

Florida Coconuts Move to Italy

Part II, Arranging the Adventure

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After swooping through Northern Italy on a whirlwind sight-seeing trip during the second week in August 2002, my wife <http://mariahurt.com> and I decided we wanted to move there “someday”. We just could not resist the Italians' zest for life, willingness to engage life with gusto, gracious and hospitable manner, architecture, land-and-cityscapes, music, and of course the food and wine.



Maria and Bob Hurt



Ponte Vecchio in Florence, Italy

While in Firenze (Florence) during FerroAgosto (15th of August, when everyone is on holiday), staying in a charming side-street hotel, we started our groundwork for the move. We began inquiring about rentals and learned a small apartment could be had in the area for about €600 (Euros) per month. We decided the rent was affordable and that perhaps I would write while there to earn a “living”.

We returned home to Clearwater, Florida, and busied ourselves catching up on our affairs that had been untended for over a month, and enjoying the sugar sand beaches on the Gulf of Mexico. Then, in mid-summer 2003 we began making formal plans for the move. We agreed to depart for Italy in the summer of 2005, two years hence. That would give us plenty of time to arrange accommodations, prepare the auto, learn basic Italian, and get our finances in order.

Change in Plans

As fate would have it, a turn of events stimulated a major change in our plan. Instead of waiting two years before traveling to *live* in Italy, Maria and I decided to go at the end of December 2003.

How did we come to accelerate our departure plans?

To begin with, it always feels good to start life in a new country on the first day of a year. Maybe it is a little easier to recall when recounting the tale years later. But that is not the real reason.

We knew nothing about where to live on our barely existent budget, so we asked for advice from several people. Then we started acquiring Italian MP3 songs to put us in the mood, and watching reruns of Molto Mario on Food TV. Not being able to restrain



The Author on Clearwater Beach

ourselves, we told everyone around us we were going to live in Italy. Then, Maria stumbled upon a small notice in our retirement community (of 5000 dwellings in Clearwater, FL) newspaper that offered Italian language lessons for \$10 each. We jumped at it.

Vindice Vanzo



Vindice Vanzo

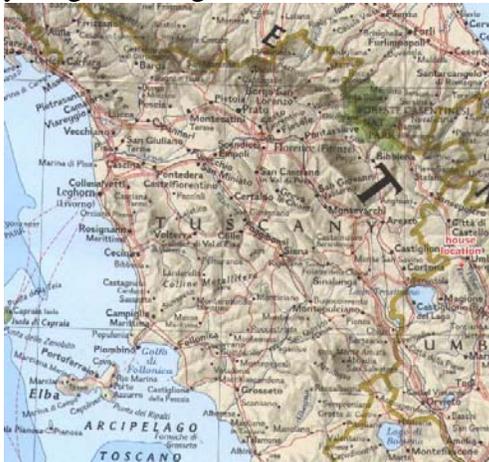
The instructor, Vindice Vanzo (for whom I just made a little web site at <http://vindice.com>, and whose name means “The Vindicator”) was ebulliently friendly, and delighted to have us join his class of one man and 7 women. I quickly began to realize why Vindice wanted to teach the classes - it gave him a reason to harangue all those women, lovingly of course.

After the first class, I invited Vindice to dinner. We talked, played Verdi's *Va Pensiero* from *Nabucco* and arias from Puccini's *La Boheme* and Verdi's *La Traviata*, ate what I considered to be good Italian food, and drank from the huge jug of Italian Rose' Vindi had brought. Finally, Maria told him we were going to move to Italy but had no place to stay yet.

Vindi's eyes brightened with sudden cognition. He put his hand on Maria's arm, looked her and me in the face with a big grin, and explained that a woman in Montevarchi had asked him twice to marry her. He then asked us, "Why don't we go together? I will marry Lucia, and you can live with us in her "palazzo".

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We had not expected that at all, perhaps because we were unfamiliar with Vindi's nature. Vindice Vanzo is 78 years old, and Lucia is 5 years his junior. Vindi lives alone in a condominium in our community of 5000 dwellings for retirees. Lucia lives in a sizeable villa on the outskirts of Montevarchi, a town about 30 miles south of Florence on the Arno River, right on the eastern edge of the Chianti Wine grape-growing region (just above the N in TUSCANY in the map of central Italy).. Her youngest daughter lives with her



Map of Central Italy

and attends university. Other children and grandchildren live on adjoining plots of land.

We marveled that Vindi would invite us so spontaneously on such an adventure. I suggested he call Lucia and find out whether the arrangement were acceptable to her.

A couple of days later, he made the call. Lucia, who speaks no English, was overjoyed and immediately agreed. Shortly afterward she faxed us an invitation to come and live with her for 3 years. Maria and I pondered whether her effusive willingness to have us move in with her might be on account of our being the influence

that finally triggered Vindi into getting off the fence. I now believe she genuinely sees the merit of our being there with her.

Immediately, Maria started calling the airlines to make arrangements for travel to Italy. Delta gladly credited her \$400 for an unused travel voucher; Maria booked the flight for the last day in December, and also bought the same ticket for Vindi. We were all set. The roundtrip tickets were \$262 each. We won't be on the return leg.

Vindi, an ex-naval officer, ex-IBMer, ex-insurance agent, and now an author of an engaging autobiography, has been married three times. His first marriage was to a wealthy American woman who is fluent in Italian. He credits his mother's harping, hateful attitude as the reason for his divorce. He was married twice more to women in or near our community, but divorced them because he enjoys his solitude.

I did not know it at the time he invited us to go on the trip with him, but Lucia is one of six women Vindi selected from respondents to an ad he placed in an Italian newspaper six or eight years ago. Vindi says she is the best qualified to be his wife. He has visited her home only on two or three occasions. It was not passion, but some sense of loneliness that was pushing him to marriage with Lucia.

**Lucia is one
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Nevertheless, Vindi began laying plans with her. At first he intended to ship his car to Italy and we would all use it as transportation, particularly because he does not drive at night. That meant we would sell our car.

Then he and Lucia decided that, they would marry in Italy, and then, so as not to waste his return flight, he and she would return to America at the end of January and get married here too. That would give her permanent resident status, should she choose to live here, for Vindi is a naturalized American citizen. We now have to ship our own car.

I wondered how Vindi's hastily arranged marriage to Lucia could be such a certainty. He loves teasing and taunting the women in our Italian class, and they seem to love it too. And, he has very friendly, almost romantic, relationships with his ex-wives.



Farmland Near Montevarchi

Vindi's first ex-wife is still his true love, albeit unavailable because of caring for a husband who has Alzheimer's disease. I am certain, from the hints in Vindi's comments, that she wants him to stay nearby, and that she loves him deeply. She had never wanted

the divorce. I suspected that she was pressuring Vindi not to go to Italy to get married. A trip, okay. A marriage, not okay.

Vindice Begins to Back Out

As time went by, it seemed less likely that Vindi would make the trip. There are several reasons for this.

Shortly after we made the plans to travel together, Vindi announced that he would not leave until he had heard back from his publisher about his autobiography. He had sent the manuscript months earlier, and had received no response. As though by divine intervention, the response appeared within a few days. It would cost him \$26,000. He showed me the contract they wanted him to sign, and I told him that service was for egotists without talent, and that his book was more deserving of the attention of a real editor of a real publishing company that pays, not bilks, its authors. He relented to my suggestion, and agreed to proceed with our plans.

Prior to making flight arrangements Maria had asked Vindi whether he had any physical conditions that would prevent travel. Vindi revealed that he has an aortic aneurism, a bulge that is 4.9 centimeters long, just a millimeter short of the length that will necessitate an operation. He said he had known about it for several months, but that it does not bother him, and it would not affect his making the trip.

Then, two weeks ago, Vindi announced that his voice was getting hoarse, and that he was worried he might be getting throat cancer. He does not smoke. It does not seem too likely that he has cancer. He has not been to the doctor for a diagnosis yet.

And yesterday Vindi explained that he had just seen Dan Rather on television talking about how it is unsafe to travel on an airplane with such a aortic condition as he has because the reduced cabin pressure might stimulate a rupture of the aorta, and that could mean certain death. So, until after an operation, the trip was off. Vindi was not willing to risk a ruptured aorta in order to Marry Lucia.

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Vindi called Lucia and talked with her about it, telling her it would not be safe to fly to Italy and marry her. She agreed. He told her that we were concerned about coming to live with her because Vindi would not be there to translate for us, and we might make her feel uncomfortable under the circumstances of a marital disappointment. She reassured him that her home was open to us as originally planned, and that she really looked forward to our coming. The trip was off for Vindi and on for us.

Serendipity and an Uncertain Future

So, for the moment, serendipity, and maybe a little divine providence, is on our side. It seems that once we set our plans, an unseen hand guides our steps, leading us to some unknown destiny of adventure in a foreign land, under the affectionate protection of a far away benefactor. Maria, who is fluent in Spanish, will help with housekeeping and child care. I might be able to help Lucia in her real estate or antique brokering business,

produce a web site for her, or tutor her grandchildren in English. If she does decide to visit Vindi in America, then we can care for her home while she is gone. Vindi says he will be glad to give her his roundtrip ticket refund to pay part of the cost for her ticket. And, he is sure to get the refund because of his medical condition.

Montevarchi is only a €33 train ride from Rome. Maria expressed to me last night that



St. Peter's Cathedral, Vatican City, Rome

since Vindi would not be accompanying us to Rome, we might be able to stay over a day or two after arriving on the plane, look around a bit, and *then* take the train to Montevarchi. Maria desperately wants to see the St. Peter's Cathedral. I could find no fault with that idea other than the cost of staying overnight in the huge and hugely expensive "Eternal City."

Then I remembered that last year we had contacted several people in Rome with the suggestion that they exchange homes with us. I asked Maria to send them email and ask if they could put us up for the first and second days of January.

We were originally able to locate people who might be interested in such an accommodation because we had joined Homelink (<http://homelink.org>) three years ago. We had already exchanged our condo with a family in Plymouth England in the summer of 2001, and with a family in Paris France in the summer of 2002. Those

exchanges had included full use of house and car, and they had not only worked out perfectly, but they had saved us a fortune in lodging and transportation. They respected our home and car just as we respected theirs, and when we returned, our possessions were all still there and unbroken, and our car had no new dents in it. Some people have been exchanging homes for as many as 20 years through Homelink. It is a magnificent idea.

We have not heard back from any of the people in Rome yet. Admittedly the first two days of the new year are not likely to be ideal times for Romans to host guests, but it is worth a try. The worst that can happen is that they will say no. At best, Maria and I will get to enjoy the empty streets of Rome on 1 January 2004, then be off to see Lucia.

Lucia speaks no English, and we are unable to communicate little more than the most basic body needs in Italian. Our meeting is sure to be interesting.

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About the Author:

Bob Hurt is an entrepreneur, raconteur, writer, and philosopher. He lives with his lovely wife Maria in (at the time of this writing) Clearwater Florida. You can write to him through <http://bobhurt.com>.