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*Raccontami il tuo Abruzzo*

“IL MIO ABRUZZO”

di KIMBERLY SAYID

While my time spent in Abruzzo may be limited in comparison to other Italian areas, when I think of the region I can't help but feel my heart warm, my mouth smile, and so many different happy memories joyfully bounce around my mind. If I have to limit my story to just one memory though, then I would go back to my very first visit to Abruzzo.

It was the spring of 1992 and I had just turned 20 years old. I was doing my junior year study abroad program in Italy and promised to accompany my American roommate to discover her family roots. She didn't speak much Italian, and had never met her Italian relatives before, and I of course was very eager for an adventure to a new part of Italy. Without any hesitation, or expectation, we took the train, a few taxis and a bus, and after 10 hours, we finally made it to the quaint city of Sulmona. Nestled in the heart of a small valley surrounded by the Apennine mountains and natural preserves in the inland province of L'Aquila, Sulmona is one of the most unknown, beautiful, picturesque and romantic cities I have ever seen. Still today, after traveling all of Italy's 20 regions, multiple times, it is by far one of the most elegant and warm experiences in my memory.

Stepping off that bus in the center of Sulmona, we immediately knew that the small group of people huddled at the corner was there for us! And it was apparent that they had probably arrived at least an hour in advance to avoid any potential risk of being late! They were crying, laughing and a bit nervous... as were we! Once they saw that we were not the typical American TV stereotypes, with big hair, long painted nails and tight, revealing clothing, their anxiety physically dissipated and their emotions came pouring through. They couldn't stop crying

and hugging us (it didn't seem to matter that I was technically not part of the family). For the next 3 days we were treated like royalty! We rode in the front seat, we were served dinner first, we got the choice meats and better wines. Almost each hour a different set of extended relatives and friends arrived just to get a look at us! We were pranced through the streets so everyone in town could witness our presence! Second to only the debate of whether Madonna's upcoming rumored guest appearance would actually happen or not, we were definitely the hottest topic in town!

After the abundant warmth, generosity and hospitality exuded to us from every single person we encountered, we were most blown away by the local food and wine! We had never seen, let alone eaten such incredible delicacies like square spaghetti, roasted lamb skewers, saffron or soft pecorino cheeses before. We had never heard of, or drank, unique wines such as Cerasuolo, Pecorino, Passerino or Controguerra. Literally every single bite of that trip was invigorating! Although it was 28 years ago, neither one of us has forgotten a single face, or taste of that beautiful long weekend!

One of the most vivid memories in my mind is walking down the main street and admiring the beautiful flower compositions in front of every store. Gorgeous bouquets, bright colors, and sweet fragrances abundantly lined both sides of the boulevard. As we approached the displays I almost fainted from astonishment when I realized that the vibrant blossoms were not actual flowers but confetti flowers! There were shiny gold and silver confetti. Arrays of every blue, red, yellow, orange and green imaginable were present. Those stale sugar-coated almond wedding favors that one would never imagine eating were transformed here into beautiful and amazingly delicious designs! We arrived at that bus station, with our souvenir bags of artisan confetti, and said our good-byes to our new family. Those 3 days felt like 3 months. We felt like we were leaving home, and this time we were crying more than them! They had won over our hearts, our emotions, and certainly our stomachs! The land, the people, the territory, the cuisine had all seeped into our souls and entranced us. As we sat on the bus in silence, we both knew inside that we would return to Sulmona, and to our beautiful Abruzzo. We didn't know exactly when it would be, or if it would be together, but we knew that it would definitely happen! This treasure was too special to stay hidden!

I have since returned to Abruzzo many times, and each time I fondly think of my adoptive family and how wonderful they were. I have come to understand that their generosity mirrored the bounty of their fertile land; their warmth mirrored the rugged mountains that protect their city; and their openness mirrored their uniquely joyful, colorful approach to life!

Unfortunately, Madonna never did visit Sulmona... but in the end, it really didn't matter! The important thing was that they were prepared, and the feast went on anyway!

This is what il mio Abruzzo means to me!