

From Sheena Maria Lomeo ('79) for AALNY Newsletter #36

Years and years ago and memory fades. Then a photo brings back some recollection of feelings though I can't for the life of me remember friends or teachers ... apart from Francesca and my dear teacher Monsieur Leçot. That was the Lycée Français, New York, in the sixties.

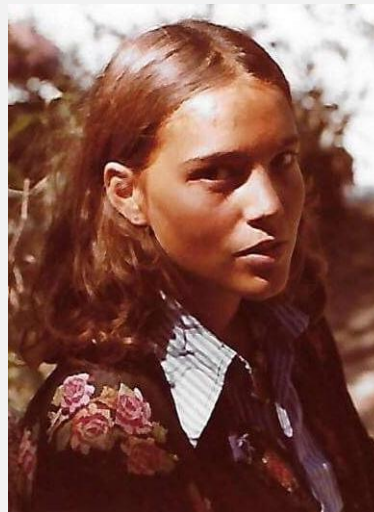
I was born in Rome, Italy, in 1961 and we moved to New York in 1963 ... the year of Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech and J. F. Kennedy's assassination. Seems we wanted to be closer to the action.



My father was specializing in gynaecology and my mother, who had sailed to Rome from Australia in 1956 to continue her cello studies at the renowned Santa Cecilia Conservatorium and "fatefully" met my father there, was working hard for her piano teacher certification from the Diller Quaile School of Music.

Soon enough, the bright lights of the USA "inebriated" the mind of the young Sicilian who began to see endless opportunities of self-indulgence. Needless to say that this newly discovered "freedom" did not play to the benefit of his young family. We were sent back to Rome shortly before my mother was able to take her final piano teacher certification exam ... to her great *chagrin*.

My mother, my brother and myself returned permanently to Rome in 1970 and Rome is where I grew up ... Lycée Chateaubriand and then The New School formed me. My father was still enjoying his newly discovered freedoms in New York.



I was eighteen when I moved to Athens - Greece that is. True love is always a good reason for relocating! I worked and I studied and I learnt to draw and I actually managed to get through the stringent exam and was admitted to the Athens Academy of Fine Arts.

"Sweet sixteen"



Sculpture at art school



Lithograph



Meeting up again with my first husband after 25 years

Love has different shades and sometimes it's not love at all ... could just be infatuation or a means to an end. Christos, my fellow art student, knew this well and we met, we loved and flew to Australia where we married ... love is always a good reason for relocating.

Posing for nude art classes, picking grapes and oranges and cherries in the season, were not long-term life solutions ... and we couldn't even sit by the seashore and have an ouzo and meze. Australia was not for us! Back to Greece!

There we were again, picking grapes and cleaning out greenhouses on Crete. Uprooting *aubergines* was particularly tasking ... very deep ... and cucumbers have these irritating little hairs. At the end of a day's work, a burning, salty swim in the sea, a glass of wine or two at the taverna and a good night's sleep under the stars on the beach.

Athens had to follow. I have no idea anymore how we managed to get there and rent a flat but, hey, it happened! Me working teaching English ... the way expats do ... then translating and reading the news on the Voice of Greece radio programme.

The 24 hour shift work at the radio was starting to wear me down after 5 years and my dear husband and love was not helping enough ... he's an artist, after all.

Hydra changed my life! I moved there in 1993 and worked in a jewellery shop then as a cook in a restaurant. I was independent, earning good money and living on a beautiful island! I met Dermot O'Connor, the most wonderful Irish musician, singer, mandolin player ... my true soulmate! That was it! We fell head over heels in love with each other and there's not much you can do when that happens ... it's completely out of your control. .



Two days after having met in Hydra.

We had to find a way of being together. He was living in London and I in Greece so we decided to move together to Germany! WHAT!? Germany!? There was the opportunity of forming a band in Deutschland with some other supreme musicians and so ... there we were...

After a couple of months, we went to Australia for a brief stint. Spent some time with my mother in Moss Vale in the Southern Highlands and then flew to Tasmania where the guys gigged around the island. Unfortunately, it ended up in tears and Dermot and I almost decided to stay in Australia but we returned to Hydra. Stayed there about 7 months running a small bistrot-type place with good food, lots of drink, and music, theatre and culture from passers-by.

It was great fun until reality got the better of us and Dermot decided that he actually could play again with that fiddle player who was the reason we didn't move back to Germany after the Tasmania debacle.

Germany was hard in the beginning ... well, the first 3 or 4 years really! We were living in a very small village where foreigners were not exactly looked upon kindly ... in fact, there was a wartime lager there for unwanted intellectuals and some of its "supervisors" were still living. But we managed to befriend some of them and I eventually found a job at ELWE, a company based in the village and that manufactured technical training systems. Things started looking up and we were discovering that Germans actually do have a good sense of humour!

ELWE unfortunately started going down the drain and went into administration after about 40 years of existence. A competitor company in Italy headhunted me and made me an offer to work for them. Every cloud has a silver lining.



Lizzie

So, there we were, me, Dermot and Lizzie (our super personality Tibetan Terrier we got in Hydra from a German!) on our way to Azzano Decimo, a small town in Friuli Venezia Giulia about 60 km from Venice.

Dermot thought it would be terribly romantic to live in Italy but I knew better and warned him. He soon found out that living in Italy is very different from visiting as a tourist!

We were, however, very lucky to rent a lovely house in the countryside and we met beautiful people who became our very dear friends.

I was travelling a lot for work to Africa and S. East Asia and Dermot was often alone, having also lost his musician *camarades*. In February 2013 he was diagnosed with mouth cancer and he left us in May 2015.

Everything sort of went downhill from then on. I resigned from my job to start something with a UK company ... they folded. Searched and searched for a job in Italy and nobody even considered me! I did translations ... taught English ... and that stuff that does not allow you to earn a living, let alone contribute to an eventual retirement pension.

Eventually, I took the bold decision to come back to Germany. Wolfenbuettel. A charming town about 10 km from where we used to live. I had no idea what me and Banjo (our new doggie) were going to find apart from the fact that some good old friends offered me a place to stay for the first 2/3 months.



Banjo

I arrived on 7 November 2018 with practically nothing! Me, my dog and the few things that fit in the car. I thought I could have got some sort of state benefit after the years of contributions made to the German government but I was told I had been away too long. Then again, my previous boss at ELWE who is now running another company came to the rescue and gave me a 3-month contract to translate technical manuals. That was enough for the German State to then acknowledge me as entitled to their Hartz IV programme! A minimum existential amount of money ... that nobody can really live off but for which I am so grateful!

I only needed to avail myself of Hartz IV for 4 months until I found a job!

I am now working for Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research in two departments: Scientific Strategy and Organization.

There are lots of ups and downs and ins and outs in life.

For those who read this to the end, if I were to say one thing, never ever give up and always have a smile on your face ... others will smile back!