

Articles, Letters & Journals from  
Helen's travels in Central and  
Western Europe & The Middle East

Sept 2001- July 2002

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# Hags Away from Home

## Of Places Near and Far...

*No accuracy claims – only intent to entertain!*

After having lived through the journeys found herein, I discovered that I feel a little unsatisfied - and a little *selfish* not to share them!

Case in point: when you stand at the highest hill of Rome, looking down over the city at dusk: grandeur and ruins right down to the corner café all aglow by the pink rays of sunset...and there is no one to \*sigh\* with - it's a lonely traveler's feeling!

Therefore, presented chronologically, are the correspondences I sent to my family and friends during my time abroad, including e-mails, letters to my home newspaper *The Delaware Gazette*, as well as some journals and reflective writings.

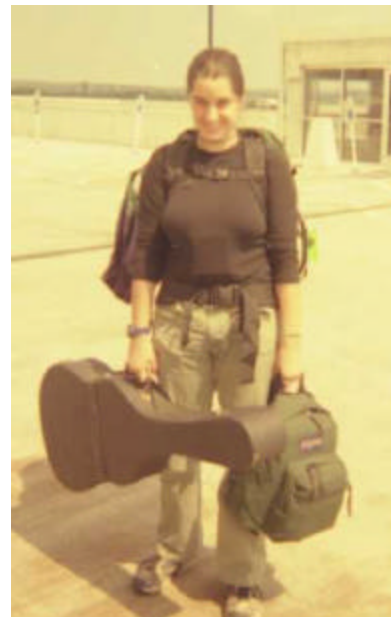
Thus I bid you; sit back, and I hope you enjoy the ride as much as I did!🌍

## Welcome to the Other Side of the Ocean

*From an e-mail to my family on my 9th day in Italy.*

**Wednesday, 12 September 2001**

Yesterday was my second day of class here at the New School Rome. At a staff meeting, the headmaster told us about sketchy details of the high-jackng in the US (by this time it was



**September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2001: Port Columbus**

about 10am EST). After hearing radio broadcasts at the supermarket and watching static-y pictures (all in Italian) some co-workers took me to an *Irish* pub that had what I was so desperately seeking - the news in *English*.

So far, the headlines I have seen are printed in Italian, but the pictures are almost more than I can handle. Can you get me word as soon as you might know something about Uncle Tom (Reeves clan) who worked in the Pentagon. [I have since found out that he is fine, as he was in another part of the building.] Prayers for others awaiting word about loved ones.

Everett [my friend who is in the Peace Corps, serving in Moscow] speaks of experiences of empathy in Russia where everyone has shown so much honest sorrow and compassion towards Americans in light of the

events. The internet cafés in Moscow allowed Americans unlimited free access to the web because it was the only way for them to get news in English. Although we all know, or rather, don't know what kind of repercussions this will have in the future, it is comforting to know that people are still *people*, the whole world around - for the most part.



'Snap, Crackle, Pop' their names were 'Pif, Pof, Paf!' Out on the terrace, a woman from the balcony above mine handed down (with the assistance of a push broom and a folding chair) a bag of fresh tomatoes. "Only in Italy," I thought to myself.

The New School Rome, where I am student-teaching this term, is an English language school with students from about thirty-four countries. I have found the scenery of the city is

incredibly diverse (i.e. contrast of the massive *Trevi* Fountain, next to a United Colors of Benetton clothing boutique, blocks from a lush public park) and my time in 'Roma' has also allowed for me to get a little taste of Italian culture.

I've been in the country for a month now, and my head continues to reel from the sights, sounds, and people of *The Eternal City*. While some scenes are reminiscent of the Mediterranean styles that I was exposed to on my 1993 time in Israel, the Roman flare surely defines the city. I hope I will be able to share further insight with you while I am abroad.

As a start, here are a few bits about my first few weeks in Rome...

After spending my first few days staying in a convent (while not teaching) I now share an apartment with another teacher. I am happy to

report that the Italians are extremely patient with foreigners (like me) who do not really speak Italian (yet). Luckily, I have located a hand full of nearby shops that I can rely on for a good meal. I started out by just pointing and smiling at what I wanted, and eventually, I have worked in a few spoken words.

Figuring out the Roman transportation system, consisting of busses, subways, trams and trains, has been – well... *interesting*. Fortunately, I only have to take one bus to get from where I live to school. However when crossing the street to the bus stop, dodging *motorini* (motor bikes), busses, taxis, or any other of the multitude of zooming cars on the street (with names like 'Panda' or 'Uno') has been a daily challenge.

Back at the school, the grounds truly are enchanting. Yes, even *after* the children arrive. Beautiful gardens line the stone path back to the stucco and red tile-roofed classroom buildings (a re-modeled *villa* and stables). Teachers are called by first names and lunches consist of delicious pastas, bread, salad and fruit, which are eaten out on the patio - year round (so they tell me). Classes are small and enthusiastic, especially since most of these children

have not had a music teacher before. Quite different from most American schools in many ways, I have found it nonetheless to be a wonderful place - and I look forward to continuing my teaching, and

learning, there.

I got the news of the terrorist attacks in the US my second day of school. How absolutely surreal. I finally found an Irish Pub where the news was in

I should be going soon. I didn't sleep at all and I've had quite a day here at school, music-wise and fielding questions from the primary age students and their teachers.

I LOVE YOU all very, very much. DO take care of yourselves.

Love, Helen

## My New Homa: Roma

*My first letter to Margo Bartlett, at The Delaware Gazette, in my Ohio hometown:*

**05 October 2001**

*Helen Hagerty is a 1997 graduate of Buckeye Valley High School, now completing her Music Education degree for the College of Wooster overseas, as a student teacher in Rome, Italy.*

Today began as any other day might begin, with a bowl of Kellogg's © Rice Krispies. Except that instead of



English, without the frustrating Italian voice-overs. Newspaper headlines the next morning were of *The World in Shock* while billboards across Rome encouraged Italians to fight terrorism: *Solidarity With the People of the United States!* My thoughts often drift to everyone stateside, as I know there is much on the minds of Americans these days. But while I am so far away, it is encouraging to discover the compassion of the Italians and the international community. A week after the terrible incidents in the US, my school held an assembly while Europe observed a three-minute-silence in memory of lives lost.

Last weekend I visited another teacher's home tucked in a lovely little village by one of Italy's volcanic lakes. Soon, I will accompany a few senior high students on a school trip to Venice, by train. I hope that these treks out of the city, as well as additional tidbits of *Roma* happenings can provide the basis for future letters such as this one. One thing is for sure, life in Rome continues to be an adventure.

## Italian Idiosyncrasies

*From an e-mail to my family*

**12 October 2001**

It was a wonderful weekend of touring all the "piles of rocks" (Coliseum, Pantheon, Trevi Fountain, etc) last week with teacher Craig and his two college buddies from The ('other') College of Worchester (UK). Now I have 2 more places to stay in London! My

### Inside *Il Coloseo*...



As you can see, the floor of this historical arena has disintegrated to reveal the catacomb remnants below. The ancient site of gladiator fights and public executions, I felt a certain sense of awe about the old place! And standing for more than 2,000 years, Hags comment: 'They just don't make em like this anymore.' Did you know the famous slanted

exterior wall didn't naturally crumble, as one might assume? Oh no, when the public grew disinterested in *the games* the Romans simply dis-assembled the un-used site, brick by brick, and used them to construct the rest of Rome! It is also rumored that some several hundred plants are found growing ONLY in the passageways of *Il Coloseo* and nowhere else in Italy. Why? Because they were brought as feed or excrement by the exotic animals housed there 'back in the day.' *The pic is me with Claudia: BV '97 (Germany)*

flat-mate Martial and I had our "apartment warming party" as well - complete with a sing-along on the balcony (not quite the same things as at home, but a few cross-overs - mostly Beatles or Simon & Garfunkel).

The week has been fairly normal with some fun things in my classes. The children at the New School continue to be very enthusiastic about music! While it is a bit overwhelming to face the massive task of planning (and designing) music curriculum for a semester, AND organizing our Christmas play (with no other music specialist to consult), I really *do* feel *very* lucky to be here, and pleased to be working with such wonderful staff and children.

Today's tidbits anyone? 1) I taught the Swimming Song ("Swimming, swimming, in the swimming pool...") to Year 1 (5 years old) and jokingly

asked the teacher, a swimmer, if he sang it when he went to the pool. In his posh English accent, the teacher replied "Oh, that would make me very popular..." but one of the children miss-heard "Mary Poppins?!" 2) After teaching the Alligator Song to Y2 (6 year olds) I have tried to explain "See you later Alligator - After a while Crocodile" But they keep getting it mixed up and saying things like "Later Lizard" or "See you tomorrow Shark Face" Kids say the darndest things, indeed - especially when they are just learning English!

Soon I must gather my things and take the bus to the tram to the subway to *Termini* where we take the train bound for VENICE! Whee! A 5-hour train ride should make for an interesting indoctrination to Italian Travel.

We'll spend the weekend there for a school trip (with about 11 of the Y12 and Y13 students (juniors/ seniors),

visiting a modern art exhibit and experiencing Venice!

I'm starting to realize that I live in Rome, and am attempting to enjoy it all to the fullest, all things considered. International news looks scary from what I can decipher of the Italian headlines - I keep you all and the future of this world in my prayers.

## Thanksgiving Just Isn't the Same Without the Turkey

Letter #2 to the Delaware Gazette

02 December 2001

After three months, I am beginning to believe that I live in Italy.

It has recently come to my attention that I am now known on a 'local' basis with a number of people in the section of Rome where I live.

There's Mimo, who runs the coffee bar, who always waves when I pass, and the street vendor with tissue



At the market in the piazza below our apartment.

packets and car-air-freshener pine trees (yes, just like in the US) who sells to passing cars, and I even got a 'Ciao!' from Donato, who was setting up the chicken rotisserie at his pizzeria that I frequent. As I slipped into a *tobacchi* (tobacco shop, the Italian answer to mini-marts) to buy some stamps (the lines are too long from people paying their bills at the post office) I was even recognized by a man who caught me from a fall when I carelessly lost my balance on the bus! I had not even gotten to the train station on this walk (where everyone knows the calico cat!) But that is the fun of Rome - where I guess it IS a small world, after all.

My student teaching at the international school, New School Rome, continues to go well. In fact, I've been asked to return after our winter holiday to finish out the year teaching music here! I am very pleased, since I find the school to be a fantastic place. Plus it gives me a few extra months to do a little more overseas exploring.

Each Friday at my school we have an assembly to talk about different cultural events. These have included such presentations as those about the Indian festival of *Dwali*, the Muslim holy month of *Ramadan*, the Jewish celebration of *Hanukkah* and parallel with America's Veteran's Day, our discussion was about the British holiday - Remembrance Sunday. My interest was sparked when I noticed the red paper flowers worn by the British teachers at school. Evidently, the tradition

was started after WWI,

## Scavenger Hunt Surprises

Things from the US that are DIFFICULT if not IMPOSSIBLE to find in Rome

Cheetos®, Doritos®

...and any other 'yellow' cheese products

Peanut Butter ANYTHING, and Oreos!

Laundry Dryers (and dryer sheets)

Anti-perspire deodorant

Pick-up Trucks (not like in Ohio!)

Bottled Salad Dressing!

Things from the US that you might be surprised TO find in Rome

Pringles

(except 'BBQ' is 'Paprika' flavored)

Philadelphia Cream Cheese

Kellogg's Cereals

Corporations: Dunkin Donuts, Blockbuster, ReMax Realtor McDonalds – right down to the Rubbermaid 'Wet Floor' signs!

when the poppies began to grow in Flander's Field after the battles had finished. I think it hit home a bit in these troubled times around the world.

Last week's assembly gave me a pang of homesickness as we discussed... *Thanksgiving!* The children seemed pleased to have a 'real, live' American to tell them about it. I have to admit, it was a little lonely to be away from home on such a traditionally 'home-going' holiday. Though my mozzarella and mushroom pasta was tasty, it just wasn't Thanksgiving without the turkey and stuffing ...and sweet potatoes...pumpkin pie...etc. It doesn't rain terribly often in Rome, but a few weeks ago, we had a very peculiar storm. Some way that the weather patterns work in the Mediterranean creates a really interesting phenomenon where desert

## Scusa, which way to...

One evening 'Matteo' (whose real name is Ahmed) and I took a stroll downtown. Finding ourselves turned around in the tourist district, he asked directions to the Spanish Steps of a young woman passing by.

I immediately recognized her American-accented-Italian 'Piazza di Spanga? Ummm, eh...' (holding her finger up as if to say, 'just a moment') *'un al-ti-mo'* and my suspicions were confirmed... when she pulled out her *own* map (most locals ask the *tourist* for their map before giving directions).

'You're American?' I asked.

'Um, yeah...are you?' she replied in shock...I admitted that I was too, and that we really didn't know my way around the centre.

'Oh cool, so you guys study here?'

'Well, no' I explained, 'I teach here, and he works at a pizzeria.'

'Oh, well, that's cool! But doesn't he know his own city?'

'Eh, not really... 'He's from Egypt.'

Hmph.

We finally consulted the map and found our location.

Turning back to Matteo who had been standing patiently while we chatted, I smiled as the girl walked off, 'So we just have to go up to the next block, weren't so far off after all!' I said, forgetting he didn't understand any English beyond 'Hallo, Howareyou, I'mfinethankyou.'

We both laughed, and I painfully made the transition in my head and explained again, in Italian. And eventually, we made it to the *piazza* (pictured above).



sands are picked up from Northern Africa, and then rained down in Italy. It creates such a surreal effect - for nearly an entire day with bright yellow clouds (full of sand with the sun shining through) and then, with fat raindrops of muddy desert dust, the whole of Rome was splattered with yellow sand! Nothing was spared. Even the paper pamphlets that are often stuck under windshield wipers were soaked through with a sandy residue. It looked a bit like the whole city had run through a mud puddle. Well, kind of.

You might imagine that being without a car would cramp my independence, after living in the rural Mid West where it is the sole mode of personal transportation. But actually, now that I have figured out how it works, using the transit system in Rome is very convenient - and cheap! As a student I pay less than the equivalent of \$15 per month for use of the buses, subway, and trains! Another thing about Roman transport - I will never forget stuffing my first 1500 Lire (\$0.75) into the machine at the subway station for a ticket and realizing that classical music was playing over the loudspeaker. Such

little surprises are constantly showing themselves, the longer I live here.

While the children at school are now gearing up for our winter play, (coincidentally, the Italian story of *Pinocchio*) I am also looking forward to the visit from my family for the holidays. I have to admit, it is a little hard to believe that it is nearly Christmas here in such a warm climate, though I began to be convinced by the 'Christmas Market' in *Piazza Navona* (taking up nearly the size of a football field) last week. And though it was full of novelty ornaments, 'Father Christmas' trinkets, multi-colored tinsel, flashing lights and build-it-yourself Nativity scenes of every shape and size, somehow I just wanted what they didn't seem to have... a candy cane! 🍭

P.S. Thank you to the West Family for the GIANT candy cane in anticipation of my need and *'grazie mille'* (thanks a thousand) to the Baldwin family for their Trans-Atlantic delivery of approximately 36 full size candy canes of various sizes and flavors in response to my article. And to my family, thanks also for the box of 200 mini-canes. My students and I enjoyed the peppermint novelties all semester!

# Touring Italy

*Before I return to Israel to visit family for the New Year, I have several bits of travel (and a few Italian idiosyncrasies) to catch up on from my time in Rome:*

## 04 December 2001

I have realized that it takes me a bit longer to catch on to things that are so typically Roman/ Italian because I spend the majority of my time working at an *English* school and socializing with people who are at least English-speaking if not otherwise like me - foreign.

It has come to my attention that Rome shuts down between 2 and 4pm for a siesta at which point nearly everyone basically closes up shop - pulling mini-garage doors over their storefronts so that a bustling shopping district suddenly looks like a ghost town. This is a good tip to know if you were planning on doing a little afternoon shopping.

When my roommate and I went to the market together last weekend, not only did we get fresh fruits, meat and vegetables, but also a cooking lesson on artichokes. As the gentleman slipped our purchased bunch of grapes into a small brown paper sack, he broke off grapes from another bunch and handed them to us to munch on. I guess we have broken the tourist label.

The Italians are very much about FRESH food, I have come to realize. Numerous fruit and vegetable stands can be found throughout the city, open early and late. But even the pre-packaged mushrooms I bought from the indoor *supermercato* last week had the dirt still attached to the bottom. Can you imagine! Another thing - customers bag their own groceries. And don't plan on getting

too much when you shop because you'll have to carry it home, most likely on foot. No such convenience as a drive-through pick-up here!

### Glenda & John's

While living in Rome I have been on several trips out of the city that I thought might be of interest.

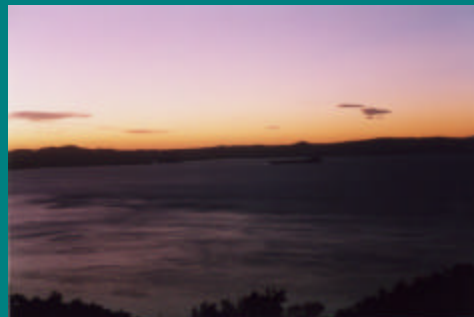
Visiting another teacher and her husband at their

home in a volcanic lake-side village was truly enchanting. Admiring the agricultural landscape out the window of the train, I might have been able to convince myself that I was back in the Ohio countryside. On the drive to their house from the train station, I noticed a small shrine to the Virgin Mary tucked into a street-corner wall. While these scenes are numerous in Rome, each obviously has its own regular attendees. John & Glenda mentioned that in all their years in this house - this particular fresco had never been without fresh lilies. How lovely!

As we strolled along the lakeshore, ice cream cones in hand, we passed a

## Toscana!

### A paruse through paradise...



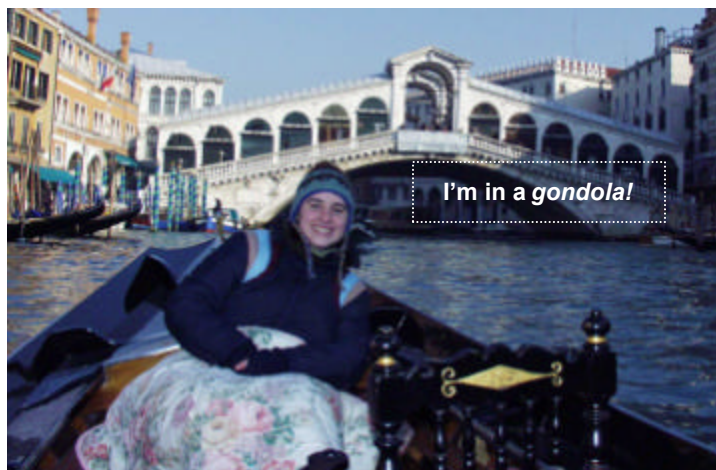
For a fall road trip to Tuscany with Alan, Karen and Anne, the views we encountered were as spectacular as they were unique! ←Adorned with the tall, skinny 'typical Tuscan trees.' We stayed in the farmhands' quarters (now a B&B) attached to a lovely castle in *Cafaggio*, dated 1300 AD.

We also passed by 'the city of 100 towers'... *San Gimignano*. Rival families once attempted to out-do each other by constructing ridiculously tall towers – creating an unlikely skyline in the Tuscan countryside: a mini, Italian Manhattan!

*'Tea with Mussolini'* is a good Hollywood reference. ☺

marching band going the other way. Hmm. It seems that announcements are rarely posted, but somehow everyone seems to know what is going on (except them, the foreigners). We decided that it must have been a religious festival as it 'always seems to be some saint's day' since the majority of the population is, by nature, Roman Catholic.

By the way, did I mention that Italian ice cream is usually made in-house at each *gelateria* (ice cream shop) and typically, you have 2 or 3 flavors on each cone. Yum Yum! As if Italian cuisine didn't already have enough delicious things to choose from!



We ended our day at the lakeside village by climbing up the hill to overlook the town and investigating the castle ruins at the top (where remnants of the twinkle-light-lined nativity scene were still left from last Christmas). It was a nice chance to see a little bit of Roman 'suburbia' if there is such a thing.

### Venezia

Venice was another adventure entirely. As you might expect. With about 15 students (the New School's grades 12 and 13) we took a 5 hour train from Rome to Venice.

Once inside the city, I have to say it was absolutely mind-blowing. I mean, walking out of the main train station I emerged into what is nearly the city center where I would expect to be a busy, noisy main street. Instead - there is a canal! A series of islands in the upper-Eastern corner of Italy, the streets of Venice are water. It was hard to believe, at first, that when I bought a bus ticket, it was to get on a boat. And a taxi? Of course - you take a *gondola*. Though obviously packed with tourists and tourist-y merchandise, I found Venice to be a fantastic city, if for nothing else but utter admiration of the whole concept. Our particular reason for visiting Venice was to see

the *Biennale* (Biennial), an international art exhibition that is pulled together every 2 years and has been going on since the 1920s, I think. My favorite was the hands-on Brazilian exhibit where a nearly

half-gymnasium sized room was fashioned into walls, ceiling and columns of well, what was a bit like white panty hose...but the FLOOR was like a 30' x 40' bean bag! *That* made my day.

We visited the famous arched bridge (above) *Ponte di Rialto*, and peeked down lots of quaint 'streets' of water and little stone archways and laundry hanging out and all the things you might think only existed in stories. I even saw a motorboat with a little plastic bath-toy tugboat trailing along behind it! If Romans adorn their homes with plants (and they certainly do, by the looks of the terraces) then Venecians adorn theirs with lights...elaborate chandeliers and the like. I assume it is for the effect on the water - which was quite magical. And what a quiet city, really! No motorbikes, in fact -

very little traffic at all! Only small splashes of water from the canals made a sound in the dark sparkle of night. Enchanting, truly.

The first weekend of December I never would have imagined being where I was - picking olives north of Rome. A lovely German family whose children are students of mine invited us up to their home for the community event of olive picking! With catching nets underneath the trees it was a mix of ladders and tree-climbers that stripped the branches of their wares. From there, these olives will be made into oil, while others are soaked in a variety of wine or spices that make them suitable for eating. Take my advice and don't try them straight off the tree. No, really. 🙄



# Holiday in the Holy Land

20 January 2002

Of all the places I expected to find snow, Israel was the LAST of them! But living abroad, I have gotten accustomed to surprises.

In letters from Israel to *The Delaware Gazette* in 1993, I described encounters with a new culture through the eyes of a 13-year-old American girl. Returning 9 years later, I have found some things familiar and some things just as foreign as ever. Kfar Hanassi, the *kibbutz* (Israeli village) where my Aunt Jane and her family live, once thrived on the shared dining, laundry, agricultural and industrial labor that were traditionally a part of communal living. Presently, members receive 20% of their wage and the remainder goes to the funds for general well being of everyone like health, education, utilities, etc. Although many things have changed, the socialist structure found on a *kibbutz* is definitely a unique and interesting way of life.

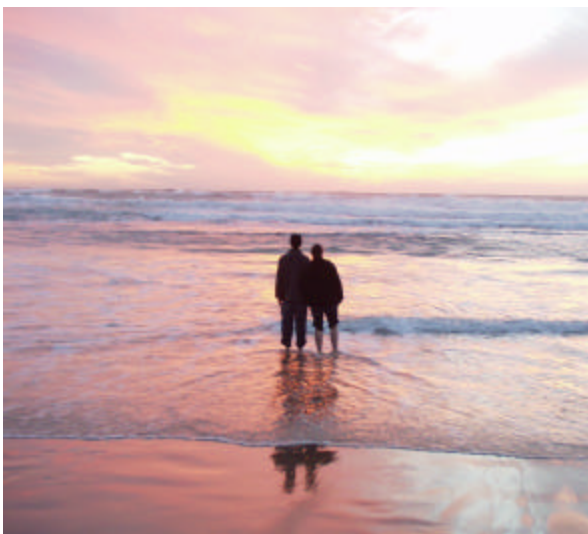


**Jerusalem Juxtaposition:** The Al-Aksa Mosque's *Dome of the Rock* towers above the *Wailing Wall*, where pilgrims tuck prayers in the cracks of the ancient Jewish temple wall.

After seeing the international news broadcasts of war-torn scenes, I sometimes think that we might picture the whole Middle East as being made up of crumbling adobe homes and sandaled villagers. But in contrast, on the drive north from the airport in Tel-Aviv, we passed numerous high-rise office buildings (of the 20+ story variety with neon-lit signs, billboards, and shopping malls complete with Burger King and Pizza Hut). However, my favorite local food remains to be good old-fashioned *humus* (chickpea paste) served with oven-fresh pita bread. YUM!

Translated from Hebrew, a '*Tel*', means 'mound' and is used to describe the phenomenon that occurs when a new city is built on the ruins of another which was built on top of another city and so on...thus creating a mound of earth with lots of ruins underneath! Loosely translated, 'Tel Aviv' could mean "The New City of Spring." While the modern city of Tel-Aviv has no ruins beneath *it*, numerous excavated or abandoned *tels* litter the Israeli countryside. If you can get past the lengthy descriptions, check out Michener's *The Source* for more info.

In the port city of Haifa, we visited a Navy museum of 'Clandestine Immigration,' so named because some unauthorized arrival of Jews from Europe began before the 1948 end of British occupation. My uncle, Isaak, first arrived to Palestine on the *Yagur*, one of these 'clandestine ships,' a sailing vessel whose passengers had fled Europe and survived the holocaust. His group was transported by the British military to prison camps in Cyprus before eventually being allowed to return to modern-day Israel. Many of Isaak's stories are intriguing for their historical content, yet amazing in their own right.



← We spent a few days in *Caesaria*, the ancient seaside-city built by King Herod to honor Caesar. The impressive ruins of a Roman Aqueduct graced the fine-sanded Mediterranean beach where my brother and I left our footprints. It's not every January that we see water warm enough to go wading!



### Jerusalem

When I visited in 1993, the Old City of Jerusalem was absolutely my favorite place. Its cobblestone streets, donkey carts, and spiritual pilgrims blended with the radiating energy of this ancient city was truly enchanting. But this time, I was heartbroken to find, my friends, that on January 6<sup>th</sup> (a holy day no less - *Epiphany* and Greek Orthodox Christmas) the Old City of Jerusalem was empty. Other than our small entourage and a few shopkeepers, desperate for business... I saw only a few other tourists.

Entering through Jaffa Gate, one of the 7 ancient gates to the walled city, we visited all the usual sights – and were greeted by similar scenes of desertion. How sad it is that nearly all of the visitors to one of the holiest cities for 3 of the world's major religions have been scared away by the violence and terror that have become characteristic to the area.

The only line we had to wait in was going through security at the entrance to the Wailing Wall. Male



**Old City stairs** : These ramps match the spacing of vendor pushcart wheels – based on a standard that is centuries old! Preserved like the spacing of roman chariots: in US railroads.

and female security lines were segregated just as the sections of the wall are divided for prayer. The 'Western Wall' or 'Wailing Wall' (see pic on opposite page) is the only remaining wall of the Jewish Temple. For centuries, pilgrims have flocked there to pray and place their written messages in the cracks of the ancient stones. Just above the Wall you can see the dazzling gold of the *Dome of the Rock*. In the same compound as the *Al Aksa Mosque* that is built on the spot where the Prophet Mohammed is said to have ascended to heaven.

I almost didn't recognize the empty courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which had been literally packed with people when I visited years before. The crowd of candle-carrying and precious-oil-bearing pilgrims from 1993 was nowhere to be found. The holy sites housed by the Church (places of Jesus' crucifixion and burial) are revered by Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Armenian and a long list of other Christian denominations. I found it quite interesting to learn that, perhaps to avoid quarreling, the key to the massive front door of the Church is traditionally held by... a Muslim family!

The next day, *snow* fell in Jerusalem. It also fell, for the second time in the last 30 years, at Aunt Jane's home on the *kibbutz* in the Galilee region. Let me remind you that 'snow days' are not nearly as common in Israel as

### *Shalom!*

**And Allahsalamallekum...**



With three official languages (Hebrew, Arabic, English) in three distinct scripts, nearly every time something is posted, it is written in *all three* languages. Naturally the written and verbal understanding of each language leaves room for error in the translation, and often – comedy. The city of 'rah-VEED' has a 'WELCOME TO RABID' sign posted at its entrance, and a museum asks that patrons 'PLEASE PUT PEPPER IN THE GARBAGE CAN' while letter transposition in the sign shop must have led to the warning on the breezy Galilee hills 'BEWARE OF WESTERN WINPS'

they are in Ohio, so when school was cancelled, it was twice as exciting! They even added 'sno cone' syrup for a tasty snack. Let me assure you that the snow on the Golan Heights makes snowballs just as well as in Ostrander. And the view... was breathtaking.

### Day Trips

Using Kfar Hanassi as a base, we took several day trips, during which we could easily cover a lot of ground, since the entire country is only about the size of New Jersey.

Leaving the *kibbutz*, crossing the Jordan River, and travelling up through the Golan Heights, we saw bright orange signs hanging on the barbed wire fences of surrounding fields. They read, "Danger, Mines!" in Hebrew, Arabic and English, the country's 3 official languages. Yikes!



*Kal'at Nimrod looking over the deep, narrow valley separating Mt. Hermon from the Golan Heights - and the road linking the Galilee with Damascus (in present-day Syria).*

It was later explained that these minefields are left over from before 1967 when the Golan Heights were controlled by the Syrian army. Today, only grazing cattle are found on these rugged and stony hillsides.

At one point, upon arriving at our destination higher up the mountain, we were startled by the two military helicopters circling the plateau where we stood. It was a vivid reminder of our location near the contested border and sadly, a reminder of the times. I think I might now have a clue as to the fear instilled in villagers as military choppers swoop overhead. But I suppose this is every-day life for Israel. How lucky I am to have lived my life in such security!

Onward and upward we went, toward the slopes of Mt. Hermon and to the ruins of a fortress built in 1227 by Salah-a-Din and his Muslim allies as a defense against the crusaders. It was most impressive upon approach. We navigated our way around lookout towers,

overgrown gardens, the water system (a VERY advanced development for that time) and through the numerous stone-pillared rooms and arched halls of Nimrod Fortress.

Circling down a spiral staircase through three still-standing levels of defense towers, the only light was that slicing through narrow slits in the stone wall where archers once hid from would-be invaders on the opposite slopes.



**Kfar Hanassi** (near the star) is just to the north of the Sea of Galilee, **Akko** is at the western coast – on the Mediterranean. Note: 'Yerushalayim' = **Jerusalem**

Wow! I mean, this was a REAL castle, even if most of the roof was missing. The destruction by an earthquake in 1759 led to its ultimate abandonment.

Another tourist attraction, this time near the southern end of the Sea of Galilee on the Jordanian border, was the Hot Springs at Hamat Gader. Now commercially updated, the warm sulfur baths were once used by the Romans. A large 'hot tub' (Olympic pool size) is adorned with seats, jets, and waterfalls. Once you get used to the smell of sulfur, I have to admit, it was quite relaxing! Though initially wary of the adjoining crocodile farm, I learned that local fish farms take advantage of the warm water temperature by raising tropical fish (in separate tanks from the people).

On the sparkling Sea of Galilee (which is more of a lake, really) we visited several biblical landmarks where churches have been built to commemorate various stories or people. Capernum, the fishing village where the apostle Peter once lived, holds the remains of a synagogue where Jesus first preached. How amazing that the newest of these 2nd and 3rd generation structures is still just under 2000 years old!

The more contemporary frescos and white marble dome of the Church of the Beatitudes is placed with a nice view of the Sea, where it marks the traditional site of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Scott and I also got a chance to see a realistic version of the scattered stone ruins at the reconstructed village and synagogue of Qazrin (kats-REEN). Among the two-story stone buildings were period-authentic wooden scaffolding, ladders, clay jars, ovens and tools that would have been part of daily life in this ancient village.



One of our visits was to the nearby Old City district of Akko (or Acre), a sea port pre-dating Phoenician times.

We visited the recently excavated Crusader quarters including enormous 'Knights Halls' with column-supported cross-vaulted ceilings. I could almost imagine the long table around which the Crusaders must have gathered in these halls where wrought iron candle-lit chandeliers might have hung above.

← **The Old Square in Akko.**

*Stables in the foreground with the minaret of a Mosque above*

At nearby Rosh HaNikra, on the Lebanon-Israel border, there are a twist of tunnels and steep, stark cliffs reachable only by cable car. Looking through (nature-carved) picture windows toward the Mediterranean, we watched as kayakers ducked into the caves where crystal-blue water crashed against the contrasting brilliant white of the cavern walls.

Armenian, Israeli or *whatever...*) only wish for days when they can safely send their children to school and gather back at home for supper – without fear.

In the eyes of most, it is only the small minority of extremists who spoil the chances. And any loss of life is a loss for the common goal of all of these people - peace. But we never expected the Berlin Wall to come down, and it did. There is always hope. 🌍

**Middle-Eastern Realities**

In Israel, military service is obligatory for both boys and girls (18-22 yrs). The army is very visible throughout the country, and soldiers are just as likely to be found grabbing lunch in the mall food court as posted on snowy mountaintops or hitchhiking home from their bases. It certainly is a different world than I see at home.

On the *kibbutz* there were plenty of cable movie channels in English, broadcast with subtitles in a variety of languages (we even saw *The Fellowship of the Ring* at a nearby theatre). During the period without violence in the ending weeks of 2001, I had a feeling of disbelief, with a kind of too-good-to-be-true label having been stamped on the calm around me. On the kibbutz, we could get MTV, BBC and CNN.

Text underneath the picture identifies 'the family' all together on Kfar Hanassi...*Scott, David, Cheryl, Lloyd, Raanan, Helen, Isaak, Jane, Gabi, Michaella, Maya and Dafna (friend).* →

It was there that I watched the breaking news about the capture of a weapons shipment destined for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

As the reports of wounded Palestinians and Israelis increased in the days following, I felt there was a universal sigh of disappointment. It seems to me, that the majority of people living in the state of Israel (whether Muslim, Jewish, Bedouin, Palestinian, Russian, Christian, Arab,



# ‘The Most Beautiful City in the World’

*For a break in February, I went up to the Czech Republic to visit a former Czech co-worker - now attending Charles University in the capital city, Prague.*

**23 February 2002**

Let me begin by clearing up one thing about the Czech Republic. When it is wintertime, you can depend on it being COLD. The climate is far from that of the mild Mediterranean temperatures that I have been used to. And no, it's not Czechoslovakia (not since 1989 anyway). But if you didn't know that, you are not alone.

Wearing nearly all the clothes I own (on this side of the Atlantic) I ventured into my first day in what my host Jan ('YAHN') insists is 'the most beautiful city in the world.' But now that I have *seen* it, I must agree - Prague IS beautiful.

A mixture of architectural styles like baroque, the gothic Middle Ages up to the present, it was a little surreal to be in a place so storybook-like. A living phenomenon in that its buildings were not destroyed in the World Wars, *Praha* is divided into two sections of the new and old.

After meeting me at the airport and taking a bus to the subway system, the first place we emerged was at the National Museum. We didn't bother to see the exhibit about the Prague Zoo, but the building was impressive enough. Above each window was the name of a different Czech Hero. Climbing up the wrapped staircase, the outdoor mezzanine gave an impressive view of the square. I also

noticed something in all of the similarly marble structured buildings that I assume is common wintertime practice - just inside the main doors was a little foyer of tall, heavy curtains draped over railings around the entrance. It kept the bitter cold air from rushing into the entry halls, and probably saves on heating.

Czech Republic; his teacher came into the classroom the and said 'don't call me comrade anymore, call me *Teacher*.' But, 'People are starting to forget,' Jan says of the aging generations. 'They think it wasn't so bad.' His grandmother and her twin sister were both commandos in the war – *snipers even*, the family boasts.



Just in front of the National Museum was a very interesting memorial to demonstrators. It looked like two railway ties, slightly bowed up, then down, in a cross. But they were not standing erect with a plaque, rather they were imbedded in the sidewalk, with the pattern of cobblestones parting to swallow them up. Jan told me it was the site where two people - on different occasions - lit themselves on fire in protest of Czech persecution... What a sad and intriguing past the country has.

Though he was young, Jan speaks with certain conviction about the impact that communism had on people. He remembers the 'Velvet Revolution' when Czechoslovakia split into Slovakia and present-day

In our walks along the streets, building after building enchanted me with its individual splendor. Baroque façades and gothic towers seemed to be around every turn. Cobblestone sidewalks (usually in some sort of decorative pattern) were under the feet of *Praha* visitors. We also passed the green and white first public theatre (built of stone) where Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was premiered. Wow. That is old.

Jan reminded me of one of his favorite Czech composers whose CD he gave me - Smětena's 'My Country.' The second movement is about the river that runs through Prague. Boasting a rich musical heritage, Antonín Dvořák is perhaps the most internationally know Czech composer - with his (jaws-like intro) *New World Symphony*.



### The clock in the Old Town Square

As we reached the Square of the Old Town, we were lucky enough to arrive on the hour, just in time to see the Astronomical Clock. (*pic above.*)

Joining the swarm of tourists gathered around, we watched as the doors opened, the skeleton rang the bell, and the saints paraded past, one at each window. After about 10 seconds, it was over, the crowd dispersed, and we climbed about 8 flights of (crosshatched metal ramps in place of) stairs up the clock's tower. If I wasn't dizzy from the climb - the view did it! Wow.

Across the square to the twin spires, or opposite to the red rooftops of the Old Town. Jan snapped a picture of me in the corner of the tower - hopefully I didn't have my head *in front* of Prague Castle, standing stout on the hillside behind me.

At the world famous Charles Bridge, we climbed the tower at its entrance. Since all of these 'tower tours' were run by the city, the student discount was only a difference of 10 Kč (30 for me, 20 for him - a total of less than

\$2.00 all together!). Jan also put his spare change into an offering box, telling me 'this is how the national theatre was restored - with public money.' Another fantastic view greeted us at the top. Jan pointed out the multi-story dance club where different music could be found on each level. Other standard tourist shops lined the adjoining street.

A pedestrian bridge lined with venders-of-tourist-y-things (drawings and figurines and portrait-painters and jewelry makers), the identifying statues of the saints were placed on the bridge by its namesake, Charles IV. Someday I'll have to do a little research to see why everyone was stopping to touch the relief of a (saint? and his) dog. People posed for pictures and everything! Seemed like some sort of ritual, but nobody bothered to touch the person, just the dog.

Later, we went up, and really UP the winding sidewalk staircase to Prague

Castle. (The first time we attempted the climb, it was too cold, too windy, and they seemed to be filming a movie nearby.) Possibly the most famous building in Prague is this gothic cathedral. After waiting outside for the changing of the guards, we ventured into the massive cross-shaped structure, with stunning stained glass windows lining its grand white-stone hall. Jan pointed out how the cross-vaulted ceiling is in the manner of prayer-folded hands. Noting the small ornate chapels off to the sides, we also ventured down into the crypts underneath the cathedral. 'It's very large,' Jan joked, 'Don't go wandering around.' I didn't. In one room, we looked in on the tombs of 5 or 6 Czech kings. In the center was Charles IV. To the left, were all four of his wives. Two named Anna. All in one box. Hmm.

In the old parliament buildings (after we passed a man who seemed to be chiseling cobblestones that didn't wear



In stark contrast to the baroque façades in the Old Town square, is an impressive monument to Jan Hus. The inscription below his statue reads, roughly - 'tell the truth, and love each other.' My *guide* Jan tells a story of when the church elders were controlling the Czech kingdom and exploiting tax collection for their own enjoyment. Jan Hus cried blasphemy and protested – standing up for the good of the people. 'Invited' to Germany to explain his position, he was burned. The monument stands in honor of his service and memory of the execution of this national hero.

## Scusa, Which Way...

Wandering around Prague, two elderly ladies stopped Jan, a Czech native and I (not) to ask directions. He pointed the way we had just come, and spoke to them for a few moments. Smiling to us, the woman said 'spaciba' which I recognized as NOT being Czech for *thank you*.

'They're Russians?' I asked Jan...  
'But you spoke Czech to them!'

He shrugged, 'Close enough. They'll find what they were asking for.' Ha!

at the same rate as those around it) we saw several portraits of princes and princesses, as well as national documents and other pieces of old Czech government. A large green-glazed oven stood in the corner of several of the cold-stone walled rooms. Ahh – that's much cozier! Law books, written before they were organized by number, were arranged by the color and picture that appeared on their binding. Neat!

Walking back to the center of town, we passed buildings that used same medieval system; pre-house-numbers, the buildings were identified by the symbols above the door - 'six pointed star' or 'two suns.' Living in Europe, I am constantly reminded of exactly how *young* the United States is!

Speaking of, we passed the American Embassy on our way back down the hill. With sidewalks roped off and *policie* nearby, a small stars-and-stripes bunting-adorned balcony protruded from the second floor of the white marble building face. When the doors opened, I had to giggle when a man (the janitor?) with his large belly peeking out from underneath his T-shirt walked to the

edge, placed his arms on the railing (as if it was his front porch) and said to us 'hello!' A little startled, we both responded with 'ciao' and 'hi' (foreign languages respective to the speakers) and proceeded to the notice board. I REALLY wanted to stop and take a picture, or perhaps attempt further conversation, but the guard out front already looked a little nervous... moments later Jan's translation of the radio chatter was confirmed - the ambassador drove out!

I haven't been to an American Embassy since leaving home, nearly 6 months ago now. But if the reality of September 11th hadn't already started to rear its ugly head in the few bits of American news I have gotten, the 'notice to Americans abroad' posted at the embassy in Prague put things into perspective. The advisory gave a blanket warning to 'lay low' (good advice for stereo-typically ignorant and obnoxious tourists) and 'beware of kidnappers.' Also posted was the introduction of an anti-terrorist profiling form - to be filled out by ALL MALE visa applicants between the ages of 17 and 45. Yikes. And here I am traveling from country to country with a smile and (if I'm lucky) a stamp on my passport, no hassle.

Later, we visited the Zoo in Prague, and Jan took me to a building of mirrors - built for a fair some years ago. 'It was fun when I was a kid' Jan commented when we emerged from the maze of warped mirrors: slightly dazed and more than slightly confused. He

also told me that the wall around the garden in which the House of Mirrors was held was known as the 'Wall of tears' or 'hungry wall' because during a historic famine, a king had kept all the food behind it from the people.

The next day, we *just* managed to catch the train to a Castle outside of Prague, built (once again) by Charles IV (this must have been SOME guy) to house Czech treasures. Strategically placed, it is no wonder that it was never conquered. Too bad that it was closed for the winter. I TOLD them 'that's what the sign at the train station said,' but as they explained, Czechs never trust signs. Fine. But with the man glaring out of the tower window above the barred and clearly closed gate (with ENGLISH signs), we finally admitted defeat. Never mind, we had a nice walk up one side of the hill and down the other.

While tourist shops of 'typical Czech glass-craft' and cappuccino (hmm?) lined either side of the 'up' trip, the 'down' journey was merely a path marked by hiking symbols. I noticed that everyone's driveway went from their door, over a small creek to the street in front. It wasn't until later that I realized nearly every town we passed through had a similar set up. Jan told me it was left over from the Middle Ages when every village needed... water!



## Velký Šenov

Taking a bus from the furthest Prague subway stop, we traveled through the countryside for about 2 hours to Jan's home in the north, stopping every couple of towns. At one point, in the darkness, he explained how on one side, was the Czech Republic, and on the other was Germany. Wow. Cool.

It was like the three (or two) stooges when we finally got to Velký Šenov, where everyone always seems to fall back on silly-ness when language barriers prevent intelligent conversation. Jan's brother Martin offered me the keys to the car when we got off the bus, but not having been behind the wheel for 6 months, I didn't think that a stick shift in a foreign country, in the cold, dark night was the place to start!

Jan's family was all bright-eyed and smiley to meet me - giving a warm reception from the bitter cold. (That is, after they got over the initial shock; 'She doesn't speak Czech OR German?!' But we managed.) And as I have found to be typical - we were once again - off to the pub... There was another Olympic hockey match to be watched!

While I learned that the waiter was released from a US prison after dealing cocaine (yikes!), he was nice enough to bring me a Velký Šenov 'salat' (salad) of some kind of sausage meat with bread. That is, even though Jan said it was illegal to serve food after 3pm, 'nobody cares.' Typical of most of the Czech 'pub' establishments, they are restaurants by day - beer/gathering place by night. And while you may want to play pool with a Czech flag tacked on the wall behind you, don't stand in front of the TV.

We later retired to a friend's flat for the hockey game that night. Martin was obviously struggling with his English, but we managed a halfway decent conversation for a good portion of the evening. Their friend Eva sat to his left, feeding questions and demanding translations (Jan asked me to translate 'nosey' for him) but it was very interesting.

At one point, evidently frustrated with having to work through translations, Eva simply went to the CD cabinet and placed Whitney Houston's album in front of me - with the twin towers on the front. They asked what I felt



Represented here is the equivalent of about \$10 – with each Koruna (Kč) being worth about 35 cents! Although 10 bucks went last long in the States – with beer at 15-30 Kč a pint (\$0.50-\$1) – I could afford a week of 'drinks on me' - even on a budget!

about it. Wow. (And English is Martin's third language, I might remind you.) I mentioned how my boyfriend and several college friends are Muslim, and how I couldn't in any way blame the actions of a few people on the place from which they came, or a religion they share - as I think is only fair, for everyone's sake.

I forget how he phrased the question, but Martin asked me if I thought some good could come from September 11th. I explained that I

thought what happened was terrible... but I thought that it opened the eyes of many Americans - to issues of the world that we couldn't understand before, because we had never had a war on our soil, or been 'occupied' since our independence. Though I was impressed that Martin didn't consult the dictionary too much, rather, he chewed a little bit on his thoughts before choosing his words. 'I think you are very bold.' He, and I, wonder if other Americans will one day be able to see past the hurt to feel the same way - and say it. I pray for the best.

## School Days

The next morning, on foot, Jan and I crossed over the railroad tracks to walk alongside the trestle to the station for the train to the elementary school where Martin teaches. Jan pointed out the mechanical

crank where the man came out to raise and lower the crossing gates 100 yards up track. When a

single carriage pulled up, I almost said aloud 'where's the rest of the train?' We climbed aboard and sat on bench seats while the inspector came around to gather our tickets. It was like a bus with train wheels! Ha! [In a Czech airline magazine on my return flight, I found a picture of a train carriage in Czechoslovakia from 1987 or so – IT LOOKED THE SAME! Ha!]

As we approached the school - the unmistakable sound of CHILDREN could be heard seeping out of the



Shortly after my arrival, the class assembled at the door, where we paraded, one leg of the journey at a time to buy 'rolls' (I would have called them bread sticks) so we could feed the ducks - on our way to the nearby church. The German woman who takes care of the church told the children the story of the spring that runs there. Just like I had seen covering the flowers in the Prague parks, evergreen branches were laid all around the spring to keep it from freezing. She handed out post cards (and I later heard that she apologized profusely to Martin for not having the key to the organ so I could play - How sweet!) Jan walked me past the adjoining cemetery of white stone monuments, pointing out that many of the older graves are left completely overgrown. A newer section lay on another hillside.

windows. Stepping inside, pairs of little eyes looked up at us in wonder. Translating an identifiable whisper of 'americky?' Jan laughed, 'It's her, the American!' He explained that most of these children had never seen a real, live American before!

Martin led us up to his classroom, where his 11 children quickly shuffled behind their desks and stood respectfully, beaming at me. Surreal! 'It's like a greeting' Jan explained. I hope I wasn't so rude as to forget to manage an 'Ahoj.' Other faces gathered at the door and I realized they were all wearing (Martin included) house slippers! While it is common practice in many homes, I suppose it is because of the muddy and wet ground that is characteristic of most of the Czech year that the shoe exchange probably makes maintaining classroom cleanliness easier.

In this primary school, Martin explained that he is one of 4 teachers for the 60 students. Assuring me that he loves his job, he is the same age as

me, and has already served his 1-year of mandatory military time. Not trained for teaching, he is paid less than the equivalent of \$300/month. That is half of my part-time salary, which is half of my roommate's salary who complains that he barely survives. I guess that is why everything is so cheap in CZ - prices must be relative to the wages.

In the Czech Republic, even the smallest towns will have one of the typical Czech churches with simple outside, and ornate golden scenes at the altar. Few of them, however, have active congregations;





rather, it is only a few elderly women that tend them. Jan suspects that it was sometime during communism when people stopped attending regularly. 'Communism didn't like churches.' I could speculate that it was because faith reinforced the belief in something other than communism itself. Or maybe it fostered ambition... or something.

But for a country full of churches, Jan reckons that 'believers' are few.

Back in Martin's classroom, I gave a short guitar *konzert* while the children 'made pictures' for me. One girl sang the English alphabet, and another sang a phonetic version of the theme from Titanic (although she didn't speak English - like Americans trying to sing *Macarena* if they don't speak Spanish) Wow. Neat kids. The artwork (which I hung on the walls of my apartment back in Rome) was actually pretty impressive too!

At a whole school *konzert* of more guitar, piano and singing, the teachers asked lots of interesting questions. The hardest to answer caught me off guard: 'What is the biggest difference between Europe and the US?' was one, and 'Is it really a free country?' I have to admit; I've been in Europe so long now, that I'm starting to forget exactly how different it is. Even more difficult was being asked to narrow it down to 'the biggest difference.' Boh!? (Oh, that's Italian for 'Durr, I dunno!')



**Wenceslas Square** has a large pedestrian mall of patterned cobblestones, dotted with squares of green – one containing a monument to struggling Czechs. Dominating the end closest to the National Museum is the statue of Saint Wenceslas (who also ruled at one time) sitting atop his horse. Jan says it is a common meeting place in the city... 'under the horse's rear.'

Jan teases me about the 'Imperialist Americans who eat children,' but it reminds me to wonder what the rest of the world really thinks of the US. Especially based on what gets out... everyone here knows who The Simpsons and Jerry Springer are! I'm afraid I've been so busy soaking up the culture around me that sometimes I forget to get their impressions of my *own* home culture?!

I was very pleased to meet everyone at Martin's school, and I had to remind myself that it is the thought that counts...when a teacher waved goodbye saying 'Hello, Hello!' Whoops, I guess that's what you get when you try to translate from a language that uses the same word for its greeting and farewell. *Ahoj!*

School was over midday, so Martin joined Jan and I for lunch at a local pub. Jan pointed out that since we were on the border, many Germans came over to spend their more weighted currency – (previously

*Deutschmarks*) we could even use Euros!

Back in Velký Šenov, yet *another* Olympic hockey match was on, which I was warned not to disturb. But at the pub, Jan and Martin's friends begged me to play my guitar quietly in the corner. It was a struggle to find common tunes, although they recognized a couple guitar riffs, and sang a bit of *Puff the Magic Dragon*.

Back in Prague for my last night in CZ, we made an appearance at the local ...Karaoke Bar! Man, do they love Whitney Houston!

On our way there, Jan made efforts to purposely design our snacks around experiencing 'typical Czech dishes.' On the street, this might include a sausage in bread or a fried cheese sandwich with mayonnaise. But at home, you could almost depend on Czech dumplings (slices of squishy bread) drizzled with gravy and meat. For a couple meals we slipped into a place called Einstein Pizza (where Jan's student card got us a discount), and we even had a lunch at a Chinese Restaurant in one of the subway stations (which was WAY better than the bland Italian '*Cinese*' food in Rome).

Okay, so we *did* have KFC for supper one night (it was just so CHEAP) and breakfast while watching the construction workers at Dunkin' Donuts. But not only did I NOT see anyone *dunking* their donuts, but somehow I don't think many Czechs would know where Kentucky is. Funny though, it still tastes like chicken. 🌐

# Easter in Austria

*E-mails after visiting Eric, a college classmate working in Vienna...*

01 April 2002



Hiya and Happy Easter/ Pesoch!  
Just wanted to let you know that I'm home from Vienna.

I took an overnight train last night – I haven't gotten all the way back to the flat yet, but I certainly had an interesting time - especially this morning...

The train TO Vienna was definitely fun! My (non-bed) cabin was a chance mix of all English-speakers: myself, plus a Chicagoan, two B. C. Canadians (fresh from their

engagement in Greece) and a Hungarian girl that studies in Rome! After a feet-in-each-others armpits arrangement for the sleeping portion of our journey, we expressed our common relief that we had been so fortunate to have been among such (non: smelly men who don't speak English-type) nice people.

Nothing beats waking up the next morning to the cool mountain air – pulling back the curtains in our passenger car to reveal the Austrian Alps. Wow.

I spent lots of the time in Vienna just kind of bumming around. Eric and I took a walking tour of the city - Vienna's majestic opera house etc. We even saw the Jewish Museum and the Easter Market of glass and eggshell festiveness (*pic below*). In the end, I resolved to the fact that it was okay if I just wanted to hang out in the sunshine of their backyard. Meanwhile, the *Heurigen* [wine bar] owner next door offered '[you want some] *schnapps*?' over their shared garden fence – (at 10 am no less!) since it was, after all, vacation.

By the way, did you know '*Wiener Schnitzel*' is just 'Viennese Schnitzel'



(turkey hammered flat, then fried). Basically, anything called 'Wiener' (VEE-nur) just means 'from Vienna' as the German (language) name for the city is 'Wien.' (VEEN) Hmph. You learn something new every day if you're not careful!

Eric's American roommate Caroline and I took a day trip to a nearby city to see the mustard colored Abbey (*above right*) in Melk (the views of the quaint Austrian town look like absolute postcards (*see pic, opposite page*→)). Plus when Eric's family came to visit, we

I noticed something kind of cool about Austrian **license plates**. At the left is the crest for the *district* where the car was registered. (forgot to get a pic!) Like having a symbol, depending on your county. Since the formation of the European Union, most new plates (*below*) have the EU flag with a



country-specific code (F= France, I= Italy, etc.) Hmm. Maybe I'll get one for my collection...too bad the plates usually stay with the car instead of renewed every few years like the in the US!



went to an English-language church went to an English-language church service. For the first time in a while, I knew all the tunes, if not the words!  
(If only I hadn't stayed up with Eric's housemates the night before – listening to the Beatles and decorating Easter eggs, maybe I could have stayed awake for the sermon more easily.) We met some nice people - even a couple that was from Oxford, Ohio. Not bad for the first time at church in 8 months, I reckon.



When it sunk in that it had been the 25-year-old from the train that would be seeing his family in Bangladesh for the first time in 5 years - I had to smile. I often wondered what would become of him after our Easter Monday breakfast. Now I know! \*He made it.\* God be praised.

**Epilogue: June 12, 2002**

When I took the train back to Rome and saw that a crowd of South-Asians was in the cabin I was assigned to, I knew it was going to be an interesting trip. Only one of them stayed - and we had a nice trip. 'Sheik' was from Bangladesh and had taken *refugee status* in Vienna. It was VERY interesting to hear him explain his spin on the situation in his homeland, and Bangladeshis abroad. Because of his refugee status, he told me, he can do everything *except* return home where his family has remained since he left 5 years ago. 'Money no problem' he said, 'only papers.' When he crossed the border, unscathed, he was so relieved (and as he repeatedly told me, elated at the possibility of seeing his family again) - he was sure that I was good luck. In fact, when we got off the train and met his friend at *Termini* (central station), they insisted that I join them for breakfast across the street - at McDonalds!

I am, again, forced to realize how very fortunate I am to carry an American passport. The Hot Cakes weren't bad either.

**P.S. Sequel: 25 April 2002**

Yesterday morning (much to early for anyone in the US to call) a cheery voice on my mobile phone said in sketchy (and I suspect, rehearsed) English: 'Helen? I am Sheik... Yesterday I get my *permesso di soggiorno* [official Roman 'permit to stay' documents], today I buy my ticket, tomorrow I see my mother!' 'That's great! Today?' I managed. 'Yes, 12 o'clock, British Airways, then I see my family. Ok, I talk to you later. Bye-bye Helen.' \*click\*

I hadn't been in England for a few hours and was just sitting down to my first 'family' meal in a LONG time when... ring-di-ding went my Italian *telefonino*. Who should it be, but the unmistakable broken English of Sheikh...

'I am in Bangladesh! I see my family! I am vedy, (very) happy! Thank you!'

No Sheik, thank you. For showing me how fortunate I am, and the joy to be seen in God's blessings. ☺



← Italy's 10 cent piece from *The Birth of Venus*

**Quanto Costo?**

**Euros – the new currency.**

Lucky for me, I was in Israel on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, the day the rest of Europe switched currencies. While 1,900 Lire became just 1 Euro, it was a little surreal to cross the border between two different European countries, and not switch currencies. While the fronts of the coins are identical, the back of each one shows a symbol from its country of origin (much like the new American Quarters – with state-specific backs, with G. Washington still on the front). It is this cathedral, St. Stephandom, whose striking silhouette is notably Austrian, that graces their 10 cent piece, pictured here.



# Adventures of Roman Transport

From an e-mail to my family.

Sunday, 05 May 2002

This is a little update on some of the adventures I've had recently. I hope you find it enjoyable, if not thoroughly confusing. ☺

Luckily, this episode involves no mention of 'strike' that I have only had minimal problems with. Nor will I speculate as to why busses SUDDENLY stopped running at about 10pm last Wednesday, as opposed to during the *business day* on an Italian Public Holiday. Luckily, Naomi had a spare couch about a 1/2 mile up the hill from the bus stop.

On my way here, as I got on a less than crowded subway car, a familiar guitarist and his companion got on with the traditional '*buona sera tutti*' (Good evening everybody...) Except this time his partner, who I'm sure had a different instrument before (maybe an accordion?), had a tiny drum set. Two little toms on a stand,



Lucky, for once, to have a seat – Here I am at the *fermata* (bus stop) where, once again the bus was running late. Notice *E.T.* on the billboard.

## Un Altra Discourse

### At the Corner Café

You might never imagine that language barriers could be overcome so easily, and you know what - sometimes they can't! But as I sat at the tiny café table one afternoon, sipping cappuccino, I realized what a phenomenon existed. Around the table... *Claudia*, the BVHS exchange student from Germany, who spoke English with me and German with *Eric*, my classmate from Wooster who had been working for a study-abroad program office in Austria, sitting next to *Tim*, the younger brother of one of my English co-workers at the New School, who in fact, had been born in Italy, and lived there when he was a child. Next to him were *Tarek* and *Fathi*, two Egyptians speaking Arabic to each other and Italian to anyone who would listen, regardless of whether or not they understood. A beautiful sight - smiles all around. ☺

and as he leaned against one of the orange poles (usually surrounded by people hanging on for dear life), he then created an impressive drum set, tapping on the other orange pole... creating a super-cool ride-cymbal effect. (Maybe only Paul Skedell can appreciate that, but if anyone else will imagine - it was really neat!) I was actually going to drop my pocket full of change into one of their tip cups (which are *always* the indestructible cups from McDonalds) when we arrived at the *Flaminio* station...

With an (in-?) human 'whoosh' of 'oohhhho' about 192309134 people rushed, rather, *crammed* into the tiny car, all but smashing me against the opposite doors. As I realized that they were all wearing the same 2 shades of red and orange... and appeared to be all male, I remembered: AH! *Football!*

That's soccer in America-speak). How could I forget that there was a Roma match today?

Anyhow, when the smooch of humanity finally seemed to stabilize, the couple in front of me asked over their shoulder if I had wanted to get off. In fact, I had two more stops to go - but if you've ever played with one of those puzzles where you slide the pieces around, or if you have even experimented with water displacement - I could see some relevance. Anyway, as I mumbled something about wanting to get off in two stops, the aforementioned couple stepped to the side and announced 'make way for this girl!' as I began my trek across the 8' car. By the next stop, I had reached mid-way with a combination of '*scusi*'s and '*permesso*'s and holding my backpack up like a *polizia* riot-gear shield. But as we approached my stop, it was a combination of 'Look out - this one wants to get off' and a number of faces grinned and arms raised while others squeezed me through the gauntlet of shoulders and poles so that I somehow found myself \*plop\*ing onto the platform unscathed! For a minute there, I thought I was gonna have to ride to the end of the line and take ANOTHER subway train back to where I wanted to be!

Actually, I don't think words do the description trick. Try popping your thumb out of your cheek. Yeah, it was something like that.

Now, so far, that is the saga of today.

Never mind last night when I took a walk, pleased at my anonymity in the warm Roman night. As I came to a small *piazza* (cobblestone square) a block from my house, a tall figure in a typically Romanesque denim jacket with upturned collar said '*ciao (H)Elena!*' Would you believe it was one of the 5 or so 'characters' in my Monte Mario life: Egyptian, bus-catching-man, Tarek! Just finished with work, he asked what I was doing out so late. '*un giro?*' (which is sort of the Italian way of saying 'having an around' or well, 'taking a spin?'...if that translates). I nodded, realizing that it is my new favorite word, since it is also used to describe how to 'turn over' your ticket for the machines on the bus how to 'stir' tea and even how to tell someone their shirt is on inside-out. In fact, I am so pleased at the multiple usages of nearly every word in the Italian language. Although my proficiency is still minimal - I love the fact that you only have to know about 10 words to say 100 things. I mean, *prego* isn't just a spaghetti sauce anymore!

As I grabbed a pizza on my way here to the internet cafe, I had another row with *pizzeria* owner Donato, who seems to be getting cheekier as the week goes on. Today he cranked up the *televisione* in the *pizzeria* to dance along to an Italian Broadway-esque version of Popeye the Sailor Man. (I know, who woulda thunk it) - cigarette in one hand, and a typical 'shot' of *café* in the other. I had to laugh. I shook my head explaining that I just 'didn't understand' Italian

## Un Altra Discourse

### New Sandals

Out to grab lunch one afternoon, I bumped into one of the Egyptians on his way to work. Urging me to come with him into town, I pleaded that I couldn't go out in the already-once-mended flip-flops that I was wearing – it just wasn't fashionably acceptable for Italians! (nor is, evidently, leaving the house with wet hair or no lipstick!) 'So what – you never cared before!' was basically the response I got as we jumped on the bus.



At *Ottaviano*, just a few blocks from Vatican City, he got off to change busses, and I headed towards the post office for my weekly batch of post-cards (since sending them from the Vatican saves letting them get lost in the Italian post before getting out of the country). But at exactly that instant, the mending job that had held up until then, was pushed beyond its breaking point, popping open - so I attempted to hold it on with my toes. (If you have ever attempted this, you know how futile my efforts were.)

So I shuffled along, towards the '\*could it be!\* ...*shoe stand* set up on the sidewalk, just across the intersection, hoping the tourists, venders and mass of humanity that are ever-lingering near the Vatican wouldn't notice me.

Just as I was nearing (remember, I'm walking REALLY slowly) one of the stands, I winced to hear the characteristic Italian cat-call 'Tss, tss' from a figure leaning against the wall. Afraid to look up and run the risk of creating a scene that I had no means to resolve, I just shuffled on, trying to ignore it.

Funny thing though, the sound and the figure followed me! These Italians just don't give up, I thought to myself! I finally reached one of the stands and navigated my way off of the main sidewalk and in between two of the tent-like stands, limp flip-flop in tow. Exasperated and annoyed, yet relieved at the shelter of the tent, I mustered up my meanest 'dirty look' and shot it over my shoulder at my pursuer. Wait a minute! 'Sayeed!' It was Matteo's brother who had arrived in Italy from Egypt roughly the same time I had come from the US... This should give you an idea of our respective proficiency in the Italian language, and how we must have sounded like absolute idiots to our listeners:

'What are you doing! You big jerk! How are you?'

'I'm fine, fine, fine. My friend works at the pizzeria – are you hungry?'

'My shoe is broken!'

'No problem, this guy is Egyptian too, he'll give you a discount.'

What would Rome be without its *strangieri*? (foreigners)

And don't you know, the *strangieri* turned out to be not so different from me - not so *strange* after all!

One of those views that was so ordinary for a day in Rome, but yet, so extraordinary!



to ask, (in Italian of course, which could be the tricky part) if they know each other. Some how, I wouldn't be the slightest bit surprised. I mean, it's a small world after all, right?

I can hardly believe I've got to make all those homeward travel plans for dates (middle & end of June) that are actually, not so far away now! An exciting challenge, I wonder who and what I'll meet along the way this time, or until then, rather.

Love you much and hope you have had a fab weekend. Sorry if I'm sounding so 'British.' The Americans tease me about it all the time at my English-teaching course. It seems that I just end up using whatever language

each word happens to surface in. Allora...

television. I'm not sure I could properly explain why ... (I mean, a line of models in French-cut bathing suits and beauty-pageant smiles are the backdrop for nearly every talk show - no really - nearly every one, no matter what the subject of discussion. They are just there.) I didn't go on to tell him that my in-comprehension basically includes Italians in general.

Meanwhile, 'Matteo,' another (Egyptian: Ahmed) pizza-making man, called me to the kitchen door with the traditional exchange of Italian greetings. Asking if I had to work tomorrow, he explained that the shop is closed, so he is going swimming. Expressing regret and passing dancing-Donato as I went out to the street, I realized that Tarek had also said something about swimming (or motioned, really, since I didn't know the word for 'the

### Scusa, which way to...

#### II Trionfale Irony

Walking home from the *pizzeria* with Matteo one night, a car pulled up next to us and asked if he could explain where the Via Trionfale was. With my limited Italian, I always left direction giving to someone more proficient in the local language other than myself. Still, I understood when Matteo replied to him 'You're on it - just keep going straight.'

Only as the driver pulled away to reveal the Great Britain stickers plastered all over the back bumper did I realize that the DRIVER had leaned out the *right* side of this English-made car, to ask directions of an Egyptian, *in Italian*.

thing you do at the sea') on Monday, the only day that the *ristaurante* where HE works is closed. Thus, it occurred to me, ...being that they are both from Cairo, about the same age, and are most often spotted in the Monte Mario district - I'll have to work out how



# Lutimo Giorno

From an e-mail to my family.

01 June 2002

'Lutimo Giorno' I think it's called.

Last day.

Summer Fair at the New School was a huge success. A bucket of water perched precariously on a platform above a lawn chair at the 'Soak the Idiot' game, Jungle bingo, face painting, a horror house, international foods and several suspiciously yard-sale-esque tables of toys were among the more professional vendors' tables throughout the schools garden.

Auction and raffle prizes blared from the public address system in the lunch area, as I grabbed my guitar and headed for the 'red circle' (of bricks in the area of the garden) where the children have playtime and where our primary singing concert, dubbed 'Singing In The Garden' was to take place.

On my way, I passed Shelley Rulle, (an American classmate from International House, where I took my English as a Foreign Language Teacher Training, and whose presence I was truly honored by). I surveyed the scene to find only about five of the 17 students from Year 1 present for the first number. *Va bene.* (Whatever!) 'Okay children, who knows the Swimming Song? That's right, up you go, now line up over here...' and *Vòila* - cute children singing = instant success with ever-so-pleased adoring parents. *Whew!*

Year 2's rendition of 'I'm Being Eaten by a Boa Constrictor' was a smashing success of smiley children. Year 5 pulled together, after a week-



## *The New School Song*

To the Tune of  
'My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean'

On Via del-la Camilluccia  
There is a place called the New School  
The kids come from all dif'rent countries  
That's why we think it's really cool...

Oman, Sweeden, Le-ba-non  
Some of us are from Rome\_  
Sri Lanka, England A-mer-i-ca  
We all call The New School our home!

Kate is the name of our teacher  
There's Li-o-nel, Barb'ra and Claire.  
Don't forget Anne, Rachel, Glenda  
Or even Na-om-i out there →

Teach-ers make us  
Do lots of work every day:  
Maths, sport, spel-ling,  
But we love them anyway – Hooray!

*By Kate's Year 4 Class, 2002*

long trip away, to manage a respectable 'We're all Going on a Summer Holiday' with my help and even the few and reluctant boys of Year 6 joined in a short version of the Caribbean Calypso 'Hill an' Gully Rider' complete with bongos, to match the tropical Roman temps (at a mere 2 o'clock in the afternoon).

Year 3 stole the show with their hip-swinging version of an old Girl Scout favorite - "The Princess Pat". (I don't know WHO could have taught them THOSE motions!) And bless Year 4. Their 'New School Song' was a well-deserved hit for our finale.

As we finished and the crowd dispersed, the boys stood smiling while the girls did some sort of Helen-magnet trick after which I was surprised to find myself intact with guitar. Hugs from children are so pure and un-restrained, like...nothing else. It is true that Year 4 indeed has a lot of talent while, in fact, they are also my most blatant admirers... 'But Helen, you can't go...we have to staple you to the wall!'

A Year 4's father said how his daughter was plotting to climb into my suitcase and come back to America with me. (At Christmas she had a similar plan involving arriving in the US, climbing out, finding me, and 'bring-ing you back to I-ta-ly.') She and her Year 3 sister bestowed me with lovely cards for 'Hellen' yesterday, with identical messages of 'pleeeeeeease stai, or if you don't - at least come and visit!' \*sigh...\*

As I packed up my belongings and prepared to go home one last time, a shy 5-year old's big eyes looked up at me while she and her Dad approached. In his thick Pakistani accent, he told me that, 'my daughter wanted me to meet you - she seems to have this idea that her teacher is leaving...' Pleased to be able to greet him in Arabic (thanks Mansoor & Egyptians!) I told him that in fact I *was* leaving. 'Oh then, I'm sorry. She's really enjoyed you.' The girl had been a shy and almost immobile starter, and I had really enjoyed watching HER grow... (sniff...) I never knew she cared so much.

The blonde-framed face of another Year 4 student beamed up with crinkled eyebrows saying that she 'dimenticato'd ('forgot-ed') a card for me but 'aspetta just one second' and she returned with a lovely yellow potted plant. I plan on enjoying every last one of the 12 days that we have together before international custom regulations dictate our parting. (Friends in Monte Mario graciously offered to tend it in their own garden.)

While a Year 6 student attempted to physically prevent me from leaving the grounds, one of the first students that I got to know from Year 5 moaned that she couldn't hug me too much because she 'got in the way of the garden hose' and was 'very soaked.' Scribbling out my address, her mother sent me off with well wishes. I'll never forget the kindness of their lunch invitation after we ran in Rome's 'Race for the Cure' together the week before. For once, I had felt like I was part of a real community. In fact, it had been so atmospherically reminiscent of after-church 'Bellpoint-y' Sunday lunches, it almost made me tear up... instead I distracted myself playing kick ball with the kids.

While I didn't get to say too many actual good-byes, I did seek out the school's Romanian caretaker 'Mario' (who had filed down my Dad's American plug to fit into the Italian adapter) and I farewelled one of the senior students who's orange-roadworks (construction worker) - reflective-tape-trousers I had envied only last week. And the senior

school Pakistani kids – a brother and sister who were two of my first 911 bus route pals - on my way out. One last gracious Year 4's dad, strapped with a new baby, caught me, "Even I'm going to miss you - these car rides



in the morning have certainly been more interesting with the kids singing the whole way!"

And the darling 4-year old Italian who once marched up to me, on duty at the jungle gym, and gigglingly told me, with his limited, though thickly posh-English-accented voice that 'Hel-en... But, you have a beautiful voice,' and then ran away. Today, with his mother in tow, he tried to clarify a particular fact, 'But, Hel-en, isn't it

true that you are finished now because you taught us all the songs you know?'

On my way out, it was almost like going through a ritual - one last time - as I came out of the school gates and spotted the orange frame of the 911 bus just down the road. I once more ran past the *Caribanieri* posted outside the Omani embassy at as full speed as my new flippy sandals (*un'altra discourse* - eh, like 'but that's another story') could carry me. Yellow flowered plant, gift bags, guitar and handbag in tow, I turned around halfway up the hill to see that the bus was actually held up off the side of the road, and I had plenty of time... Ug! How very typical.

A relatively new Sri Lankan student was already on the bus when I eventually clambered through the door. 'So you're not coming back? Well then, it was nice to meet you...!' As I admired the view of my favorite valley in Rome, I took a seat near the front when she got off.

Knowing that it was a bittersweet time as I left the New School behind, I grinned at the day's memories, of the year's experiences, of the month to come before I am again stateside. I pulled out my *telefonino* and sent a *squillo* (quick call & hang-up just to leave your caller ID) to 'the Egyptians.' Maybe by *siesta* I would be home in time to join them for Arabic tea ... 🌍



## Eng-rrr-land

*With only 3 weeks left before returning to the States, I landed a \$25 dollar flight (man, I love economy travel) from Rome to London. Here are a few reflections from my time on 'da island.'*

**June 12 - 31 2002**

One of my favorite parts of this particular trip is that over the course of my nine months abroad, somehow, I discovered that all roads lead to ...London! I've found it to be just a little ridiculous how well everyone in this little planet seems to be connected. That is, I managed to spend 3 weeks in the country and meet up with everyone from former high school classmates to my boyfriend's brother from Pakistan, as well as enjoy the company of Israeli cousins, Italian-connected family and friends and even my second-American-family, the Reeves, who were passing through London on their family vacation toward Scotland.

Having traveled in London before, I assumed it would be an easy transition, sort of an incubation period before returning to the full-fledged familiarity of American 'home.' But arriving with an itchy throat, driving past authentically thatch-roofed houses to a 'chemist' (pharmacist) for some 'Clarityn' I realized that I spent an unreasonably long amount of time standing at the counter pointing at what I wanted and tapping my throat before (teacher Naomi's brother) Tim jabbed me in the side and whispered loudly 'they speak English.' Whoops. And so it went.

But aside from my own incidents of near-peril (i.e. the cars now came from the other direction, yet *another*



currency and exchange rate, and my mistaken identity as an Italian rather than an American), I also had the opportunity to take in plenty of the English culture that might be interesting to those who have not experienced it.

For anyone who has never had to transition cultures, I cannot fully articulate the relief of just being able to speak freely without worrying about the nuances of ordering '*thé alla pesca/ pescha*' which would respectively be 'Fish/Peach Tea.' [Believe it or not, this was one of the LESS embarrassing mix-ups when I was in Italy.] However, I found an entirely DIFFERENT set of details to worry about in the UK – like 'trousers' are 'pants' and in fact 'pants' are, well, what you wear *underneath* your trousers. Oh, the list goes on...but it does keep things interesting!

Even arriving at the English airport, there was a distinct difference between Stanstead and the other European airports I had been to. And for once, it was the Americans that were in the 'long line'. (If you have ever traveled internationally – you may have experienced the despicable pecking order of passport privileges.)

But this time it was myself and a beautiful ethnic rainbow of American passport holders who waited off to the side of the main crowd, where we were dealt with one at a time - in curt, English fashion. I must have looked a bit suspicious (or else the customs official hadn't met his hassling quota for the day). I was asked not only to give the names of anyone I was staying with, but also produce any cash and credit cards that I carried with me and explain how I planned to leave the country, before I was allowed to, slightly bewildered, retrieve my luggage (conveniently the last bags going round and round on the carousel by this time.) It occurred to me later that perhaps the guitar strapped to my back gave the impression of planning to 'busk' on the subway for money. Not like I could have proved, well, much of anything I told him. It was a real eye-opener to be on the other side of the hassle fence, however.

When I first arrived in the UK, I stayed with Naomi's family in Essex (outside of London) for a few days. A fellow teacher from Rome, Naomi's parents were ever so kind, and her brother Tim (who I had met in Italy) was ever so entertaining: 'Hey Tim, can you show me how to use the washer, I have dirty clothes to wash'



'Nah, just put 'em on the floor in my room, Mum always does that laundry eventually.' Baha!

I'll never forget the shock of sitting down to our first 'family' meal. As customarily courteous, they waited for me, the guest, to begin eating. Funny thing was, it had been SO LONG since I had properly sat down and eaten in any kind of respectable setting - that I was at a bit of a loss as to what to do! I never thought I would find myself incapable of eating! Their appreciation for fine desserts was encouraging enough... imported Italian ice cream! Did I mention that they used to live in Italy? What a relief!

### Bench Tour of the South of England

Tim and I found it uncanny how many *benches* we came across - tucked here and there on street corners and in village parks. Thus, our day-adventures (begun by nicking the car before his parents noticed and driving off to the next place on the map) soon earned the title/purpose of seeking out such resting spots. Some nice sights too!

I am pretty convinced that the system of roundabouts that works so efficiently in the UK would never fly

in the US, purely on the basis that we don't have very many right now - and those that we *do* have seem to instill panic in those who are unfamiliar with their functionality. But I have to admit, it is pretty neat that we could drive for ages, through a series of interchanges, staying in constant motion by zooming through roundabouts rather than stopping at 4-way intersections. I know I would find it a little un-nerving to be the *driver* in such situations, however. A little like jumping on the merry-go-round at full throttle...

We perused multiple salt-water taffy shops and I bought 'rock' candy, bearing the name of the sea-side town of Hastings (*beach pic on previous page*) where it was made. Sitting on the pebbled shores we ate our lunch... Fish 'n' Chips (with Salt and Vinegar, naturally) before hopping in the car for a short drive up to the white cliffs of Beachey Head. What a sight. We

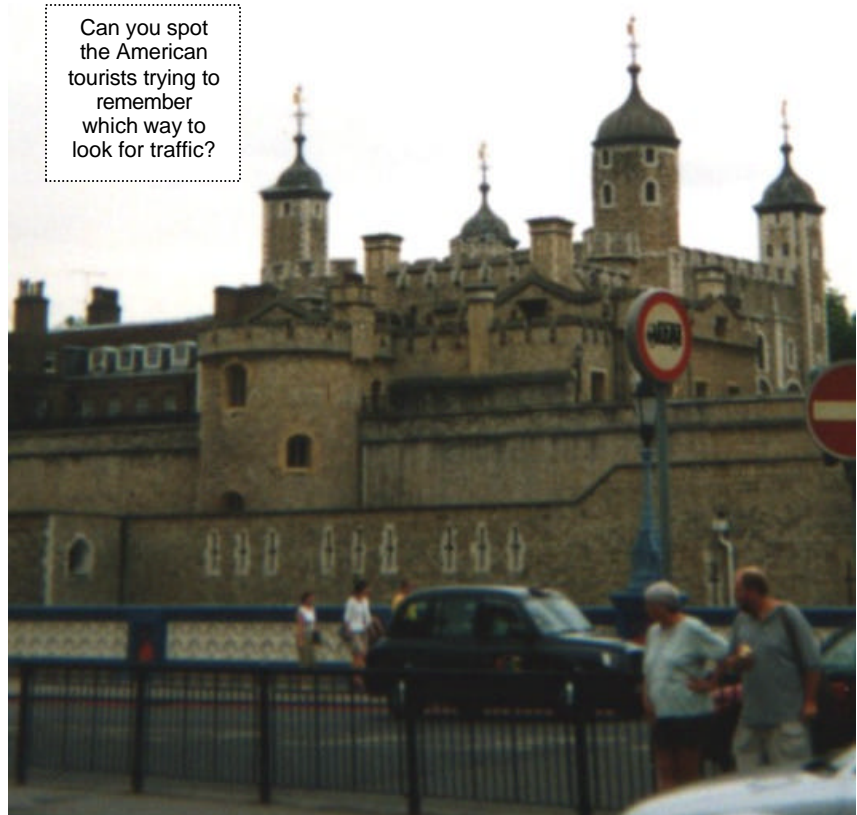
also visited the oldest wooden church in Europe, and an old Monastery in the town of Battle, where the grounds were established in remittance for the bloodshed there. It was just so nice to be out and about in the country - you know, music up, windows down. Ahhh. 'Look, another bench!'

### London Town

London, as I remembered, was a city full of everyone *except* the English. My brother Scott and I had been there before, back in college - to visit an Australian friend working in a London pub. On that trip we had eaten at his South African friend's favorite *Indian Pizzeria*. Did you know that curry is the number one dish in England?

Tim (*close to a real Brit, but yet - born in Italy*) took me across the 'Millennium bridge' which evidently used to sway until 'some spoilsport closed it until they fixed the sway.' In

Can you spot the American tourists trying to remember which way to look for traffic?





## Going North

I guess I never realized quite how much of the city life I had put up with, and quite how much I missed *the country* until later that week. Narrowly escaping the city while driving our rental car on the ‘wrong’ side of the road into the countryside, Amanda’s CD of delicious American music couldn’t have been a better soundtrack as we wound through the twisting hills north of London. Arriving at our once-dairy farm B&B, we simultaneously opened our car doors to the crisp afternoon air, letting the scents of the country fill our nostrils as we deeply inhaled. ‘Ahhhhh.... Manure!’

It was the greatest road trip ever, being able to say ‘I wonder where that road goes...’ and then driving until we found out! Navigating the one-lane roads, we would locate church steeples or castle outlines we had seen on the horizon. We stopped at parks or grocery stores, or even in the middle of the road to snack on our traveling vittles: bread, cheese, cookies, and Papa Reeves’ favorite – Ginger Beer. We saw another hilarious Shakespeare play in Stratford-on-Avon and wandered around the playwright’s hometown, dotted with historic churches, parks and other sites.

*Most* enchanting was Warwick Castle (pictured above: me with Jamie, BV ’96 – England), complete with a conservatory for Peacocks! Updated to handle the tourist crowds, it was a perfectly overcast English day for strolling around the gardens and investigating some of the re-furbished rooms of the castle – complete with lifelike wax figures in period costume. The *knights* even staged sword fights and archery tournaments on the lawn. Funny though, I found a plastic bow and

fact, most of London seemed to be under construction! I got a great photograph of the skyline surrounded by cranes and scaffolding from the Tate Gallery, just before a guard kindly informed me that there were no pictures allowed. Funny, I wasn’t trying to photograph any of the art – except there was this really terrific upside-down piano suspended from the ceiling...

When the Reeves family arrived fresh from Ohio for their inaugural visit to our common genealogical homeland, we made efforts to seek out only the most *English* of tourist paraphernalia. Besides my ride into town on ‘The Tube’ (subway) we took the red double-decker busses between the sights, passing – oh yes – those red phone booths... on our way from the dungeons at the Tower of London to the austere brilliance of Parliament’s Big Ben clock tower, opposite Westminster Abbey. Catching sandwich lunches, we ate at the famous Mary Poppins site – on the steps of St. Paul’s Cathedral! Too bad the ice cream truck drove away before we all got our dessert – I guess we’ll have to learn not to hesitate when sweets are involved!

Amanda and I caught ‘A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream’ at Shakespeare’s historically re-constructed Globe Theatre. What an experience! We sprung for the cheap seats - £5 to stand in the ‘yard.’ Funny how everyone fought for *leaning space* during the 3 hour show. But man, was it worth it!

It didn’t take long to have just about *enough* of our downtown hotel, which seem to have been pieced together from a series of town houses. We had to take the elevator - oh, I mean ‘*lift*’ - up to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, cross an outdoor catwalk to another indoor section where we took a narrow twisting staircase (that was just not built for size 9 feet and American luggage) down to our room. By the way, it wasn’t run by Brits either, but rather, eastern Europeans! I’ll spare you the details of trying to sleep 4 of us in 3 beds, but I will say that the Reeves cannot possibly know what a relief it was to be among *bona fide* Ohioans.



arrow/plunger on the highest tower of the castle's defensive wall. Baha! The most fun was when Amanda and I got to try on some helmets of our own! (pictured above)

**01 July 2002 – Baggage Woes**

Whereas I had escaped being fined for over-weight luggage when I left Rome (it's amazing what kind of disruption Israeli luggage tags, Czech immigration stamps, Roman-accented speech, an English airline ticket and an American passport will produce – they forgot to re-weigh my bags after determining that the 'suspicious' objects were both toys – an expanding plastic sphere and a bi-plane shaped kazoo,) I could tell that the hassle-patrol was on duty at the airport for my departing flight. I couldn't have had a better crew with me however: Naomi, 5' with blonde spiky hair and a hard London accent, Tim, who had forgotten to put in the denture that replaced the front tooth he lost in a motorbike accident years before, wearing the same hat he had worn while fruit-picking his way across Australia for the past 2 years, and me, putting on my best, most

obnoxious American/valley-girl accent: all berating the baggage attendant who was trying to inform me that there was a 2-bag limit. After Naomi's verbal assault, Tim's toothless grinning and my repeated insistence that 'Like, I can't very well leave

my stuff here,' the poor clerk finally caved in and chucked my 3, 30-kilo bags onto the conveyer belt. Now I just had to sweet talk the flight attendants into letting me stow my guitar in the overhead compartment. ☺

Half a day later, when the plane touched down in Cleveland – at the same airport to which I had made numerous runs during my college days – it was the first time that

something, some *place* so very familiar, had felt so...foreign! I HAD to call someone! Unfortunately, all 3 cell phones in my family were in (big surprise) a 'dead spot' on their way to the Columbus airport to meet me ...and the Reeves – were still in Scotland! So I called back to Italy, managing to say something in Italian like 'I'm here! And everything is so... BIG!'

Soaring over checkerboard farmland, it was a bittersweet flight, over almost as soon as it started, which in retrospect, felt much like the 10 months that had been since I left Port Columbus last September. I had gone through so much as an individual, but I knew that the world had changed too.

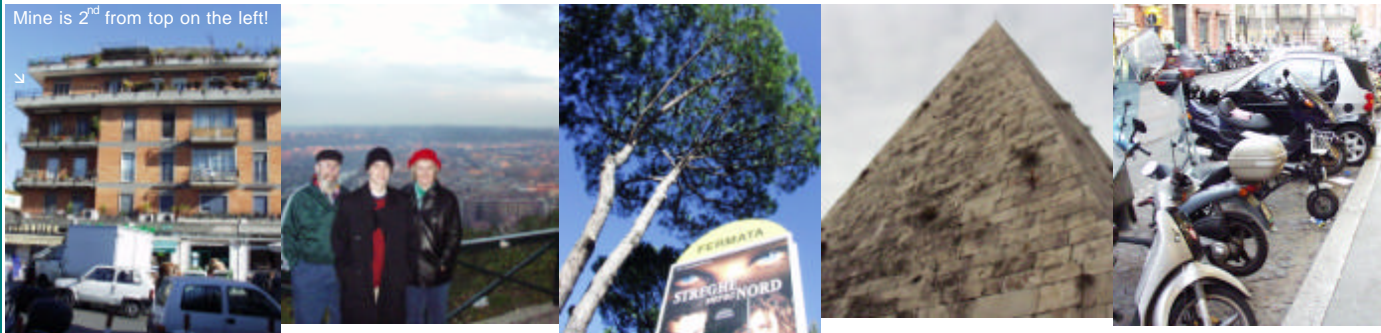
Whatever experiences I have had, whatever amazing people I have met, and however life has affected me, I know that I am who I am, because of it. I will hold my memories most precious, more than any souvenirs, and as one of my favorite quotes by Libby Fudim reminds me – *'Recall it as often as you wish, a happy memory never wears out.'* 🌍



**A special kind of souvenir:** What can I say? My Dad has a brick collection! Don't worry, we put it back...Didn't want someone's stiletto heels getting caught!

There are so many things that I don't even have room to say! Did you know that there is a Pyramid in Rome?

Mine is 2<sup>nd</sup> from top on the left!



...and tiny cars that park sideways and Egyptian obelisks with hieroglyphics? (like at the top of the Spanish Steps pg.5!)

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way...

*Post-return to the US – reflecting on another adventure of Roman transport*

Riding the 911 Bus to school one day, we were in a small wreck. Thankfully, no one was injured.

Now, before I continue, perhaps a little background: Typically, when a Roman bus is involved in an *incidente*, all the people standing up in the center are thrown into a big pile whilst all the old women sitting down (because all the people *standing up* have offered their seats) shake their hands in Italian gestures and grumble loudly to no one in particular.

This time, I was actually going to school for the afternoon only, so the bus wasn't crowded enough for people to be standing. Of course, once everything came to a screeching halt, all the passengers rushed to look out the back window at the car that had just been bumped out of the intersection.

Truthfully, sometimes this whole scene doesn't get a chance to unfold. Sometimes busses just keep going! Or, like on the way to *Termini* with a load of senior students (planning to catch a train to Venice) the bus driver clipped someone's mirror, stopped, got out, left a note on the windshield and kept going!

But back to the 911 bus wreck, we stopped. Shortly thereafter, an elderly lady climbed aboard and asked me, what I recognized to be in Italian 'will the bus be leaving soon?' I faltered for a moment, apologizing that 'durr, I don't speak Italian real good, but...(pointing) accident.'

'Oh, well then, what language do you speak, English?' she asked (in Italian).

So –I told her that it looked minor, but I didn't know where the driver went. Satisfied, she chose a seat to

wait. So I turned to the Pakistani man next to me, (who appeared to be a little surprised to hear me speaking English) greeted him in *Urdu* and asked if he was on his way to the Embassy (across from the school). I explained that I recognized him because I taught the children that he often chatted with in the mornings. Eyes wide, he apologized for not talking to me sooner, (we had been riding together for months now) but, 'I thought you were Italian!' Ha!

Back to the little old lady... (the bus driver was taking *forever* – which I guess you could call a 'Roman minute'). I sat down next to her, and she asked what I was doing in Rome, how I liked it etc. I felt compelled to compliment her, 'Forgive me, but your English is very good – How did you learn to speak it so well?!'

'Well, actually,' she confessed, 'I'm French.'

In case you were thinking that this was one of those classic fill-in-the-blank bad jokes 'An American girl, a Pakistani guy and a little old French lady get onto a Roman Bus...' that was the punch line. 🌐



I just can't seem to capture the hilarity I found in the mix and match cultural coincidences that I ran into. Outside the Coliseum, guidebooks were in nearly every language!



# Bella Italia

So, after spending 8 of my 10 months abroad in *Italy*, I have had to face the reality that there are far too many things than I can possibly tell you about *bella Italia*, especially in these few pages.

These 'broccoli trees' were some of my favorites among Mediterranean vegetation. The tall pines offered shade at the most miserably hot of bus stops along the *Via della Camilluccia* – and I've watched the children at school use rocks to break open the cones for the yummy pine nuts inside. Just look out should a strong wind happen to come along while you wait below... Those monstrous pinecones must be a couple lbs. each!



## Italiano, indeed!

The best time to visit the Trevi fountain (and you *must* visit it) is at night when it is lit up. Naturally, this is not the best time to catalogue your ceremonious tossing of the coin (superstitious good luck for a return trip to the Eternal City) on film. Nevertheless, just like the rest of the tourists around us, Mansoor and I took a photograph, which as you can see, is not only flattering to neither of us, but shows no evidence of the fact that we are standing in front of the most magnificent fountain in the city. Dad, however, managed to catch a guide-book-worthy nighttime photo of the *Fontana di Trevi*, in all its glory. (See picture at right) →

Pleased at my improving Italian, I told everyone afterward that Mansoor had been to visit for '*tredici giornale*' remembering that the Italian government had given him a visa for strictly '13 days.' It was one of my Egyptian friends, who later informed me that, actually... '*tredici giorni*' was probably a nice vacation, but in fact, '*tredici giornale*' would make for interesting reading, since that translates as 13 newspapers!! Doh!

Since there are so many languages per square mile in Europe, often times the signage is *pictures only*, which skips the whole bother of illiteracy... in any language!  
Here is one of my favorites from the grand swooping spiral staircase in the Vatican Museums - Watch your step!



I just couldn't finish this up without a proper picture of Vatican City! The Basilica of *San Pietro* is not only breathtaking inside and out, but also resides next door to the only post office where you can send post cards 'from the smallest country in the world!'



**Thank you:**  
Especially to God, for travelling mercies and presence in places I forget to expect.

EVERYONE, for putting up with me going/ coming back/ talking/writing a mile a minute/ and leaving again. ☺ Bahaha!

On this project: Papa Hag and Mansoor for your photography. To Dad and Mom and Scott and Pat Lavelle for reading this, *again* and *again*, and for helping me say what you know I meant to say in the first place. You guys rock!