

BCSP 50th Anniversary Celebration – Bologna – May 27-28, 2016

Comments by Elizabeth Doupé Goldberg, Class of 1968-69 (University of Washington)

Forty eight years ago I stepped off the SS Aurelia in Le Havre, France—the Aurelia was a World War II troop transport ship, very slightly reconditioned to transport students across the Atlantic Ocean, headed for places like Bologna, Italy. Little did I realize that I would later make my home just a kilometer from another Aurelia--the ancient via Aurelia in Rome. My life has come full circle from that moment when I arrived in Bologna, in the class of 1968, in a small contingent of 10 students from universities around the US, under the watchful eye of our Program Director, Dr. Louis Kibler of Indiana University. I was coming from the great Pacific Northwest, from the Romance Languages Department at the University of Washington. 1968 was not just any year. As we gathered in Bologna, Soviet tanks were driving into Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring and the University of Bologna was occupied by students wearing red neck scarves, reading Herbert Marcuse and waving Mao's little red book from the balconies of all the occupied faculties. The women's liberation movement was in full swing, divorce was on the agenda of the Italian Parliament and revolution was in the air.

To make a long story short, one should never underestimate the power of studying a foreign language. It can open doors in the most extraordinary ways, or at the very least make life more interesting. My junior year abroad resulted in the following:

- Intense immersion in classical Italian literature under the mentorship of outstanding professors such as Mario Passaglia and equally intense immersion in French Horn studies at the Conservatorio G.B. Martini, something I was told was not possible, but BCSP managed to arrange for me.
- I met my husband in Bologna--a New Yorker--who had arrived in Italy via the oil camps in Maracaibo, Venezuela to study at Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies. In step with the times he was reading Antonio Gramsci—for pleasure. How else would someone from Washington State in the extreme West meet someone from New York, in the extreme East, if not by traveling 6,000 miles out of the country to more neutral ground like Bologna. He too was serious about language studies and international travel.
- I made my career in international agricultural research with residences in Cali, Colombia for 10 years where I exchanged my Italian for Spanish and then to Rome for 13 years where I exchanged my Spanish for Italian. I have traveled with my work to 10 countries in Latin America, 6 in Asia, 7 in Africa and 3 in the Middle East. I worked using English, Spanish, French and of course Italian.
- My two daughters speak fluent Italian and Spanish having spent their formative years growing up in Cali, Colombia and Rome. One was a high school exchange student traveling from Colombia to a liceo scientifico in Siena with the AFS. That one also later added German, French and Arabic to her portfolio. Thanks to languages and the opportunity to live and experience other cultures deeply, both have become world citizens, which has deeply and positively affected their values and perspectives as adults.
- My husband, the New Yorker, at 72 years of age has just been granted Italian citizenship, having made a quality choice that the artichokes are better in Italy.

- Furthermore, we have acquired an Italian dog, a volpino Romano, who has lived on both continents, is now a Frequent Flyer, enjoys a plate of spaghetti carbonara, and also happens to be bi-lingual.
- Finally, after a career of 42 years, we retired in 2013 and have taken up residence in Ascoli Piceno, in Le Marche—a jewel of a medieval hill town, one of Italy’s best kept secrets, nestled between the Adriatic Sea and the Sibylline Mountains, where we eat, drink, read, think and sleep in Italian. While Bologna is a beautiful city, has good mortadella and Lambrusco, in Le Marche, the “Other Italy”, we produce truffles, saffron, olive ascolani and Pecorino wine.
- So you can see how we have come full circle. Who would have thought that a girl from a small fishing village in the Pacific Northwest, population 550, (where ironically Latin was the only “foreign” language taught in school), would end up in Italy—the first time for studies, the second for work, and after traveling the world, the third time for quality of life. And I am sure I don’t need to convince anyone on the reasons why. That’s the transformative power of studying a foreign language and I owe it all to the Bologna Study Abroad Program. Congratulations on your 50 years! With more programs like these, there would be more peace in the world.