

Trip to Italy  
by Thomas A. Hugo

Our trip to Italy started on January 14, 1955 when we left Washington, D.C., on the eleven o'clock a.m. Pennsylvania train for New York. Julie Nisonger drove us to the station with Beau and Auntie Ada to see us off. Our drawing room on the train proved to be quite nice since we could lunch there with little confusion and Curt, Michele, and Beth were able to nap a little in the afternoon. The country side was dotted with patches of where some snow still lingered in the hollows and draws. None of the previous day's rather heavy snowfall was evident when we arrived in New York at about four p.m. Apparently the heat from the subways, which run under most of the main streets, solve the snow clearance problem for the big city, except perhaps a really heavy fall.

Reservations for us had been made at the Henry Hudson Hotel, a family type hotel on 57<sup>th</sup> Street near Columbus (?) Circle. Our rooms were small, definitely not plush, but completely adequate. Michele was quite impressed with her private bath and telephone--which rang every time some one tried to reach us--rather than the one in our room. We knew that dinner would be anything but pleasant what with all four of us almost exhausted from the packing and excitement, so we ate in the hotel cafeteria.

When we looked out the window the next morning we saw we would be leaving New York in the midst of a snowstorm. Breakfast in the room proved much more successful than dressing and going downstairs. We packed and left for the ship about 10:00 a.m. After much walking downstairs etc., we arrived in our tiny cabin and found Sue Burklund and her baby, Sandra, there to see us off. Sue and Beth worked together in the State Dept. and we hadn't seen her since she and her husband went to Alaska.

The ship sailed almost on the dot of noon with the band playing tunes with an Italian flavor. It was quite touching what with the handkerchief waving both ashore and aboard--with some teary eyes claiming their share of time from the hankies. The Andrea Doria is a beautiful ship, inside and out, and we were anxious to get settled in our room and oriented as to which deck contained what. Our first lunch on board was quite hectic with Curt and Michele immediately discovering that food aboard didn't taste like it did at home. Indeed it didn't! With the same basic ingredients the Italian cooks come up with a deliciously different flavor from the same food in the States. Beth and I enjoyed it thoroughly and a little later Michele began her orgy of pasta. Despite the tastiness of the food and our desire to try everything new or different, our waiter--a pleasant man with a very limited knowledge of English and as homely as sin--was convinced we ate like birds, and I don't mean buzzards. He tempted us constantly with filet mignon and the most beautifully decorated cakes--all cream filled and laced with liquor of some kind. Wine, of course, was available at each meal for a small extra charge. The menus were most attractive with prints of flowers done in water color. We have an almost complete collection of them with about eight different pictures. These we hope to frame at some time as permanent souvenirs. Each afternoon, tea was served at four and movies were shown at 4:45. These were the very latest ones. At least four were being shown in the first run houses in D.C. when we left. After dinner each evening, there was an hour and a half of Bingo or the horse racing game then dancing from

10:00 to 12:30. With the children we couldn't begin to do everything because of naps and baby-sitting problems. The promenade deck was glass enclosed and a good place for all of us, particularly Curt, to work the kinks out of his legs. The cabin was much too small for our family and we tried to vacate it as often as possible to avoid the confinement. Despite two very attractive playrooms (which had no toys but very clever murals) the children were almost constantly our chore. Only one nurse was aboard to take care of them and she spoke very little English (in fact none of the crew did) and had no deck with children at all. Our two took an immediate dislike to her and Michele began having nightmares about having to go to the nurse. So, we had to discontinue sending her at all.

The cabin steward and stewardess, on the other hand, seemed genuinely fond of all of us and Curt seemed content with them. They of course had many duties and worked only until 10:00 p.m. Most generally we were able to get Curt down with a bottle--and to sleep--about meal time so they would listen in on him and send for us if needed.

The crossing was rather rough, particularly the first three or four days, and we saw no sun until we dropped anchor at Gibraltar. Heavy white ropes were strung at convenient intervals as hand holds while walking about. Several nights our furniture and empty luggage slid from one side of the cabin to the other and one morning my one bottle of I. W. Harper fell from its resting place and about 1/3 spilled out. The side to side rocking had a cradle effect on Curt and I think he's never slept so much. Dancing on the tiny floor was something of a job, but any mistakes could be blamed on the unsteady floor.

The people in cabin class were all very nice and showed no resentment to the children's noise or occasional crying. By the third or fourth day out we had a small set of acquaintances whom we really hated to see leave. Particularly we liked Peter and Bruna Recker. We hope to see more of them in Italy. Peter is of German descent, a professor of art, who appears to specialize in religious art for churches and restoration of murals. He had brought his wife Bruna, a most attractive and witty Italian girl, to the states for a three months commission and they had stayed 2 ½ years. Their interesting experiences in Arkansas and Milwaukee and their amusing recital of them won us over. Then there was Michael Wood--a young man traveling to forget a broken marriage--who seemed to be the leader in getting the group together. Sally Hallomena--fortyish and from Buck's County, Pennsylvania, was on her way to Bavaria to adopt some children. She, too, was a magnet for the gang. Then there was Adam, who was returning to his job in Naples with the National Catholic Welfare Society after a few weeks home. Michele called him Madam and was crazy about him. Frank was returning to Rome to continue his medical studies; Rose Bruno from Philadelphia who was touring Europe and planned to get a job and stay; and "grandpa" returning again to his home country near Bologna. There were many others--Italians, returning from their U.S. trips and Jewish people going to the Holy land.

On the day we anchored at Gibraltar, the sun shone its brightest and the sea was its bluest. There was no opportunity to go ashore for those not actually disembarking there, but this process took about three hours. During this time the boat peddlers, there must have been thirty, came alongside to peddle their wares. This they did by throwing long lines— or heavy cords--aboard. The buyers pulled their purchases up in baskets and sent their money down the same way. The

wares consisted of bright scarfs, bracelets, castanets and cognac--all very cheap in quality. The vendors themselves were very poor, some barefooted and probably they have no other source of income. A bracelet for Michele was our only souvenir purchase. The Reckers and Michael departed at Gibraltar and our group seemed not the same after we sailed.

Naples, unfortunately, did not put its best foot forward for us weatherwise. The cold drizzle dampened our desires to go ashore as we'd planned. We could have had a two or three hour tour including a trip to Pompeii, but could not help but believe that it would be better to return at a better season to "see Naples and Die," as the travel ads say, than to suffer the same fate from the thorough chilling we would have had, had we gone.

After sailing all night on a sea rougher than I expected the Mediterranean to be, we dropped anchor off Cannes on another beautifully sunny, but cold morning. The weather continued through the day and when the ship tied up at Genoa, we met a cold wind but clear and sunny atmosphere. With the help of a representative from Thomas Cook and Sons--the old man with white beard and mustache--we whizzed through customs in no time. We had arranged on board ship to have most of our baggage sent on to Bologna in bond, so there really wasn't much to open had they asked to--which they didn't. A representative of the Banca Nazionale e del Lavoro, with whom the school will be doing business, had a car (a small one as 75% or more are here) at our disposal with a driver. We were whisked to the Albergo Columbia Excelsior and up to our two rooms. After a very nice dinner in our room and a wonderful hot tub (our cabin had only a shower) we enjoyed our sleep on a steady bed once more.

After supposedly buying trains tickets from Genoa to Bologna, with a change of trains in Florence, we boarded same about 11:00 p.m. (a.m.?) and departed after a 45 minute delay. Fortunately, the train was not crowded and we had the compartment to ourselves. We went through dozens of tunnels and stopped at many little villages. For many miles we traveled with the sea on our right and the mountains on our left. The sun blinded us with its brilliance whenever we emerged from on the tunnels. We had sandwiches and orange drinks on the train rather than risk the diner, which seemed to be World War I vintage with a one-course menu. You guessed it, spaghetti! By this point I realized that my possession of lire was mightly low; to tip porters in Florence and Bologna and pay taxi fare to the hotel was going to take all my lire and remaining U.S. coins. I wasn't about to hand out \$5 bills! Too, we realized that the train connections in Florence were going to be very tight due to our delay in leaving Genoa. How we made ourselves understood we'll never know, but the conductor realized our predicament and hailed us a porter almost before the train stopped. For this service we gave up a package of cigarettes. We rushed around platforms and got on the very last car of the Bologna Rapido just seconds before it pulled out. I'll always wonder what the porter was able to do with the 7 U.S. dimes I handed him. When the conductor on the Rapido asked for our tickets I produced same, only to find that they were only good for the trip from Genoa to Florence! Fortunately, the dining car steward was equipped to change money. By the time this was done and our extra fare was paid I just had time to sit down and smoke a cigarette before we arrived in Bologna.

Our hotel reservations were, we knew, somewhat scrambled. We hadn't expected to have the children's room across the hall and down three doors though. We were able to convince the clerk

that this arrangement would not do and they convinced us there was nothing better that night--perhaps the next day. Finally, we took one large room (with an extra cot moved in) with hopes that next day, the adjoining room would be available to us. It was and although we had to use the bath down the hall, we've grown to rather like it.

The famous towers of Bologna--the one leaning precariously--are about a block from the hotel and visible from our hotel window. The streets are for the most part very narrow and merge with the sidewalks with no curbing of any sort. At some of the curves it's necessary to practically flatten oneself against the building should a streetcar want to pass simultaneously.

Although Via Rizzoli seems to be the main drag, every street, some hardly worthy of the name since they compare in size to our alleys--has its share of shops of every variety. We've been impressed with the children's ware shops, leather good stores (purses, wallets, belts and baggage), pastry shops and a great many stores which seem to sell nothing but yard goods--wool, silk and even felt in fantastically beautiful colors. The shops, the architecture and the products all seem to be either very old in style, or quite modern. In restaurants or stores or wherever you might have personal contact with Italian individuals, they seem most pleasant and nice; on the crowded streets they are very rude. The cars, motor bikes and bicycles move extremely fast, particularly the little Fiat station wagons. California drivers must have learned their art from the Bolognese!

Most of our meals that we eat out, we take at Jagus Ristorante, a roticerie. It's about two blocks from the Hotel San Donato where we are staying and has very good food at reasonable prices. The menu, which is not printed, consists of roast meats (beef, pork and veal), chicken, shrimp and delicious small steaks. Potatoes, mashed or french fried, and spinach seem to be their only vegetables at this season. Naturally they have all the Italian past dishes and minestrone. Particularly we like think tortellini--which is little squares of macaroni pinched around a little seasoned ground meat. The pasta dishes in Italy--spaghetti, macaroni, lasagna, tortellini or taliatelli--are really only a course to be eaten before the meat course. This doesn't mean they are just a small serving, however, for they are as big as the servings we make a meal on back home. We usually let the pasta dish be the meal, or skip it and get right to the meat course. Deserts here are quite different from our cakes and pie, but they are all **very** good. The one that really tastes like "home cooking" is Creme di Caramel a custard cup with browned sugar syrup. I naturally miss good old American coffee. Their regular coffee is strong as it can be and served in tiny cups which hold about two regular swallows. I'm beginning to like their cappuccino, which is ½ strong coffee, and ½ hot milk whipped to a froth. It's really more like hot chocolate, though.

Since our arrival in Bologna preceded that of Dr. and Mrs. Haines and Phoebe Everett, and since our school offices were in the process of renovation, there was little for John Loftus (Professor of Economics) and I to do but look for suitable living quarters for our families. We turned to Georgio Polla, regional director of USIS for assistance, since he had been looking into the situation for us for some time. He was wonderful. Altogether he spent at least three full working days taking us around with a local agent to show us what he had available--which really wasn't too much. The two most interesting things we saw were from private trips. We found that the word "villa" has quite a different meaning than we thought. It seems to cover anything at all, and

might have as many as 5 or more apartments--not efficiency type either. The apartments we've seen are all very large in comparison to our standards. New ones though are quite ill-equipped in comparison. The renter provides for himself a kitchen stove, any kitchen cabinets, work counters, tables, etc., refrigerator, all light fixtures, mirror for the bathroom, towel racks, toilet paper holder, etc. Most floors are marble or terrazzo (marble chips in concrete) and bathrooms are of course all tiled, quite modern in appearance, and invariably equipped with a bidet. No showers are installed with the tubs, rather, there is a hand apparatus with flexible tubing and shower head which we find very convenient.

Not through the agent, or Polla did we find our apartment, however, Hans Schoenberg, one of our American students was searching on his own initiative (through other agents) for an apartment for he and his wife Rinata (our bi-lingual secretary) and their 4 year old Michael. In one apartment house that he saw there were some others larger than the apartment they liked and wanted. We saw them at his suggestion and liked one very much and decided to take it. He has been wonderful to us. While going to arrange for installation of gas, electricity and water for his apartment--an unbelievable maze of bureaucratic red tape--he arranged for ours at the same time. Our move, however, will be delayed because of customs. Our furniture shipment was held up in Genoa because we did not have addresses in Bologna at the time of its arrival. We had hoped it would be in the weekend, but it wasn't.

One week later--February 20, 1955

Our furniture arrived last Monday morning at our apartment. We knew we had brought a skeleton amount--enough to get by with until we had a chance to shop properly for additional furniture--but it looks like so little in the large apartment. Putting it another way, we didn't realize how large the apartment was until we got our little bit of furniture in it. There's considerably more floor space than in our house in Adelphi. However, we are very happy with our living room with the three African camp chairs, the lounge and side table combination which I made and our red rug as well as our two modern lamps.

We're on the "Prima Piano" which means literally first floor. Actually we climb one flight of stairs to get to our floor, and there are apartments below us completely above ground. The entrance to the building is at the side, about 1/2 way back rather than on the front. It has a very modern appearance, with an open stairway (with metal handrail) leading up. One wall (the stair wall side) is painted mauve and has a carving in stone on it which is very modern. The door to our apartment enters on to an "ingresso" or entry hall. No Italian would be caught dead without one. They most generally are not small either--ours is about 13 x 16. Two of our five closets (something almost unheard of in Italian villas or apartments) open off the ingresso, so we can hang our coat in one when you come to call. Three more doors from the ingresso lead to (straight ahead from the entrance door) the living room and dining room; to the left to the kitchen, maids room and maid's bath; and to the right--two bedrooms and bath. The doors to the bedrooms and the living room are of frosted glass and the latter has glass panels on either side and above the door. The ceilings are all quite high--10 ft at least.

The living room is about 14 x 17' and opens by a squared arch about 9' wide into the dining room

which is about 15' square. The windows are all French door type and run from the floor to within about 1' from the ceiling. The one in the living room is approximately 8' wide and opens onto a balcony which extends across about ½ the front of the building, but is only about 4' wide (by 26' long). One bedroom's window opens on this balcony too. The two windows in the dining room are 4' wide and have balconies hardly large enough for 2 people to stand on. A hallway from the dining room runs back to the kitchen wing, maid's room and bath. The kitchen is about 13' square, light and airy. It's contents on our arrival were a sink and a hood outlet under which to put the stove. The maid's bath, next to the kitchen, really has no tub, just a lavatory, stool and bidet. Directly across the hall is another of the closets. The "Maid's room" is large (11 x 16) and also contains a closet. Since our maid prefer's not to live in, we shall probably use it as a study, guest room or what have you--when we get furniture to fill it.

The double door on the right at the ingresso (double door, glass panels) enters onto a hall which leads to the two main bedrooms and bath. The bedrooms are both on the front of the building and the first is about 14 x 16. The second bedroom is 16 x 22 with a partial separation--for a dressing room section I guess about 5 x 10. The bath at the end of the hall has black tiled floor and blue tiled walls and tub incasement.

We have central heating--under the marble floors (tan in the living room, dining room, ingresso and bedroom hall, grey in the bedrooms) which has been working rather erratically--almost too warm some days--quite cool others. We unfortunately have no control over this. We do though over our hot water, the tank for which is in the bathroom. The closets come equipped with nothing. We moved in on Tuesday and are still waiting for a carpenter to put up rods for our clothes. At present, things are hanging on doors and draped over everything available. Until we find light fixtures, we have bare bulbs hanging from the loose wires. Our street is a brand new one--not even paved yet, so our weather has naturally been its wettest best! It seems to me we've gone through most of this before! But so far we love it. This spring and summer we should enjoy the roof a great deal. It's completely flat, should be a wonderful place for the children to play, has a nice view of the nearby hills and should have a good breeze. Oh, yes, we have a large storage space allotted to us in the cantina (basement) too. The rental--without utilities of course which may be quite high until we learn to turn out lights, etc.) runs to \$56.00 per month.

Our address is Via Paginino Bonafede, 13, Bologna. Some day I hope to look up the history of the name. From the two towers, which is the center of the city, we travel about 20 minutes by train out Strada Maggiore which becomes Via Mazzini to the edge of the city. Our street is about a block from the end of the line. This is the route to Forli and then the Adriatic seacoast. The trams are old and narrow and the fare is 20 lire (a little over 3 cents). When we go in to town in the morning before 8:30, we are given a round trip ticket for the same amount. The gimmick though is to get on a streetcar to return at the rush hours. Such crowding and pushing I've never seen. Until we get a car, I think I shall forgo lunch at home (we are following local custom and taking time for lunch from 12:30 to 3:00) in order to save my sanity.

By Beth Hugo

January 27, 1955

Dear Mom and Auntie Ada,

I don't know how intelligent this letter will be, my head is whirling with all the new and strange things, but here goes!

We arrived in Genoa as scheduled and were met by a Dock man and an Italian representative of the Bank Tom visited in New York. They whizzed us through customs without a bag being opened, altho they eyed the sewing machine case suspiciously. The Bank sent us to the hotel in their care and we women (Mrs. Loftus) received flowers from them in our rooms. We had a delicious meal in our room. Michele particularly enjoyed the soup which had little ravioli in it. She is doing amazingly well on the new food. At first she ate nothing, but guess she got starved and is now eating more than ever before. So the experience has been good for her in this respect.

Genoa was beautiful, palm trees, very green grass and flowers growing in little plots around the monuments. We left the next day so didn't see much of the city, of course.

We took a noon train which was late leaving and arrived in Florence with seconds to spare to catch our connection to Bologna. The trip to Florence was long and tiring, but we caught a Rapido to Bologna and made that in an hour.

Our arrival in Bologna at 7:00 p.m. was not as convenient as that in Genoa, but we did very well on our own (the people are very helpful and understanding past believing.) At the hotel we found our two rooms were separated by the length of the hall, but they found us a room, in which we all slept the first night, adjoining a room to be vacated the next day, so we are all settled. The rooms are all large, clean and warm.

We plunged into the Italian we knew immediately. The maids speak no English (and admit it, which is refreshing). You should have seen me conversing? With the maid the first night for Curtis' milk to be boiled, the plate to be filled with hot water, etc. Since that experience I'm not worried about getting along in Italian.

Michele and Peter Loftus who is 6 are having a fine time together playing cowboys and Indians, drawing and building with the blocks. Curt has been having fun too in a much simpler way like sticking his finger in the electrical outlets and climbing up and down stairs among other things.

February 6,

I wrote the above by hand some ages ago it seems to me. I wanted a copy of everything I wrote and so I waited around until they got the office things so I could get carbon paper. Until we got the maid the other day I didn't have time to go shopping for it. Sorry to be so late in getting new to you.

We found a very nice apartment in a new building in the suburbs--three large bedrooms, a bath and an extra room with a toilet and basin with it which would be the maids if she lived in. The maid we found doesn't want to live in so we have an extra bedroom. The living room is very large with a connecting dining area, L shaped, a small balcony the children can play on, and an entrance hall. The children can also play on the flat roof where we will hang our clothes. We hope to get in this week end.

Rosa, our maid, seems very nice. She must be in her fifties, has grandchildren and lives fairly close she says to us. Best of all Michele has taken to her very well. She has been coming in from noon until 8:00 here in the hotel. For twenty-seven dollars a month and two meals she will do everything which includes cleaning up after dinner and staying late if we have company or go out.

Getting and moving in an apartment in Bologna is quite an experience. One must supply ones own light fixtures and in the closets (we are privileged to have 5!) Have to put in bars and shelves. First we must get a residence permit; must buy three papers or forms, involving three visits, in order to get the gas meter installed. Similar procedures have to be gone through for water, electricity and telephone installations. Fortunately, Hans Schoenberg, whose family is to live in the same building has done most of the leg work, since Tom has been tied up at the office and me with the children. We are very happy to have the Schoenbergs near us, since Mike is only a few months older than Michele and have great times playing.

The shops here have truly gorgeous things, The children's clothes are out of this world. We hope to bring some back. We were able to buy some little knee length wool and nylon stockings for Curt which are darling. About the only scarcities we have found are the nice soaps and detergents, although we can get Johnson's baby soap very reasonably. We have been able to buy Clapp's canned baby food which is only a little more expensive than at home. Peanut butter is expensive and so are the breakfast foods like Sugar Pops and Corn Flakes. Peanut butter we can make when we get in the apartment with the blender and feel the cereals are a necessary expense. Michele has enjoyed the oatmeal I make in the kitchen in the hotel. This we can buy here, although more expensive. The baby's cereal here must be cooked, but the maid has been doing this (the hotel maid). Of course, when we get our supplies we sent over we'll have enough to last for at least a month.

For our gift box please send a couple of bottles of Benadryl, Pres. No. 18865, 2 boxes of baby aspirin, Bactine, bottle of Elixir of Turpin Hydrate with Codeine, Desitin, coffee--as much as is allowed per the leaflet you have--Cheerios for a treat, that Rinso Blue and that LaFrance Nylon brightener. I haven't any idea how much of this can go in the first month so send us the medicine and what space is left over stick in the rest.

We have seen the sun two days since we have been here. It is a rarity in the winter, we understand. But on the day the sun shone it was warm and lovely. We have had no cold weather. Everywhere in the main part of Bologna it looks like about the eleventh century. The streets are narrow and if I could draw or paint what a field day I would have. Our hotel is close to the leaning towers and have a beautiful view of them through our window. The city has a military history and looks quite austere as a result.

Our allowance money may take sometime to come through so I would like you to transfer \$500 for our savings account and deposit it in the checking account so we may draw from it. This will necessitate going to the two banks so hope you don't have to run your legs off. All this seems a lot of trouble to put you to and believe me we more than appreciate it.

Thanks again, Auntie Ada, for the iron. I didn't get a chance to thank you for it properly. I can't wait to use it.

Please give our greetings to everyone. Has Mrs. Connor had her baby yet, I hope! What was it? I haven't thanked the neighbors for their farewell party, but hope to soon. Pass this letter on to whomever is interested.

Much love,