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The Love of Family

I was stretched out on a lawn chair on the porch of the villa where we were staying. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining and there was not a cloud in the sky. I looked at the scenery that surrounded me: below was a crowded beach with many people lying out on the sand sun bathing, others were swimming in the clear blue water that revealed the sharp rocks that appeared as dagger at the bottom of the ocean floor. I looked out across the Mediterranean Sea and saw the outline of the volcano Mount Vesuvius, that so many years ago destroyed the city of Pompeii. Boats cruised back and forth across the sea causing the smooth surface to ripple. Behind me were large houses scattered about the huge mountains of Sorrento, Italy. I was in heaven. I was in Italy with my family and my best friends. I was surrounded by a scene so beautiful that it took me hours to realize that I was not dreaming, and that in reality my dreams were finally coming true.

My friends and I were getting ready to go down to the beach to go swimming in the ocean, when my dad came and gathered up my mother, my brother and me and told us that we would be going to Scafati for the day, the town from which my great-grandparents had immigrated. I was disappointed and was about to complain about being forced to go, when I looked around again at my surroundings and realized I was only here because of my parents; I owed it to them to go to Scafati, no matter how boring it might be. I quickly changed out of my bathing suit, put on comfortable clothes for the train ride, and watched with envy as my friends ran off to the beach. As our train traveled to Scafati, the massive umbrella trees and escalating mountains in the distance appeared as a blur across my window. The warm sun was caught inside the train making it very hot. The smell of sweat and old leather filled the air. My father anxiously sat on the edge of his seat, like a little boy waiting to tear open his birthday presents. He was waiting for the second he could jump off the train and see his family's hometown. He had prepared for the adventure by wearing the shirt he had received at the last family reunion that pictured everyone who had lived in Scafati, including his father. My dad searched the congested subway train as if looking for a family member's face to magically appear in the crowd. After minutes of frantically searching around the train, each time concluding the search with me, a huge smile appeared

on his face as he said, "Yes, we are definitely on our way to Scafati. Everyone looks just like Andrea. Everyone is short, has dark curly hair, and never stops talking!"

While we waited for our stop, three dark haired Italian women with tan skin approached us out of curiosity. My dad's excitement and the camera around his neck had given us away as tourists. They asked us in broken English and thick Italian accents where we were from and where we were going. As we were far from the populated tourist areas and entering the poorer towns, it was no surprise that these women were confused by the sight of tourist. My dad readily gave our story of how our family had come to Italy on vacation and we were now hunting down his grandfather's hometown, Scafati.

From the first moment we stepped off the train, it was obvious that Scafati was not the prettiest of towns, but the family history it represented made the broken down town more beautiful to us than any of the major cities in Italy. I was surprised by the eerie feeling and excitement that come over me once we arrived. I was suddenly expecting to see someone related to us or someone who recognized our family name off of my dad's t-shirt even though our family had left decades ago. The streets were lined with old apartments; each apartment had signs posted along the walls announcing deaths, weddings, and births. One of the first signs we saw was for someone named Andrea Rose, my first and middle name. Bright colored shirts, pants, and skirts were draped on clothes line from window to window and numerous cars were parked along the poorly paved streets that led to the piazza, or the town square. The center of town was filled with Italians. There was a puppet show in the center of the piazza where children circled around the red and white striped booth to see the show while their parents watched from a distance and talked to each other. We continued our walk around the town when my dad suddenly came to a halt. He was looking up at a massive and beautiful church when tears began to fill his eyes. He had found the church in which my great-grandparents were married. When we got inside the church, mass was just ending the people were gathering their belongings and wishing one another farewell. My father walked up to the priest and told him how his grandparents had been married in the church. After my father talked with the priest for a few minutes, we walked around the church and looked at the magnificent art work that surrounded us. The tall ceilings were covered with beautiful designs, such as angels and roses. At the front of a church was a grand altar with a larger altar made out of red and cream marble behind it. On top of the larger altar were golden candle sticks and huge golden display case portraying a statue of the Virgin Mary. We exited the church to find the streets filled with Italians as a procession of people carried a large statue of the Mother Mary through the streets. We later discovered that the day we visited was the Feasts of Saint Peter and Paul. Celebrations and feasts

are very important in Italian culture and that tradition has been passed on in our family. It was very moving to see the Italians celebrating their feasts with the same passion as our family. Before we returned to Sorrento, my dad ran into a nearby store to buy some wine for one Euro. We made fun of him for buying wine that cost only one Euro, but he realized something that we did not. Though the wine was cheap and probably not the finest, the historical reference to Scafati and the connection that it has with his grandparents gave it more meaning and made it priceless.

My trip to Scafati turned out to be one of the best parts of the trip. I realized the importance of family and the sacrifices that one makes for the people they love. On the train ride back to Sorrento, I thought about how hard it had been for me earlier in the day to leave Sorrento for just a few hours and realized how hard it must have been for my great-grandparents to leave Scafati forever. They left their home and one of the places they loved most so that my family and I could lead better lives and have more opportunities. Watching my dad recognize the church in which his grandparents were married and watching the happiness that overcame him when we were there, showed me that I was where I was supposed to be.

We returned home weeks later with only the pictures my dad had taken, his one Euro wine, and the memories that were made. The next day, we went to my grandpa's house and shared with him the pictures and stories of our trip, especially those from Scafati. As he looked at the pictures of the town and the church, his eyes began to glisten from the tears that filled his eyes. My dad came back into a room with a glass of the one Euro wine for everyone. I looked around the room at this picture perfect scene we were creating and realized that this is why my great-grandparents had left their beloved Italy. They wanted to make it possible for us to gather around each other in a comfortable home, they wanted to make sure we were able to go to a good school, get good jobs, and raise happy families.

The lives of my great-grandparents change when they arrived at Ellis Island decades ago. The changes that came to their lives and those of their family as a result of their long and tedious journey took a long time, hard work and a great deal of determination. My return to my roots was far shorter and a much more comfortable trip. The changes that took place in my life that day were far less dramatic but will stay with me always as I remember that I have also benefited from their sacrifices. I will never forget the lessons I learned that summer day in Scafati about family, sacrifice and tradition.