

# La Voce della Dante

Published by the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington (DAS)

<http://das.danteseattle.org>

December 2009

## December English Meeting— Christmas Celebration

Wednesday, December 9th, 2009

Headquarters House, 2336 15th Avenue S, Seattle

No pre-Dante pasta meal, Christmas party only, 6:30 pm

**B**uon Natale! Please join us at Headquarters House for the annual Dante Alighieri Society celebration of Christmas. Instead of our usual meeting-and-presentation format, we are having a purely social evening.

Each member is requested to bring either an antipasti plate or Christmas cookies or dessert. Of course, everyone always loves homemade items, and we have a decided preference for Italian flavors and recipes. Also, please remember to bring whatever you would like to drink, and to share.



If you have a CD of Italian Christmas songs, that would also be welcome.

Another aspect of our Christmas party that we'd like to share, is to invite members we haven't seen in a while to join us again. Think about it...who haven't you seen lately? Please give them a call and encourage them to come. Family and friends are always welcome, too.

Ci vediamo!

## Upcoming Events

Sat, Dec 5th,  
Festa di Natale  
per i Bambini,  
2:00-5:30 pm

Set-up: noon -  
2:00 pm

Headquarters  
House

Pre-registration required

Wed, Dec 9th: English Meeting  
6:30 pm

Annual Christmas Party

Mon, Dec 14th: Board Meeting,  
7:00-8:30 pm,

Faerland Terrace, Seattle

**Please Note:** There will be no  
Italian meeting in December.



*Happy Holidays!  
Buone Feste!*

## Festa Columns, Chairs, and Table for Sale

**A**s many of you know we have a set of six columns and associated framing that was previously used in the Festa Italiana booth. We also have two of the chairs pictured and the table. These items have not been used in a few years and the storage costs for them is pretty high so the board has decided that we will attempt to sell them or dispose of them in another way. If you have an interest in the columns, please contact Frank or Norizan Paterra at 425-576-9257.



Festa Columns, Chairs & Table

## DAS Board Meeting

There will be no Board meeting for December. The next Board meeting will be in the new year, date to be announced later, from 7:00-8:30 pm in the Community Room at Faerland Terrace, 1421 Minor Avenue on Capitol Hill. You are welcome to attend this meeting.

### \* DAS Star List \*

While we appreciate those who support our Society through membership dues & volunteering, stars are awarded to those making extra cash contributions which allows us to provide services without having to raise membership dues. Grazie Mille for supporting the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington.

#### Bronzo up to \$25

- \* Borriello, Rosa
- \* Cottrell, Jane & David
- \* Crawford, Dick & Barbara
- \* Forte, Giselda
- \* Gillett, Debra
- \* Hollingshead, Norm
- \* Huggins, Veronica
- \* James, Mike
- \* Mazzola, Arthur
- \* Munizza, Joseph
- \* Shiroyama, Sylvia

#### Argento \$26 to \$50

- \* Canorro, Anthony & Cathy
- \* Cooney, Eileen
- \* Huntermark family
- \* Kleinman, Goldy
- \* La Fornara Family
- \* Schroeter, Richard and Carol
- \* Tobe, Robert & Maddalena
- \* Veigel, Allan and Laura

#### Oro \$51- \$100

- \* Mulally, Catherine
- \* Palermo, Donna Maria
- \* Van Tilborgh, Peter

#### Platino—over \$100

- \* Harmon, Gini

## From the President's Desk

Seattle is chilly as we move into winter, but it's not chilly at the Headquarter's House for our Dante meetings. The warmth I feel is the friendship and camaraderie of our members and guests as we share a great meal or the fun of our program. And the warmth is increasing! Our attendance at the English and Italian programs are both up over the first part of the year and it's great to see. We have had a number of visitors at the last couple of meetings and I want to thank everyone as they reach out to bring in new friends for all of us to meet and get to know. Thank you!

We had a great English program in November when Magnus Feil of the Industrial Design division of the Art school of the UW gave us a very complete and fascinating history of Italian design and its impact on the rest of the world. What a great program! Many thanks to Nancy McDonald for arranging a series of programs that continues to impress.

We did not have an Italian program in November; Thanksgiving with friends and family took precedence. In December we have Festa di Natale per i Bambini and our annual Christmas party so Nancy gets a break but I can't wait to enjoy next year's programs with all of you.

I hope that you were able to attend some screenings of the Seattle Italian Film Festival; all reports are that it was a great program. I'm looking forward to another one next year.

Enjoy your holiday season with friends and family.

*Frank Paterra*

## Magnus Feil on The History of Italian Design

Dante members were treated to an outstanding overview of Italian design at the November 11th meeting, presented by Magnus Feil, assistant professor of industrial design at the University of Washington.

Magnus studied both design and architecture while growing up in Germany, and was fortunate to have additional stimulus and guidance from his parents, both of whom were designers.

Using visuals of famous designs such as Olivetti, Ferrari, and the iconic Bialette Moka Express, Magnus led us through the history of Italian design and designers, and the periods in which they flourished. It was a fascinating look at the country and culture which has long been considered the world leader in all spheres of design.



# Café Amore - Public Opera

Sunday, December 6th, 6 pm - 8 pm

Reservations Required

**P**ublic Opera (Barbara Smith Jones, Gino Ljucchetti, Misha Myznikov, and Victoria Chaussee) will be performing at Café Amore in downtown Seattle on Sunday, December 6th from 6 pm to 8 pm. Come and enjoy celebrated Café Amore's great fare, an extensive wine list with opera soaring for your soul.

Space is limited with reservations a must. Call 206-770-0606 for reservations and ask for the "opera room." Café Amore is located at 2301 5th Avenue, Seattle.

Check the Public Opera website (<http://www.operanightsingers.com>) for updates and a new Seattle Classical Events calendar.

# Michelangelo: The Artist and the Aristocrat

Presented by William E. Wallace

Friday, January 15th, 7:00 pm

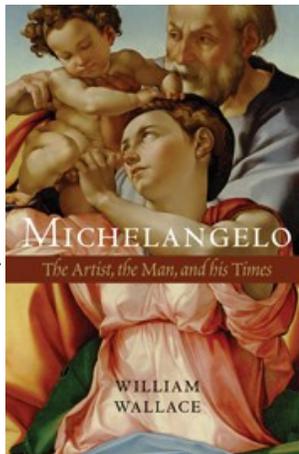
Seattle Art Museum (Downtown) Plestcheeff Auditorium

**W**illiam E. Wallace, an internationally recognized expert on Michelangelo, speaks about the challenges and excitement of writing a modern biography of the famous Renaissance artist. Wallace offers a substantially new view of the artist, who was not only a great sculptor, painter, architect, and poet but also an aristocrat who believed in the ancient and noble origins of his family. A book signing follows the lecture.

Wallace, the Barbara Bryant Distinguished Professor of Art History at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, was one of a select group of scholars, curators, and conservators invited to confer with the Vatican about the restoration of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel (1990). He is the author of more than 80 articles and essays, including two short works of fiction on Renaissance art, and the author and editor of five different books on Michelangelo, including his biography of the artist, "Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and his Times", which was published by Cambridge University this fall.

Tickets:

Non-member \$8.00, seniors and students \$6.00, SAM members \$4.00



# Inclement Weather Procedure

**A**s the seasons change, we are approaching a time when the weather can turn quickly. If schools, community centers, and businesses are closing early or remain closed, we will postpone any scheduled meeting for Headquarters House. We will do our best to have a message on the DAS reservation line, 206-320-9159, to let you know if our meeting needs to be canceled. If the weather is treacherous in your area, PLEASE DO NOT attempt to travel to Headquarters House, we want everyone to be safe.



# Perugia Scholarship

**E**very year, SPSCA offers up to four one-month language scholarships to study at the University for Foreigners in the heart of medieval Perugia. Apply by December 31st by writing to Scholarship Director P a t t y M a t h i e u ; [pamkdw@msn.com](mailto:pamkdw@msn.com).

It's a grand experience with students from around the world. Don't miss your chance! The Umbra Institute also offers scholarships to Perugia - up to \$8000 - for university-level courses as well as language study. Application deadline for the fall semester 2010 is next June 15th.

For further information check the SPSCA website:

<http://www.seattle-perugia.org/>



## Language Program News by Giuseppe Tassone Italian Language Program - Director

The following is the schedule for the Language Program:

### Course Schedule 2009 – 2010:

Fall Quarter 2009:

October 1 - December 10

Winter Quarter 2010:

January 7 - March 16

Pre-registration deadline: December 8

Spring Quarter 2010:

March 30 - June 3

Pre-registration deadline: March 11

**Location:** Seattle University Campus

**Class fee:** \$130 per quarter unless otherwise indicated

The Dante Alighieri - Italian Language Program is a non-profit self-sustaining program operating exclusively with the income from the tuition. Thank you students for your support.

### Writings by Peter Hasson

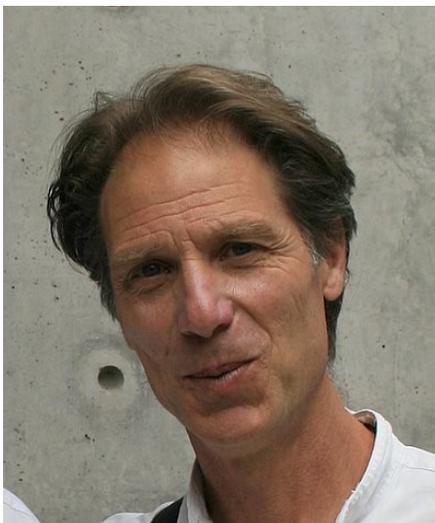
In this issue of La Voce, you will find a story by one of the Language Program students, Peter Hasson. "Laughing with Agnes" is about his mother-in-law, Agnes. More of his works will be in future issues of La Voce. Below is a little something about Peter who so graciously submitted his articles in both Italian and English. . . enjoy.

#### Peter Hasson

Nato a San Francisco nel 1947, è cresciuto a Seattle e ha vissuto tra Kitsap County, Washington e l'Italia per gli ultimi quindici anni. Della sua arte Peter dice <<La creatività è il mio modo di vivere. Adoro dipingere, scrivere, fotografare, cantare e scrivere canzoni. Un modo divertente per me per imparare l'italiano è quello di cantare canzoni italiane e di scrivere sulle mie esperienze di vita in lingua italiana.>>

#### Peter Hasson

Born in San Francisco in 1947, he grew up in Seattle and has lived in Kitsap County, Washington and Italy for the last fifteen years. Peter says of his art <<Creativity is my way of living. I love painting, writing, photographing, singing and writing songs. A fun way for me to improve Italian is to sing Italian songs and write about my experiences of life in the Italian language.>>



## Membership Renewal

Membership renewal is due January 1, 2010. It's time to renew your membership if you joined before September 2009.

Membership is \$30 for an individual or \$40 for a family.

Fill out the membership form on the last page of La Voce and send your renewal in today.



## Delivering La Voce to Members



Just a reminder La Voce will not be sent to the membership via an email attachment. For many emails, the file size is too large. Instead, an email will be sent to members that includes a link to the current issue of La Voce on the DAS website. Just click on the link and you will have La Voce to read for your pleasure.

Adobe Reader is necessary to be able to view La Voce. You can download this program from the DAS website.

And be sure your email box isn't full.

You can buy your Dante gear at:  
<http://www.cafepress.com/dantewashington>



## La Voce Needs You!

**T**ell a story, write an article, share your Italian heritage; send via email (as a Word document) to lthdesign@comcast.net. You can also mail it via regular mail to Linda Heimbigner, 4355 Little Falls Drive, Cumming, GA 30041, USA. Keep things coming!

Thanks to everyone who is helping.

Article submission deadline:

<u>ISSUE DATE</u>	<u>SUBMISSION DEADLINE</u>
January 2010	December 14
February 2010	January 18

### Dante on the Internet!

Check our website. It has links to our recent newsletters (including this one) as well as information on speakers and other matters of interest.

Our web address is:

<http://das.danteseattle.org/>

**Note the website address has changed!**

## Pre-Dante Pasta

**J**oin us for the pre-Dante Pasta dinner preceding the English language programs. **To attend the dinner, reservations are required. The only way to make these reservations is by calling the activity line at (206) 320-9159 by 5 pm on the Monday before the meeting.**

*Please remember to bring your homemade Italian desserts to finish off this great meal.*

This is a communally prepared meal – the preparations start at 5:30 and the meal is served at 6:30. People who come early help with set up and cooking, those who come late help with the clean up.

Pasta dinner cost is \$8 per person, \$15 per couple, if reservations are received on the Activity Line by 5pm on Monday before the meeting. Late reservations and walk-ins are charged \$10 per person and subject to availability. We meet at Headquarters House, 2336 15th Avenue, Seattle, WA. DAS will not be providing wine for the pre-Dante pasta dinners so bring your own wine to enjoy and share with others.



### Dante Alighieri Society of Washington

*"Società per la diffusione della lingua e della cultura italiana nel mondo"*

Mailing address:

PMB #1244  
1122 East Pike Street  
Seattle, WA 98122  
(206) 320-9159

The Dante Alighieri Society of Washington is a nonprofit corporation organized to promote Italian language and culture within the state of Washington. Membership is open to anyone interested in the goals and ideals of our society regardless of ethnic origin. *La Voce della Dante* is published eight times a year by the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington. All rights reserved.

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# The Theft of Santa Lucia: Who Knew?

by Chickie Farella, Performance Artist, Women's Spirituality  
Godthemother.com

*Where have I been living? Under a rock? Did I fall asleep at the wheel?!*

The first time I kissed her eyeballs I was four years old, kicking and screaming as my zia dragged me and my crossed eyes up onto her float on the South side of Chicago during one of her festas. I'd wrap my arms around my zia's neck, squealing "I don't want to kiss the balls!"

"Oh it'll only take a second! They won't hurt you!!!"

I was born visually challenged with conditions of amblyopia, strabismus, and congenital cataracts in both eyes. Cut to the chase, I am legally blind in one eye and have multiple issues in my *good eye*.

I started with visual therapy and corrective surgery at the age of four. There was a never ending battle between my mother and I throughout grammar school as she forced me to wear a patch on my *good eye* in order to strengthen my bad eye, while following doctors orders of course. The problem was, that *no one* understood that I could not function because I was unable to SEE the blackboard, nor could I write. Add the slings and arrows from my peers calling me the *one eyed chicken*, or *Captain Cook*, (remember him?) which created nauseous quivers at the eight a.m. daily mass before school.

At the age of 15, my *good eye* became near sighted. Bring on the spectacles! At 26 vanity set in and so did contacts. Hitting the mid forty mark, my close vision in my good eye began to deteriorate, so I researched and wrote letters to a myriad of ophthalmologists begging for the latest *Laser craze!* Yep, this one eyed *chickalina* could not adjust to bifocals, walked into walls, tripped on my own feet, and missed stairs. So, now I desired to eliminate all my contacts, far glasses, and downsize to a pair of readers. Every doctor dissed me, until I found a kind doctor who agreed to *laser* me. Though I signed my life away, it was total bliss for four years! Clear as a bell! Since then, I've lost much vision, had a vitrectomy, (sorta like a vacuum cleaner that sucks out floaters), a retina detachment, blossoming cataracts that allow me to see six moons at night, and have become a very limited driver. Now, when I need it the most, no doctor will dare to step up to the plate!

*Ok, so there's my sad story.*

As a multimedia artist in the realm of Women Spirituality studies, I have spent 17 years excavating the evidence of the Divine Feminine we have not been allowed to know. The work process not only involves book lists, but going to one's indigenous roots; in my case Sicily.



Though I've visited my family a couple times and experienced the privilege of the *joyous connection* with my Sicilian cugini, it wasn't until August of 2000, a new "joyous privilege" emerged through study tour of the island. There, I traipsed through all of the museums, archaeological digs, caves, above and below the earth, Black Madonna sanctuaries, and trekked all over Mt. Etna, surrounded by some of the most brilliant women scholars in various disciplines, led by Dr. Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, a Sicilian American feminist cultural historian. And then I "woke up." At least I thought I woke up. I finally got to see Santa Lucia, not on a float during a Santa Lucia festa in Chicago, but in her hometown, Siracusa!

There she was, floating above my head on a fresco in a church ceiling, and on a picture that joined me on my return flight, holding a wheat sheaf in her right hand, harking back to the story of her being the daughter of a wealthy Roman father and Greek mother, sending ship loads of wheat to feed the poor. It's the story that aligns her with the primordial nurturance of the wheat Goddesses, Demetra, Cerere, and Isis.

She is also known for bringing gifts to children on December 13th, which is also a day of abstaining from bread and pasta and eating the bowls of *cuccia wheat* grain laced with honey, reminding us of the nurturance of the Goddess.

Her left hand carries her eyeballs on a plate, sharing the Christian version story of when her mother was ill, they both went to the grave of St. Agata, another virgin martyr who chose to have her breasts slashed in exchange for her virginity. Lucia promised her devotion to Christ and her virginity in exchange for her mother's health.

Later, when she turned down a suitor, he *turned* her in as a heretic for curing the blind. When he attempted to rape her, she plucked out her eyeballs, gave them to him on a plate rather than be witness to her own rape.

Today, the Church interprets virginity as total abstinence, yet the contemporary feminists' view is a woman who makes her own choices.

Born in 248 CE and martyred in 323 CE, it goes without saying, this woman of vision had her own idea of *vision!*

*About the Theft!!*

On September 25, 2009 I flew to New York to attend a conference entitled "Saving Venice/Protecting New Orleans". Water scientists and architects from Venice and Louisiana State University came to compare notes on how to stop Venice from sinking and controlling the waters during the hurricanes of the southeast.

I was there specifically to collect research on a multimedia water project of art, science, and spirituality, entitled, "Pool Premonitions of Katrina". Through a series of photos documenting the renovation of our swimming pool, I had symbolically excavated images of Isis/Santa Lucia. Eyes everywhere and ultimately the pool transformed into the womb of the mother goddess collecting the souls of Katrina! This conference was to fill in the blanks on some of the technical scientific end of the project.

When I returned to California, I went over my notes then hopped on line to do some research on Venice and learned that in 1204 MY Santa Lucia's body was stolen from her tomb in Siracusa, Sicily and brought to Venice and now rests in San Geremia Church!

*Jeez Louise!*

Then, I remembered the scientists claimed that the number one cause of the rising tides is the *Scirocco* wind from Africa. Well, I hate to tell you that in the business of Women's Spirituality, that *very sacred* wind comes from mother Isis who is connected to Santa Lucia! The Venetians are spending nearly 6 billion euros on a project that may not work. So, when the winds keep coming and the water keeps rising, I think it may be the tears of Lucia wanting to go back to her mother. In my opinion, Venice is living the contemporary version of Sicily's Demeter/Persephone story. I say take a rock'n roll chance on giving Lucia back to her mother, Sicilia, and perhaps the Venetian waters will settle. Lucia's mother will dry her daughter's tears so that she can SEE again and so will I!



# Recipes

from Louise Sportelli

This is my mother's recipe. She does not have a drop of Italian blood but she IS an excellent cook. These are terrific for dipping in vin santo.

## Almond Anise Biscotti

Preheat oven to 350°.

1 cup slivered almonds – toast 10 minutes in oven. Reduce heat to 325° when finished.

1 ¾ tsp. anise seed – toast 10 minutes in frying pan on stovetop.

3 cups flour

1 tbs. baking powder

¾ tsp. salt

½ cup unsalted butter at room temperature

1 cup sugar

3 eggs

2 tbs. lemon juice

grated peel of 1 lemon

1 tbs. vanilla

½ tsp. almond extract



Beat together butter and sugar. Add eggs, lemon juice, lemon peel, vanilla, and almond extract. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt and add to other ingredients. Work almonds and anise seed in with fingers. Divide into two rolls, each about 12 in. x 1½ in. Bake on cookie sheet for 30 min. Reduce heat to 250°. Let loaves cool about 10 minutes. Cut into slices and place on cookie sheet. Bake for 10 min. Turn pieces and bake for an additional 10 minutes.

This is my version of my favorite *biscotti* that I buy at a *bar pasticceria* near our house in Italy.

## Biscottini d'albicoca

2/3 cup dried apricots

½ cup softened butter

¼ cup sugar

1 cup + 1/3 cup sifted flour

½ tsp. baking powder

¼ tsp. salt

1 cup brown sugar

2 eggs, well beaten

½ tsp. vanilla

½ cup chopped almonds

powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°.

Snip apricots into small pieces with scissors. In small saucepan, cover apricots with water. Boil 10 minutes. Mix butter, sugar, and 1 cup flour until crumbly. Pack into 8x8 greased baking pan. Bake 25 minutes. Sift remaining dry ingredients together. Gradually beat brown sugar into eggs. Add flour mix, then vanilla, nuts, and apricots. Mix well. Spread over baked crust. Bake 30 min. Cut into bars while still warm and roll in powdered sugar. This recipe can be doubled and made in a 9x13 pan.



# Restaurant Review

by Anita Bingaman

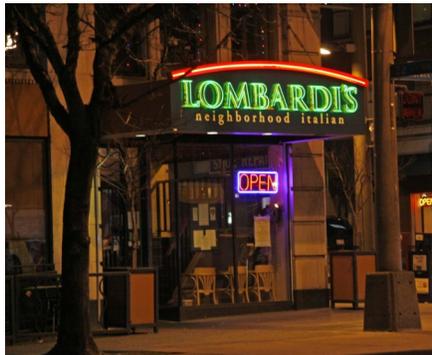
## Lombardi's Italian Restaurant

2200 NW Market St, Seattle, WA 98107

(206) 783-0055

<http://www.lombardisitalian.com/>

**H**ad I not gone to Italy I would never have learned about the many pleasures of food, and I would still be satisfied with food in American restaurants. As it is, I came home from my first trip to Italy determined to find an “authentic” Italian restaurant. Of course, as you can guess I was disappointed. I could see that many places were sincerely trying to serve “real” Italian food, but they were faced with two obstacles. One was that customers who have not traveled to Italy demand American type food. And, the second major obstacle is that this is not Italy.



Instead of pursuing a hopeless dream I looked at what it is that I appreciate about the Italian way with food. This new focus made it possible for me to develop criteria on which to rate Italian restaurants in the States and not be disappointed because my expectations were not met. That means I can enjoy eating here in my homeland, and I have to find a way to go to Italy more often to get my “Italian food” fix.

Here are the criteria I developed. Pasta should at least be hot and not overcooked. Americans are not used to “al dente,” so that is something I cannot expect. Bread should be rustic with a good flavor. Fresh ingredients should be used and if possible, should be local and in season. I prefer a cozy unpretentious atmosphere where I can carry on a conversation without shouting and can hear other members at the table without leaning into my plate to get close enough to hear what he or she is saying. Italian dishes are usually simple with only a few ingredients, not a lot of sauce, and nicely presented. I, also, look for moderately priced restaurants, although they are getting harder and harder to find. I don't mind splurging if the meal is very good. Flavors should be well balanced with not too much salt. Good service is important, no hovering, just a friendly professional attitude.

This review is of Lombardi's Neighborhood Italian Restaurant in Ballard, where I have eaten many meals during the last 20 years. Over that time I am happy to say the quality of the food and the service has been consistently good. Prices have been adjusted over time as the economy has changed, but are still reasonable.

On my last visit, for the main course, I ordered Scampi Diavolo and my husband, Mel, ordered Tuscan Rack of Lamb. Both dishes were exquisite. The sauce on the Scampi dish was lightly lemony with a sprinkling of red pepper flakes and garlic. This was served over nicely cooked fettucine and topped with crunchy prosciutto. The presentation

was simple and appealing. The glass of crisp Pinot Grigio complimented the dish perfectly.

Mel enjoyed his rack of lamb, which was accompanied by garlic mashed potatoes, slivered, lightly sautéed zucchini, and an artistic drizzle of balsamic reduction sauce. There was also a fig, raisin compote, which Mel found too sweet. This is not a selection you would find in an Italian restaurant, but none the less it meets my criteria for good food. The ingredients were simply prepared and presented. This dish in another restaurant would have been priced much higher.

Lombardi's traditionally serves a basket of rustic bread along with a bulb of roasted garlic in a dish of olive oil and balsamic vinegar. I don't recall having roasted garlic served as part of the “coperto” in Italy, but it is something I do enjoy here in the States.

From the several antipasti offerings we chose a bruschetta sampler with three toppings: goat cheese with herbs, fresh tomato with basil and garlic, and crab and shrimp salad. My least favorite was the crab and shrimp.

If you are looking for a moderately priced good dinner, lunch or weekend breakfast, I do recommend Lombardi's in Ballard. As I mentioned earlier I have eaten here many times over the past 20 years and the quality of the food and service are predictably good. There are also locations in Everett and Issaquah. Diane Symms, the owner, gives support to the KIDSTAGE in Issaquah and provides space in the Ballard location for monthly art displays.

Another plus for Lombardi's is that the bar can prepare a very good Negroni, an Italian cocktail made with sweet vermouth, Campari, and gin.

# RIDERE CON AGNES

by Peter Hasson



<<Ma Basta! Tutto il giorno a ridere e scherzare. Per amore di Dio, state un po' zitti!>> mia moglie ha gridato spazientita.

Prendendola da parte, le ho detto a bassa voce <<Penso che neanche cinque vite di risate basterebbero ad alleviare l'orrore che tua madre ha vissuto>>.

<<Sì, lo so, pero adesso dateci un taglio, per favore>> Ci ha supplicato.

La madre, con il suo accento ungherese, si rivolta alla figlia, <<Dai Andrea!

Lasciaci stare, ci stiamo solo divertendo. Peter mi fa ridere, lo sai.>>

Ed era sempre così ogni volta che noi tre ci ritrovavamo insieme.

Agnese era sull'ottantina e tante volte veniva in viaggio con noi; in Giappone, in Cina e anche due volte in Italia. A lei era sempre piaciuto incontrare persone nuove ed era affascinata dalla storia e dalla cultura dei paesi che visitavamo. Ma la cosa che sicuramente apprezzava più di questi viaggi era il tempo che trascorrevamo con noi. Senza considerare che Agnese ed io ci siamo divertiti da matti mentre eravamo in giro per il mondo .

Durante i preparativi per uno di questi nostri viaggi in Italia, il mio caro amico Salvatore, un architetto di Roma, mi ha chiesto se Agnese sarebbe stata disponibile a venire ad Orte, quaranta chilometri a Nord di Roma, per visitare il liceo di suo figlio e parlare agli studenti della sua storia.

Io ho chiesto. Lei ha rifiutato.

Le ho ripetuto le ragioni di Salvatore che alcune città di collina della campagna italiana, sono ancora piene d'ignoranza e antisemitismo. Molte persone non credono neanche che l'olocausto sia realmente esistito. <<Per favore, Agnese, parla con quei ragazzi. Salvatore ed io saremo vicini a te e tradurremo in italiano parola per parola>>

Alla fine Agnese si è convinta ed ha accettato l'invito.

Tuttavia, quando il giorno stabilito si è avvicinato, lei ha dimostrato ancora una volta qualche incertezza.

<<Senti Peter, io non lo so. Non so se me la sento. Sono nervosa, va bene?!>>

Ho Cercato di tranquillizzarla. <<Va bene Agnese, non ti preoccupare, aspetteremo e vedremo come ti senti quando sarà il momento>>.

A mezzogiorno, il giorno dell'incontro a scuola, Salvatore è arrivato puntuale alla stazione di Orte. Salvatore ha un gran cuore. Non è la prima volta che ha messo da parte il suo lavoro e la sua vita personale per cercare di fare una differenza nella vita degli altri.

Nel frattempo Agnese era rimasta nella sua stanza tutta la mattina, dopo aver mangiato quasi nulla per la colazione. Ho chiesto alle sue figlie se avevano intenzione di venire con noi, ma mi hanno detto di no. Per Andrea, essere presente al racconto di sua madre sarebbe stato come portarla ad una realtà troppo dolorosa. D'altra parte, Agnese ha preferito che Andrea e Shirley non fossero presenti perché voleva mantenere la promessa fatta al marito David di continuare a non esporre i loro figli alla loro esperienza infernale.

Sono andato su da Agnese per farle sapere che Salvatore era arrivato e che in un'oretta dovevamo essere pronti per andare a scuola. Lei camminava ancora avanti e indietro, scuotendo la testa, <<Non voglio parlarne con nessuno. Non credo che quei ragazzi vogliano ascoltare la storia di una sconosciuta.>>

Salvatore ed io abbiamo cercato le parole per convincerla del bisogno delle nuove generazioni di ascoltare la verità raccontata, non dagli esperti intellettuali storici, ma direttamente da una superstite, proprio come lei.

<<Non ce la faccio! È troppo per me. E allora, chi vuole ascoltare le storie di una vecchia!>> Continuava a ripetere. <<Datemi un pò spazio, non posso respirare bene>>

Salvatore ed io ci siamo guardati senza sapere che cosa fare.

<<Va bene Agnese>> Le ho detto. <<Vorresti che vada io al tuo posto a parlare per te?>>

A questo punto Agnese si è decisa. <<No! Racconterò io la mia storia! Andiamo!>>

Il mio amico ed io ci siamo commossi vedere Agnese prendere la sua borsa ed incamminarsi senza esitazione verso la macchina.

C'erano circa un centinaio di rumorosi ragazzi che erano in attesa di essere richiamati all'ordine. <<Silenzio! La signora e' arrivata!>> Immediatamente l'atmosfera si e' fatta grave e tutti gli occhi erano puntati su Agnese, che era ancora un po' intimorita, però è arrivata subito a toccare con la verità le coscienze ed i cuori di tutti i presenti. Era una storia vera quella che Agnese raccontava, la sua storia e della sua famiglia, una storia di vita, di sofferenza e di morte. La storia di quello che è accaduto agli ebrei in Europa, in Ungheria e nella sua città, e del tentativo brutale di effettuare l'eliminazione sistematica di tutta la sua gente.

Con ciascuna parola Agnese è diventata più forte con la sua testa alta, mentre Salvatore ed io, come se fossimo sotto un peso invisibile, abbassavamo le teste, e mentre pur non smettendo di tradurre, era impossibile nascondere le nostre lacrime.

Agnese aveva finito di parlare, ed i ragazzi rimanevano immobili e silenziosi nelle loro sedie, fino a quando la preside ha rotto il silenzio ringraziando Agnese per la sua visita e per aver dato la testimonianza di una donna capace di portare con coraggio la fiaccola della verità che non era mai stata lontano, ma era nascosta dagli occhi di chi non voleva vedere o che non sapeva vedere.

Quindi la preside le ha chiesto se era/fosse disposta a rispondere alle domande degli studenti. Uno di loro le ha chiesto se era possibile vedere il suo tatuaggio. Agnese ha fatto un cenno di sì, e con la stessa determinazione che l'aveva accompagnata nel suo racconto, si è tirata su una manica e sollevando il braccio, mostrandolo alla luce della verità in carne ed ossa, il numero che tanti anni fa i tedeschi hanno impresso sulla sua pelle, il segno indelebile di uno dei campi di morte del 1942.

Agnese con la sua testimonianza ha illuminato una verità che ha lasciato i ragazzi sconvolti e confusi con le loro domande. Chi è questa signora che è venuta da lontano? Che cos'è quel numero sul suo braccio? Cosa vuol dire? E perché?

È stato necessario riabituare gli occhi alla nuova luce che emanava dal cuore di Agnese e che ha riempito l'auditorio intero.

Cio' che è diventato importante ed urgente per i ragazzi e' avvicinarsi ad Agnese, facendo una coda lunga per guardare la sua macchia, stringere la mano mostrandole la loro solidarietà e gratitudine.

Una ragazza è passata silenziosamente per stringere la sua mano e sembrava che stesse tornando al suo posto ma si e' fermata e si e' voltata ancora verso Agnese. I suoi occhi si sono posati per un attimo sul braccio di Agnese e lei si è avvicinata prendendo gentilmente il braccio dando un bacio delicato sulla ferita aperta sul braccio, e sul cuore, di Agnese. <<Mi dispiace per la sua angoscia signora>> Le ha detto con le lacrime negli occhi. Ho spiegato ad Agnese che la ragazza stava esprimendole il profondo dispiacere per la sua grande sofferenza.

Prendendo le mani della ragazza tra le sue, Agnese l'ha ringraziata. <<Grazie cara, ma adesso sto bene, ho vissuto con questo orrore per più di sessanta anni. Tenere dentro un dolore così grande sarebbe troppo per chiunque. Sono felice di essere venuta qui.>>

Sulla strada di casa, in macchina, ho iniziato a dirle che prima sapevo già che lei sarebbe stata felice averlo fatto, ma lei mi ha interrotto dicendo, <<Peter sta zitto, non dirmi che me lo avevi detto, anche se me lo avevi detto. E poi tutti e tre abbiamo riso per tutta la strada verso casa.

Due anni dopo, ad Orte, alla stazione, uno studente dell'università ha riconosciuto Salvatore e si è fermato a salutarlo. Ha continuato a dirgli quanto importante ha creduto che la visita della signora Agnese fosse stata, e come abbia cambiato la sua vita, rendendolo da un ragazzo immaturo ad un uomo, ed ad una persona migliore.

L'anno scorso, Matteo, il figlio più piccolo di Salvatore, mi ha scritto per dirmi che alla lezione di storia ha visto un bel documentario sulla testimonianza di Agnese alla scuola.

Ne è rimasto entusiasta, scrivendo che Agnese sarebbe veramente colpita nel sentire l'impatto che ancora oggi la storia della sua vita ha sui ragazzi in quelle città di collina della campagna italiana.



# Laughing with Agnes

by Peter Hasson

“That’s enough; all day long with you two joking; for God’s sake give me break”, my wife shouts. So I pull her to the side again and say, “After what your mother has been through, I can’t see how even five lifetimes of laughter could begin to ease, let alone erase the unthinkable.”

“Please give it a little rest.” She pleads.

Her mother shoots back at her with a Hungarian accent, “Leave us alone, Andrea, we’re having fun. Peter makes me laugh”. And so it is, whenever the three of us are together.

In her eighties, Agnes travels with us to Italy twice, and to Japan and China. She enjoys meeting people and learning about the history and culture of the places we visit. More than that, she loves spending time on these trips with us. Plus she and I laugh our way all around the world together.

During the planning stages of one of the Italy trips, my dear friend, Salvatore, asks me if Agnes will come to tell her story at his son’s high school, in Orte, two hours north of Rome.

I ask. She declines. I repeat to her the things that Salvatore said to me: “The hill towns in the Italian countryside are filled with ignorance and anti-Semitism. Many people do not believe that the Holocaust happened.”

“Please, Agnes, talk to these children. Salvatore and I will sit on the stage with you and translate your words from English to Italian.” She agrees, and the date and time is set for her to be the guest speaker.

As the day draws near, she starts saying, “I’m not sure; I don’t know if I want to go to the school to speak; I’m nervous, okay?”

I respond each time with, “Okay, Agnes, we’ll wait and see how you feel when the time comes”.

Salvatore, an architect, arrives from Rome on the train at noon, the day of the speech. It’s not unusual for him to leave his work and his everyday life to try to make a difference for others. His heart is big.

Agnes stays in her room all morning, after only picking at her breakfast. I ask Andrea and Shirley if they are coming and they say, “No.” For Andrea, watching her mother tell of the torture would be too real. Agnes says that she would rather that Andrea and Shirley not come; She wants to keep the vow that she had made with her husband, David, never to expose their children to have to listen to the hell that they lived through.

I go up to Agnes’s room to let her know that Salvatore has arrived and that we are going to leave for the school in an hour or so. She is pacing back and forth, shaking her head and saying, “I’m not going. I don’t want to talk to anyone about this. Those children don’t want to hear the story of an old lady like me.”

Salvatore and I try to convince her that it’s important, that these children need to hear the truth, not just from a book, but first hand; from a survivor, like her.

“I can’t do it! It’s too much for me. They don’t want to listen to an old lady”, she repeatedly says.

Salvatore and I decided not to push it, so I say, “Okay Agnes, we understand how hard it must be for you to do this, I’ll go in your place and tell them your story.”

“No! I will go and tell my own story! Let’s go”, she says.

My friend and I grin at each other as Agnes grabs her purse and leads the way out to the car.

About a hundred loud and restless children are being called to order. “Silencio! La Signora e’ arrivata!” They all turn their eyes to Agnes and I feel the mood shift to serious. Though frightened and reluctant, Agnes is about to reach into the hearts of those present; revealing the truth of her suffering; the truth of her family’s suffering and murders; the truth of what happened to the Jews of her town and of her country and the truth of the attempted, systematic elimination of her whole people.

With each spoken word, Agnes becomes stronger, holding her head up higher and higher. Salvatore and I try to hide our crying, dropping our heads, lower and lower, as we translate for her.

Stunned and shocked, the children sit frozen in their seats. Agnes has just finished, and the school principal breaks the silence by saying how grateful they are for her coming. He calls her a great woman for carrying the torch of truth, and inquires if the children can ask her questions. One of them wants to know if he can see her tattoo.



Rolling up her sleeve, she holds her arm up, showing the filled auditorium her indelible number, forced on her by the Germans. The next question comes from several students at the same time, “May we see your tattoo up close, Signora Agnes?”

Curiosity pushes the students forward in a line for a view of the unveiled proof of the permanent blue marking that was etched onto her arm at the death camp in 1942. The group is in awe of the *Signora*; each meets her with warmth and respect. Agnes is deeply touched.

One lovely girl approaches, shakes her hand and starts to head back to her seat, but then she returns and takes Agnes’s forearm into her hands, and kisses the wounded flesh. She speaks with tears in her eyes, “Mi dispiace per la sua angosia, Signora.”

I explain to Agnes that the girl is telling her that she is deeply sorry for her suffering. Agnes takes both of the girl’s hands into hers, and says, “It’s okay honey, I’ve lived with this horror for over sixty years. It’s been far too great for any one person to keep inside themselves for this long. I’m happy I’ve come here.”

We are driving back to our villa on the day of Agnes’ talk. I break the silence saying to her, “I’m so proud of you. I knew that you would feel good after telling your story.” But Agnes interrupts me waving her arms, saying, “Don’t tell me I told you so, even though you told me so.” Agnes, Salvatore, and I laugh all the way back to our villa.

Two years later, at the train station in Orte, a university student recognizes Salvatore and stops him to say hello. He continues on to say how important he believes the visit that the Signora Agnes made to the school, helped to change his life from an immature boy to a man and a better person.

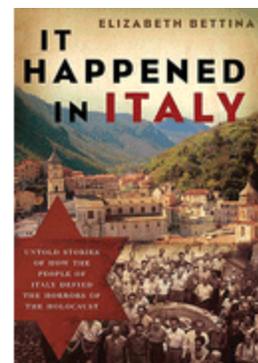
Just a couple of years ago, Matteo, the youngest son of Salvatore, wrote to me that at his history class today, he saw a beautiful documentary film of the testimony that Agnes gave at the school. He was enthusiastic about it, writing that Agnes would be truly touched to hear the impact that the story of her life still has on the children from the surrounding hill towns in the Italian countryside.

## Book Review

By Michael Luongo. Excerpted from the newspaper “Forward”, published Sept 16, 2009 for the Sept 25 edition.

### **It Happened in Italy**, by Elizabeth Bettina

**E**lizabeth Bettina is the author of the book, “It Happened in Italy: Untold Stories of How the People of Italy Defied the Horrors of the Holocaust”, published last spring by Thomas Nelson. The book tells the largely unknown story of Jews who survived World War II in Italy - both natives and those who fled there when no other country would take them. Bettina began research for the book in 2003, after seeing a photograph of a rabbi at the church where her maternal grandmother was married in Campagna near Salerno. A native New Yorker who grew up in a largely Jewish neighborhood on Long Island, she is fluent in Italian, which aided her in researching and facilitating a meeting with Pope Benedict XVI and Jewish survivors. Novelist and travel writer Michael Luongo talked with her in New York City.



**Michael Luongo:** Explain the book’s focus on what seems a paradox - that Mussolini, Hitler’s strongest ally in the war, refused to help carry out the extermination of the Jews.

**Elizabeth Bettina:** The survivors have said that they do not believe Mussolini really wanted to harm them, - that, otherwise, he would have had them deported. The foreign Jews believe that Mussolini put them in the camps as “via di mezzo” (middle way) to appease Hitler without harming them. The Italian Jews lived in their homes, and the racial laws took away many of their civil liberties, such as having a civil servant job, going to school, etc., but they were not deported. The Jews I have interviewed felt that the Italians treated them “like human beings, like they were. There was no difference between us and the Italians.”

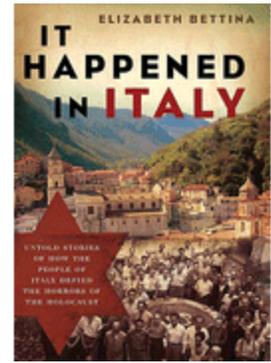
(continued on page 14)

(Book Review - continued from page 13)

It was after September 8, 1943, when Italy was under German occupation (following the Italian uprising against Mussolini), that the Jews went into hiding.

*M.L.: What first made you interested in the topic?*

E.B.: The picture of an Orthodox rabbi, bishop and police officer (in Campagna) started me on this very unexpected journey. I wondered: What was a rabbi doing in my grandmother's village standing on the steps of the church where she was married - in 1940? I began meeting Jews who survived because they were in Italy and wanted to acknowledge the people of Italy for saving their lives.



*M.L.: Tell me more about stories you heard - like playing cards with policemen, family visits, trips to spas, all while in a concentration camp.*

E.B.: When I heard these things, I couldn't believe them myself. They did not occur in only one place in Italy. Survivors had similar stories about their treatment, so no matter where they were in Italy, whether they were in a camp with barracks or if they were "internati liberi", or internees that were free in a village.

*M.L.: The book also focuses on Giovanni Palatucci. What role did he play?*

E.B.: Giovanni Palatucci was the Questore di Fiume (Police Chief of Fiume) and his uncle was the Bishop of Campagna. He helped save 5,000 Jews. Unfortunately, his actions were discovered by the Germans, and he was sent to Dachau, where, at age 36, he died....Palatucci was honored by Yad Vashem in 1990; in 2002, he was beatified by Cardinal (Camillo) Ruini.

*M.L.: The Vatican has been blamed for turning a blind eye during the Holocaust. Does what you found change anything?*

E.B.: Many of the survivors in this book were saved by priests and nuns throughout Italy. In addition, I recently received copies of papers showing that money was sent to Campagna from the Vatican to help the Jews.

*M.L.: What about today's war refugees? Iraq has four million war refugees and there is Darfur, a place many Jewish organizations are working in.*

E.B.: My message is, if you are not indifferent, things can be different. This book shows that because people were willing to risk their lives for others, the others lived. You have choices.

*M.L.: What do the survivors tell you about this book and the legacy of that time period?*

E.B.: This is a story that needs to be told because stories of those rescued and the rescuers are important. During the worst of times, there can still be humanity. As Walter Wolff (a survivor) said, "Bad times, good people."

There are so many stories about the Holocaust, but very few about what happened in Italy. The survivors in this book are grateful to be alive today, and happy that their stories will live on after them. They believe that before this book, the Italian story was not known by the general public.

*M.L.: What was it like growing up Italian in a Jewish neighborhood? What similarities do Jews and Italians share in America - and in Italy?*

E.B.: For me, my friends were my friends, and differences in religion did not matter. My friends came to my house to help me put up the Christmas tree and make *struffoli*, and I went to theirs for Passover and *matzo* ball soup. If we overlook the differences and focus on the similarities between people - well - maybe things would be better that way.



# DANTE CALENDAR 2009-2010

Dante Alighieri Society of Washington

<b>September 2009</b>	<b>February 2010</b>
9 Aisha Paterra Summer in Italy	10 Susan Gaylord (UW) Italian fashion 1300-1800
23 Robert Thomson Dante and Opera	24 Claudio Mazzola "La tradizione della commedia all'italiana dal dopoguerra a oggi"
<b>October 2009</b>	<b>March 2010</b>
14 Lisa Dorsey The Divine Journey of Dante's Inferno	10 Chris Zimmerman Tour of Italian wine regions and Wine tasting
28 Marcella Nardi Medieval castles & Italy	24 To be announced
<b>November 2009</b>	<b>April 2010</b>
11 Magnus Feil Italian design	14 Election night (no speaker)
No Italian meeting in November	28 To be announced
<b>December 2009</b>	<b>May 2010</b>
9 Christmas party	12 Vincenza Scarpaci The Journey of the Italians in America
No Italian meeting in December	No Italian meeting in May
<b>January 2010</b>	
13 Sportelli + Panel: Living part- time in Italy	
27 To be announced	

At the first meeting of each month (English program), pre-Dante pasta is communally prepared at 5:30 pm & served at 6:30 pm. Call the Activity Line (206) 320-9159 by the Monday before to reserve your spot(s). Cost: \$8.00 per person or \$15.00 per couple

Unless otherwise noted, all programs are held at Headquarters House, 2336 15th Ave S, in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Seattle. Directions are on page 12.

## Membership Application

I (We) want to promote Italian language and culture and request membership in the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington. Enclosed is my (our) check in full payment of annual membership dues (\$30.00 for individual, \$40.00 for a family).

Mark one : ( ) **New Membership**    ( ) **Membership Renewal**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed:

Membership Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution Categories (For recognition stars):

Bronzo (bronze) - Up to \$25

Argento (silver) - \$26 - \$50

Oro (gold) - \$51 to \$100

Platino (platinum) - Over \$100

Please return completed membership application with check to:

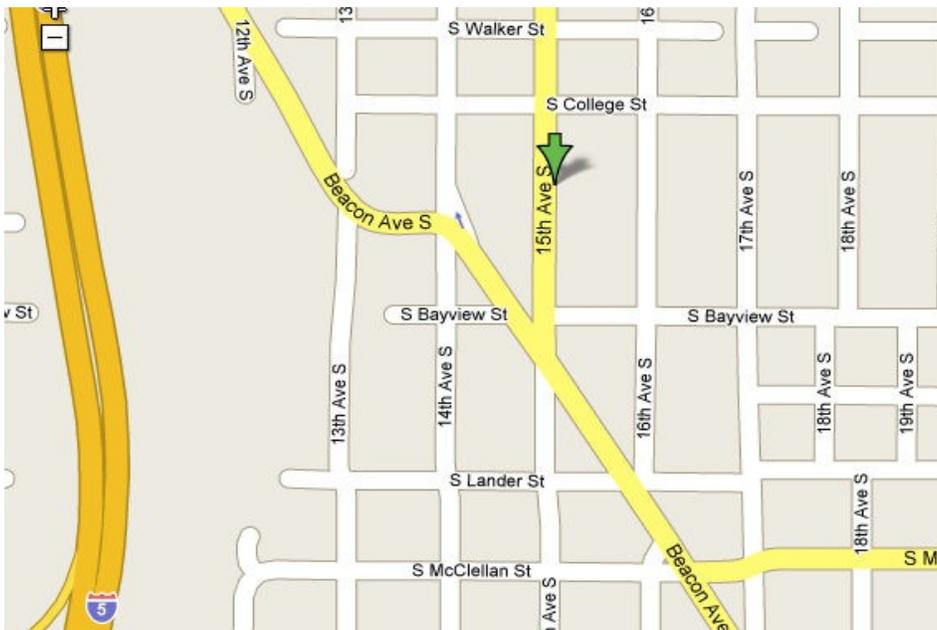
Dante Alighieri Society of Washington

PMB #1244

1122 East Pike Street

Seattle, WA 98122

If you have any questions, please call (206) 320-9159 and leave a message.



## Directions to Headquarters House

Headquarters House is located at **2336 15th Avenue South** in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Seattle. From I-5, take the Columbian Way/Spokane Street exit, eastbound. Turn left at the first light, Spokane Street and left again at the next light, 15th Avenue S. After crossing Beacon Avenue, Headquarters House will be on the right side between Bayview and College Streets.