

June of 1988 / First Trip to Sant Ippolito/ Mark Castellani & Lisa Hildorf

We flew into Rome and once the jet lag was over, sorta, we rented a car and drove to the south. Our car was a Fiat, Panda, and the engine was smaller than most motorcycles. Driving in Rome was a lot of fun. I drove while Mark read the signs for directions. Once on the highway we thought it would be easy. However, we ran into stopped traffic about an hour south of Rome. This was a huge traffic jam. All cars were stopped and parked on the highway. Families were all outside of their cars...talking, drinking wine and then suddenly everyone was running towards us, yelling and jumping into their cars. Everyone was honking their horns to get cars moving. The road was now open to drive! Avanti!!!

It took us most of the day to arrive in Cosenza and find our hotel named The Jolly. At dinner that night we asked our waiter what road to take to travel to Sant Ippolito in the morning. He shrugged. We asked the man at the hotel desk...he frowned and looked the other way. I asked the room service waiter in the morning and he shook his head and smiled. Even the man that parked our car did not know where Sant Ippolito was in relation to Cosenza. A miracle occurred the next morning when we drove away from our hotel. Mark saw one sign with an arrow pointing us to Sant Ippolito. It took us thirty minutes on a twisting road heading up a small mountain with very few guardrails! Why we were laughing is a mystery.

Once in the village, we parked our car and began walking. We had a large video camera and a man and two little boys said hello to us. We were sure the man was Frankie Pentangeli from The Godfather II. We had a hand-drawn map to follow that showed us where Art Castellani was born and where Louis Dionise's sister lived. We walked to Assunta's home and they welcomed us inside for refreshments. They showed us the church just outside their door and we met the priest who showed us the bell in the tower had the names of many families from Lansing including Paul Fata, who had sent money to pay for this church bell. We walked into the town square and met three boys around the age of ten. We asked them if they knew a person named "Finootz". No...they did not know this woman. We walked around and we bought the boys some ice cream at the small store near the center of the village. There we met a woman who was the little boy's mother and we explained we were looking for a woman named Finootz and these boys did not know her. The woman made a funny face and went over to one of the boys, who turned out to be her son, and she gave him a slap across his forehead. It turned out the woman we were looking for was her mother and the little boy's grandmother.

She took us to her home immediately and introduced us. On Finootz's mantel we saw pictures of Ernie and Theresa Fata. We knew we were in the right place.

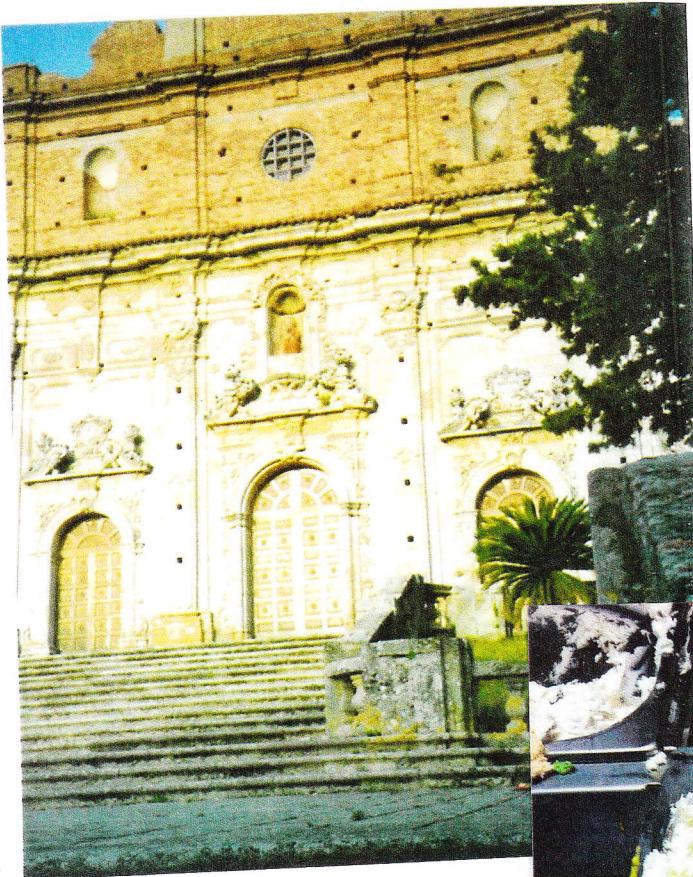
The last names of the boys who showed us around were Spagnuolo (he had lived in Toronto and spoke English very well) DeRose (grandson of Finootz) and DeLuca.

That afternoon we drove to Montalto and met Giugino Fata and his family. We found the center of the city easily and parked our car next to many other cars in the middle of the square in front of Giugino's home. His daughter, Marrisa, was actually going into their building just as we were and she heard Mark and I talking as we looked at the list of the names on the door. Mark said "I don't see a Fata" and Marisa said "I am a Fata". Once we explained who we were she took us upstairs to meet her parents. One of the first questions Giugino asked us was, "When will Ernesto or Orlando come to visit us?" Giugino took us to the farm and showed us the olive trees and the barn where the olives are stored. We drove back to the town and had a nice walk to see two beautiful churches, some nice cafes and some small stores. We were treated to some strong coffee and some good wine. It was beginning to be dusk and we thought we should head back before it was too dark to find the one sign that would direct us safely back to Cosenza and our hotel. We looked down into the city center from the balcony of Giugino's home where we had parked and our car was the only car left in the square with all the residents of the town walking around it as part of the passagata. Giugino said if we had a ticket we should not pay it! We said goodbye and thanked them for their kind hospitality.

The next day we drove to Positano and the fun really began seeing the Amalfi drive followed by a few days on Capri and then back to Rome for a final few days of museums and shopping and the best haircut I ever had at a salon overlooking the Trevi Fountain. The food was fantastic everywhere and Mark loved having seven gelatos every day!

We returned to Sant Ippolito again in 1991, unfortunately driving a car that was not much safer than the one in 1988, and ran into Frank and Teresa Castellani at our hotel in Cosenza. We had no idea they were in Italy. Visiting the village with them is another good story!

Entrance to the church in Montalto.



Mark Castellani with Louie Dionise's sister, Assunta. Assunta's son is next to her. Picture was taken on her porch overlooking her lovely garden in Sant Ippolito.



The three young boys who showed us around the village for the small fee of an ice-cream cone. DeLuca, Mark Castellani, tallest boy is Spagnuolo and the next boy is DeRose, the grandson of Finootz.