community.

Susan's brother Armando has a restaurant in Capolona, La Cascata, which is now run by his sons Stefanino and Manuele. Her brother Benito has a butcher shop, a 'macellaria', just down the street from La Cascata. He too has handed the business over to his son Claudio now.

Homes and farms lie in the hills above Capolona and it is beyond pleasure to walk there. The tourist never has the time to get off the highway, out of the old towns, and just walk in the country. My first day in Italy we were staying with Benito at his house in Capolona. I wanted to go for a walk and see the Tuscan countryside I had heard so much about. We walked from Benito's house up into the hills where we wandered for the rest of the day. It was quiet except for insects buzzing about their business. Occasionally you heard a cow bell in the distance. The sun shone down and the air smelled of brown grass and fruit.

I will never forget foraging in the ditches for grapes that had gone wild and escaped their vineyards and picking fruit from overhanging trees. Susan fed me all manner of things remembered from her childhood in these same hills.

That first day is one of my treasured memories of Italy.

Every visit to Arezzo includes a trip to the cemetery in Capolona to visit Susan's parents. It is a ritual. We stop and buy flowers and then drive to the cemetery. It is a walled enclosure with a large gate. Outside is a water faucet and a bin of old plastic bottles. We fill a bottle and go in. What a fascinating place.

We walk to the back wall and a little to the right and there they are. It is the custom in Italy to include a photo of the loved one on their tomb stone and many include some details of the life of the person. We use the water to wash the marble slab, we arrange the fresh flowers and use the last of the water to give them a drink. Susan sits with her parents a while and I wander the cemetery reading the tomb stones and thinking about life, and death, and the meaning of it all. I have still come to no conclusions.

Unfortunately, we are beginning to visit the graves of Susan's brothers and sisters as well. We are all getting to an age where this is inevitable. My Italy is changing as the years pass and I mourn for the family I am losing after so recently gaining it. But their kindness will always live in my memory.

*(Con't on Page 111)*



*In the hills above Capolona is a farm that was lived on by Susan's parents and her earliest memories of life are there. It has fallen into ruin now, no more than stone walls and caved in roof, but it is a favorite place to visit and walk. Here the road is not paved as it winds through the hills. We have walked for miles but never have we been to the end of it, if there is one. Maybe it winds on forever.*



*The River Arno flows through Capolona, right through the middle. There is an old arched bridge near the center of town that crosses the river. Standing there in the middle of that span and looking up river you see the view pictured above. In the distance are the rolling hills of Tuscany. On the right are the ever present old buildings of stone and in the middle, the river. It flows from here, through Florence, on to Pisa and then to the sea.*

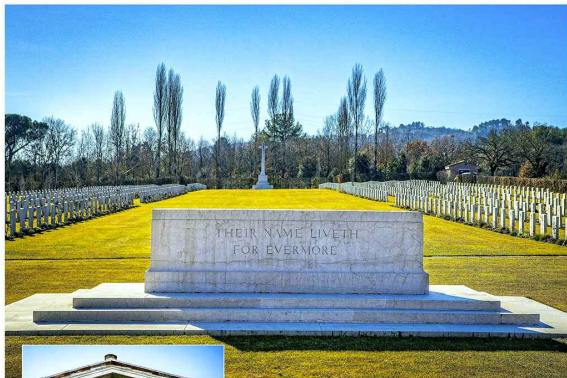


*Italy wears its history on its sleeve. In the middle of Subbiano, which is mostly a modern city, a medieval tower stands above the buildings of the town where it has stood for centuries. On the banks of the Arno old stone walls and buildings stand as they have for hundreds of years. Italy is like this everywhere you go; the old mixed with the new. And, for the most part, the buildings are still in use, remodeled many times over the years, but still serviceable.*





*A cemetery in Italy is a fascinating place. Firstly, Italians visit family that has passed on. They still live in memory and they are cared for by the family. At least for a while. Whenever we go to Arezzo we visit Susan's parents in fact and in memory. On the left is the entrance to the cemetery which is an extremely attractive setting. In the picture above Susan is standing at her parents' grave. The second thing is that the Italians usually put photos on tomb stones and often details of the person's life. I can walk for hours reading those stones. Again, it is the little details that makes this country such a wonder.*



*The 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry were serving as the reconnaissance regiment for the British 6th Armoured Division in the fighting between the Germans and the Allies in the Valley of the Arno in August of 1944. That is when Trooper Harper was killed and his mother's heart was broken. Twenty one years old. One day I would like to do an album of*

Outside of Arezzo is another cemetery I like to visit. During World War II there was bitter fighting in and around Arezzo as the British pursued the Germans who were retreating to the North. The Germans made a stand outside Arezzo in July of 1944. The British 6th Armoured Division supported by the New Zealand 2nd Division routed them after bitter fighting and liberated Arezzo on 16 July 1944. Now 1266 of those men lie in the War Graves Cemetery in Arezzo.

As you walk amongst the tombstones you can read the age, rank, army unit and date of death of the fallen soldier. Almost all young men. There are some Canadian airmen there as well. The War Graves Commission went to the trouble of contacting families and asking if they wished to record something on the tombstones. It is heart breaking to read what mothers and wives have said of their loved ones. I can think of no stronger anti-war memorial than this graveyard.

*grave stones from this cemetery. The inscriptions would tell a heartbreaking tale and make it a book to ponder.*





## *Le Piccolezze*

"Le piccolezze" or 'the little things' are what the visitor to Italy so often misses. It is easy to come away with an impression of a place without seeing those little things that actually set a place apart and create that special memory. We remember a feeling of a place but we can't quite recall what it was that gave us that feeling in the first place.

I think it is true that, to paraphrase Dorothea Lange, cameras are devices for teaching people how to see. I spend so much time looking for interesting things to photograph, imagining angles and borders, watching the light, that I think that, just from habit and practice, I see more than most people do. I will walk along a street and see something interesting but when I ask Susan if she saw it she very often says "No". But I saw it and usually I photographed it.

I worry that my tastes are just strange and that some of the things I photograph are of interest to no one else. I pick out small carvings, door knobs and knockers, iron work, statues, manhole covers, all things that I find delightful and interesting. I know that most people pass them by and they may not be so interesting to others. But

they please me and they make the place I am in special. They set a place apart from my normal. They give texture and flavor to an otherwise flat tasteless surface.

And in hurrying by people miss so much! There are so many vignettes that visitors do not see because their eyes are full of ancient buildings and old cathedrals. They don't stop to see the little doorways, the brass decorations, the window casings, the signs, all the little flourishes that create the environment around them; the details that create the whole. These are subliminal, they are subtle, but I find them compelling. They say so much about the people who populate a place.

To take a single example, consider doorways. Their architecture tells much about their origin and purpose. Often the stone or brick work around the door shows different shapes for the doorway through its history as it evolved. The way it is finished and decorated tells much about the people beyond the door, about their pride, their desire for beauty, their attention to life. I can look at a doorway and tell you if I would like the people who shelter behind it. And all of this

*(Con't on Page 120)*







Commemorative plaques and shrines appear everywhere in Italian cities. Usually ignored by tourists they are glimpses of the history those same tourist have come to see but usually miss. On the left is a shrine to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of an Arezzo native, Saint Teresa Margherita Redi.

Wine is a large part of Italian culture. Not everyone makes wine now, like in the old days, but it is still made. Grapes are grown everywhere and wine is on every table. Surprisingly I don't see the family drink that much of it. But I try to make up for that!

The old traditional glass container for making wine was the wicker bound "damigiana". The wicker cover was necessary because the bottles, about five gallons in size, were blown with round bottoms and required the wicker to provide a stable footing. Above are old 'damigiane' left in the yard of the house Susan's nephew Davide bought. The house had a considerable vineyard attached to it and a previous owner had obviously made a lot of wine.



*I am not sure why I like doorways but they fascinate me. I have a collection of images of doors from all over the world. You can tell so much about a person by their front door. It shows their pride in their dwelling and the care with which they approach life. In centuries past doorways were strong to protect the inhabitants of the dwelling. Often they were plain but they were stout. In later centuries as the danger in the street receded the*

*doorways remained strong but they softened in appearance and became ornate. Tourists see these portals as part of the background of their travel experience but they seldom take the time to stop and consider them, wonder at why they appear as they do, and imagine the generations that have passed through them.*

*Italy, like all first world democracies, is becoming more secular with the passage of time. But piety is an old habit and its expression is everywhere. You can see this in the prevalence of small shrines, usually to Mary and the Christ Child, but, often they are dedicated to local saints. These too are an interesting part of the visual experience of Italy. Like doorways, I have a collection of images of these small altars from all over Italy and some from other parts of Europe. In Arezzo one finds dozens of these reminders of a more pious past in every street, on every wall, and at the foot of many driveways. Some are overgrown but often you find them carefully tended, the depredations of time restored, and with fresh flowers in a vase of water. I do not go to church as often as I should but I seldom pass one of these shrines without a pause and a respectful nod of the head.*





*Evidence of the violence of the middle ages is apparent in the old center of Arezzo. Noble families, even the richest of the rising middle class, built large homes for their extended families but these homes, however grand, were built like fortresses, and for good reason. If you look at the medieval "palazzi" you will see that they had substantial stone foundations up to the second floor, windows and doors were small on the ground floor, and the frames were of substantial stonework. Doors were stoutly built and undoubtedly barred from the inside. And any windows on the main floor had iron grills set into the stone frames.*

*Violence in the street was common. Not just from warfare but from city politics and family feuds as well. Crowds would riot, the mobs stirred up by one family against another for any number of local reasons. Murder and assassination were common. Families had small private armies of toughs for protection and to attack perceived enemies.*

*Walking through old Arezzo, indeed Florence, Rome, and any of the old Italian cities, you will find barred windows are common on the ground level. The iron work is often very ornate but also substantial and effective. And it is often several centuries old.*

*And usually the traveler to Italy will see this part of the local history and pass by, not realizing what they are looking at or what it means about Italy's past.*







creates an impression, a memory, of a place even if I don't actually recall the doorway later. It is part of the experience of being there in that street at that time.

So I take pictures of the little things because they are important to me if to no one else. They are the texture of the experience. But just as we seldom look at the structure of the weave in a T-shirt, it is there none the less and it is the basis for the fabric we do see.

*Arezzo in summer is a fun city. There is always something going on. There are market days, antique fairs, street vendors, restaurants with outdoor seating, food stands, all in addition to the buildings, stores, museums, and shops. And twice a year in the Piazza Grande is the Giostra del Saracino or Saracen Joust which is a medieval festival in costume with teams on horseback competing in a joust. The festival began in the 16th century, died out after a few hundred years and was revived in its present form in 1931.*

*In the picture on the left a street vendor at an intersection in the Centro Storico is selling balloons to passers by.*

Here are some of those pictures of details that caught my eye. These are just a few. I take pictures like this all the time. One day I will do a book of just my little details. But for now these few will have to suffice to illustrate my meaning.

If my pictures of little things encourage you to always look for 'le piccolezze' they will have served their purpose.

*Something you might not notice is the attention to decoration and detail some people put into flowers and their front doors. With the old towns having narrow streets front doors often open directly onto the stone pavement. But many people still find ways to have flowers. They have window boxes on balconies, flower pots on flag stones flanking the front door, flowers in the windows. And they polish the front door which often has an ornate bronze knocker on it. And sometimes they just put out a jug with a pot of ivy in the top. The details are charming and often not noticed but they form part of the overall impression Italy makes upon the traveller.*





We cannot leave Arezzo without discussing a couple of things, the first of which is "gelato". True Italian ice cream is a thing of joy. It is not the frozen concoction we call ice cream here in North America. It is softer, more silky and with intense flavor. The ingredients available in Italy play a big role. Even using the same method and ingredients, what we have available at home is not the same. I have had lemon gelato that was so lemony it was like sucking on one. It was truly amazing. A warm Tuscan evening, after dinner, a stroll through the town, and a gelato: a perfect "passeggiata".



The second thing is coffee. Again, not the typical weak watery coffee we drink. And certainly not the over roasted bitter drink sold by Starbucks. Coffee in Italy is an institution. The roasting is perfection yielding a strong smooth drink that is sweet even when taken strong as an espresso. (note that there is no "x" in the word!). My favorite is "cappuccino" which is coffee with steamed milk. But the milk in Italy tastes like it came from a cow and not some North American milk factory. Without any sugar, it is a smooth sweet tasting drink. Italians normally have milk in their coffee only in the morning. I love it any time of day!

## *La Famiglia*

I was raised in a very British household. I don't know my cousins, and I have lots of them, and I never met my aunts and uncles. After having been adopted into an Italian family and community I now realize how proper and formal, you might say cold and distant, my childhood was. And yet, to me, it all seemed normal and in keeping with the families around me.

Italy was a revelation. It is not like that. It is a land where cousins are close relatives and second cousins are included family, where meals are quality time together and food and fellowship are paramount. The homes I know in Italy have long tables in the kitchen where you can seat at least a dozen people because large family dinners are common.

Susan was the only one of her family to leave Italy and I have learned what that cost her. There is a pain in her heart being away from the Italian sun and her people. In the Canadian winter of cold and cloud and rain she struggles day by day with the chill and damp and the dreariness.

*Susan's brother, Franco, had a butcher shop, "una macelleria", in Subbiano, a small town next to Capolona. One of the secrets of Italian food is the connection the people have with the sources of their food. Franco made his own prosciutto for his shop in his "cantina" at home.*







When we're in Italy she is a different person. In the Italian sun she opens like a flower. Her personality comes alive, she laughs, she rattles on in her mother's language and you can see her drink it all in. Italians need family.

I never understood immigrants because I was never one. My mother came from Ireland when she was four but she was coming to the same culture and language and she was young enough to adopt Canadian ways completely. The Italian immigrants came to a land with a foreign language. They had no jobs, no money, no homes. I had never thought about what that meant and the courage required for such an undertaking.

Now I know why Italians get together with other Italians here in Canada. It is to be with 'family'. They can talk easily in the old language about things that only they understand. They can indulge in Italian jokes and gossip and they can sing the songs they learned in school. They are a people marooned. Their children reject the old ways and language. But they go home to Italy and find that the old country has moved on and become new. The old world they left behind is gone, swept up in the rush to modernity.



*In the picture opposite Susan is standing with her sister Franca, holding the umbrella, outside Franca's home in Arezzo. On the left is Franca's son Davide. Above, Susan is sitting with her brother Benito. Do you notice how many of these family pictures involve a dinner table? Benito actually lived in British Columbia for a few years but he chose to return to Italy when he was still a young man.*



At home with her family Susan is no longer alone. You might say she is not alone because she has me. But that is not the same thing. Her family and her country are her context; they define her and give her meaning. By any standard her life in Canada has been a success. She has children, security, a beautiful home, and she lives with passion.

I see the emptiness she feels sometimes when the rain is coming down and she knows brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, are far away and beyond her reach basking in the Italian sun. Then the tears come. But I have seen her in Italy. She is not the same person. She literally wakes up and becomes alive.

Because her parents had so many children it is impossible to keep up with everyone and remember all of the names. After my first trip to Italy I created a chart, a family tree, to keep names straight. But I don't have everyone on it. Every trip I meet new relatives that I have to add. Many have moved away from Arezzo and getting to see them all on a visit is not possible. But when we are there, we are swept up into a blizzard of visits which always seem to include dinners and relatives.

I don't know why I have taken so



*On the opposite page are Celso and Anna-Maria who took us out in 2019 for a day driving in the Chianti region of Tuscany which is not far from Arezzo. The Black Rooster is the symbol of the Chianti Classico region and this Rooster is in the town of Gaioli in Chianti. In the picture above are Benito, Davide and his mother Franca, and Christina, Susan's daughter. We were having lunch outside Arezzo at Bottega dell' Abate near Monteriggione.*

strongly to this culture. I love the warmth and openness of it. Of course there are frictions and personalities that clash. But that is submerged in the general joy of being a family.

These few pictures don't include everyone. Not nearly every one. That would be a book on its own! It is not my purpose to document a family but rather I wish to illuminate the meaning and importance of family to the Italians. By putting faces and relationships into the discussion I want to show that these are real people living real lives within their families.

Look past the pictures and realize that these people are part of a living changing structure that includes them, shelters them, gives them a context in which to live their lives. It is a web called 'la famiglia'. I am blessed to have been invited in as a part of it. I know that my membership is tenuous and is dependent on my relationship with Susan. But, for now, it is enough.

*Benito's butcher shop, his 'macelleria', is on the main street in Capolona. His son Claudio runs it now with his wife Sabrina. When I first met Benito and saw his shop I was amazed by it; the quality of the products, the cleanliness, the modern equipment and décor caught me off guard. I have since come to learn that Benito is not unique. Shops like his exist all over Italy exhibiting the pride these people take in their work. In this picture Susan is standing with her nephew Claudio and his wife Sabrina.*







At a family dinner at Celso's house in 2014 I had Susan sit with her siblings for a picture. Susan, in the black and yellow dress, is sitting with her sister Pierina in the center and Franca on the right. In the back row are her brothers, from the left, Celso, Adelmo, Armando, Franco and finally Benito on the right. Unfortunately brothers Egidio, Agosto and Vittorio were no longer with us then. Neither was her older sister Sylvana. Since the picture was taken Armando and Franco have also left us. We are getting old and age is claiming us all, one by one.



In 2003 we had been invited to the weddings of two of Susan's nieces and have kept in touch with them on and off ever since. At the top left Susan is standing with Simona, the daughter of her brother Egidio and his wife Giliola. Below Susan is with Maria-Laura who is the daughter of Susan's brother Celso and his wife Anna-Maria.

There are so many in the extended family that it is not possible to keep up with everyone individually. That is why these family dinners are so important. You get to spend time with people you might not otherwise get to see. It is a time for news and gossip, announcements, a little speech making, and family bonding. And, of course, it is time for good Italian food!



*Susan and her daughter Christina standing with Armando during a family dinner at Celso's in 2014. Tables are under a canvas awning and food is served basically outdoors. In the background is part of Celso's orchard and gardens where much of the food we ate was grown. He sells the produce from his land in a little store where he also sells his wine and olive oil.*



*Susan's niece Corrina is the daughter of her brother Vittorio and sister in law Rita. She has a news and magazine shop in Via Lorenzetti in the modern part of Arezzo. We were at the Mercato one day in 2019 and dropped in on her unannounced, much to her surprise!*



*Susan's brother, Armando, has for years had a 'ristorante e pizzeria' in Capolona. He makes a fantastic thin crust style pizza that is a delight. His wife Louisa cooks in the kitchen. At least they did. His two sons, Stefanino and Manuele, run the ristorante now. Armando was always found at the oven turning out his wonderful pizze and calzoni.*

*The oven is very traditional, heated by wood only, "un forno a legna", and it takes a while each day to get hot enough inside. Regulating the temperature and knowing where the hot and cold spots are takes experience.*







*Before we left Italy in 2019 I hosted a family dinner at Celso's. He has a small store where he sells produce from his land and he and his wife have a small restaurant. He caters to the local people and seldom gets tourists. Here, at that 'festa', Susan sits with two of her sister-in-laws. On the left is Adriana, wife of her brother Franco. In the middle is Rita, the wife of her brother Vittorio.*



*In 2014 we were travelling in Italy with our daughter Christina and her husband Joe. As usual, when we left Arezzo, Franco drove us to the train station. Franco made it a point whenever we were visiting to drive us anywhere we wanted to go. That is, when we weren't driving his daughter Roberta's car. Here he is with Joe on the train platform as we wait for the train to Rome.*



*Our last trip to Italy was in January of 2019. As usual, Susan's brother-in-law Franco drove us to the station to catch our train to Rome, Fumicino and home. We didn't know it at the time but this was to be the last time we would see Franco. He passed away shortly afterwards. For me Franco was the face of Italy. He was the type of man you felt good to be around. He was kind, helpful and always had a funny story to tell. I miss him. My connection to Italy is through family ties and as our generation passes those ties weaken. It makes me sad.*

## *An Epilogue*

And that, dear reader, is my town of Arezzo. We don't get to choose the home that holds our hearts. It is chosen for us by family and circumstance. Were I an Italian I would want to be from right here. It is not on a hillside overlooking the sea, it does not have wonderful Roman ruins, it is not on the shores of a pristine lake in the foothills of the Alps. But for me it has streets full of memories and the homes of my adopted family. It was here that I came when first in Italy and it is here I am most comfortable. It is the real Italy for me.

This is a land of marvels no matter where you go. And I have felt welcome wherever we have traveled in this incredible country. It is not a matter of just scenery or famous old buildings. It is more profound than that. The people here have found a balance in life that we have missed in our North American ways. I don't know why I have taken to this Italian culture as I have but there was something missing in my upbringing that is fulfilled here.

I hope, in reading this book, you have felt something of what I feel for this place. That has been my goal: to make you 'feel' Arezzo and Italy. As a town it is small and intimate, it is historic, it is beautiful, and most of all, it is family.

Flynn Marr  
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