SANTE MATTEO: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I was born and lived the first ten years of my life in the Middle Ages. That is, I was born in a setting and in conditions which probably hadn't changed all that much since the Middle Ages: an agricultural community in the Apennine Mountains of South-Central Italy which had remained relatively cut off from the industrial revolution, from modern progress, indeed from history. Most of life was still lived in a cyclical or mythical framework, rather than a linear or historical framework. The seasons determined activities, and the age-old wisdom of elders and forebears dictated customs and behavior. Things were done the way they "had always" been done, and would always continue to be done.

My parents happened to be part of the transitional generation that would change all that, or for whom all that would be changed by forces beyond their control. History invaded their town, along with many other similar towns in central and southern Italy; it invaded their lives and thrust them and their children irrevocably into the twentieth century, with all its comforts, its technological wonders, and its social and moral ambiguities and problems.

It was a hot July afternoon in 1948 in the Molise region of southern Italy. Giuseppina, a strong, big-boned, and very pregnant twenty-two-year-old woman, was working hard, as usual, in a field called Via di Lucito, several kilometers outside the walls of her small hometown, Petrella Tifernina. As far as she knew all her ancestors had been born and had lived in Petrella, as had those of her husband, Nicolino Matteo, whom she had married during the Second World War. Petrella, a town of bare-stone houses perched on a hill around the ancient Romanesque church of San Giorgio, home to about two thousand people, had been her entire world. Her husband Nicolino Matteo, who was five years older, had seen more of the world, since he had served in the war.

"You're going to deliver that baby right there in the middle of the field, if you're not careful! Why don't you go home and get in bed, where you belong in your condition?" shouted those who walked by to work in adjacent fields. But she worked until sundown, as usual. Nicolino, a stone mason, like his father Sante, was helping his father rebuild one of those stone houses she could see on the horizon.

I was born that night in my parents' bed in the house where my father had been born and had grown up. There was no hospital nearby, no doctor. The midwife barely made it in time to assist with the delivery. As the first-born male child it was a foregone conclusion that I would be named Sante, after my paternal grandfather, in whose house we lived. His wife, Francesca, after whom my sister is named, had died years before my parents were married. I know her only from the black and white photograph on her tombstone in the cemetery outside Petrella: a thin, dark, austere woman with a determined look.

My grandfather was a heavy-set, bald, soft-spoken, gentle man with light blue eyes and a shy but ready smile. Shortly after my birth he curtailed his work and became my primary sitter and companion. As the bearer of his name and his only son's only son, I was naturally a source of great satisfaction for him. My earliest memories are of sun-drenched days spent in the comfortable presence of my grandfather, sitting on a stone bench outside the house with him as

he talked and reminisced with other old men from the neighborhood or strolling down the tree-lined street holding his calloused hand as people greeted him warmly and respectfully and typically made a big fuss over the chubby toddler at his side, pinching my fat cheeks, tickling my tummy, raising me up to kiss me loudly on both cheeks. It must have seemed to me that everyone was there, in that world, just to make a fuss over me. The whole street, the whole town, my whole world seemed to be a kind of family. I belonged to them all; they all belonged to me.

Indeed, my mother still likes to recount how I would be passed from hand to hand among her friends and neighbors. A friend of hers would show up early in the morning and offer to take me for a stroll. Hours later, when it was time for my feeding and I still hadn't been returned, my mother would have to go searching for me: "Where's the kid?" "Oh, I gave him to so-and-so." So-and-so would say, "Oh, such-and-such came by, and she wanted him for a while; so I gave him to her." Such-and-such would explain, "What's-her-name saw him and wanted to take him to the fountain." And so on. She would finally track me down and take me home, tired and hungry, but satisfied and entertained: overall a very serene and happy child.

In such a small town, which up to that time had had little communication and exchange with the outside world, many of the residents were related in some way, either through actual kinship or through ritual kinship: godfather and godmother, best man, confirmation sponsor, etc. In such an environment a child grows up with a strong sense of belonging, of being rooted among people who care for him or her. As I played in the streets and alleys there was no such thing as being lost or being out of bounds. Everyone knew who I was. Everyone had the right and the responsibility to take care of me: to aid me if I was hurt, to admonish and scold me if I misbehaved; to act <u>in loco parentis</u>. As a result I think that I learned basically to trust other people and to expect them to like and trust me. And I think that that's still the attitude with which I approach people, because it was ingrained in me as a child.

Having since lived in urban settings, I now can't help but wonder if children born and raised among strangers in large cities can nurture the same kind of trust toward their fellow human beings. It seems that widespread indifference, if not outright hostility, as well as the perceived potential for abuse and danger, require us to be much more circumspect in our relations, particularly as far as our children are concerned; and apprehension and distrust have become the more usual "default" modes of interacting with others.

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My grandfather Sante died shortly after my sister Franca (short for Francesca) was born, when I was almost four years old. It was a chilly day in April, as I recall. The mid-day meal, our main meal, was almost ready. My grandfather hadn't returned. My mother asked me to go find him and tell him to come eat. If he wasn't out in the street, I should check the outhouse in the back of the house.

There was no plumbing or running water in any of the homes in Petrella. Water had to be obtained from several public fountains located in various parts of the town. Some families had

outhouses. The less fortunate simply had to use the fields around the town. The houses were all made of rock, and attached to each other in rows and clusters. Those built on the edge of town in more recent centuries, such as ours, had backyards, with gardens, fruit trees, chicken coops, pig stalls, etc. Most of those inside the town's medieval walls, however, did not have any yards at all. Typically the lower floor of each house was used to store grains and keep animals--horses, donkeys, goats, pigs, chickens--for those who had them. Though most of the people in the town were cultivators, they did not live on their farmland. Rather, most owned or rented several different plots of land in different directions outside of the town. They would go work in these various small fields on different days, but always return to town at night.

My grandfather wasn't on the bench in front of the house, nor on any other bench on the street as far as I could see. I walked through the ground floor of the house, past the wine and ham cellar; through my father's and grandfather's work room full of hewn granite and marble stones, chisels, hammers, levels, and other tools of their trade, and a layer of dust underfoot; past the grain and wood storerooms; out the back door, into the garden; past the chicken coop and the large white-fig tree; to the outhouse. The door was closed. I knocked and called out, "Nonno! Nonno!" There was no answer. I tried to push the door open. It gave partly. I saw my grandfather's bare leg first. He appeared to be slumped over, but I couldn't get the door open far enough to see him well. I told him that dinner was ready, but he still wouldn't move or answer. I went back upstairs and told my parents that Nonno had fallen asleep in the outhouse and wouldn't wake up.

And so I learned what death was and what it meant to lose someone you loved and who loved you completely and unquestioningly, with absolutely no reservations or conditions, simply because you were there and you belonged to each other, no matter what. My grandfather continued to be my mental companion and my moral guide, a conscience of sorts. Whenever I misbehaved or was tempted to do something wrong, it was always the thought of what he would think and say to me that embarrassed me first and the most. He was my namesake and I felt, and continue to feel, an obligation to perpetuate his name and his memory with the dignity and love that I have always associated with him.

His image has remained for me an ethical and existential compass with which to chart my course through a life which has taken me to far-flung shores. Whenever I return to Petrella, one of the first things I do is to visit his grave. Seeing my own name on that tombstone, permanently fixed in that small piece of my native soil, gives me an anchor of sorts, a sense that my existence and my identity are grounded or rooted after all, despite my migratory life. It's his image, his name, his memory which constitute the main bridge between my "here and now" and my origins--or my illusion of origins--so that "where I come from and who I was" are not completely divorced from "where and who I am." I am still, and suppose that I will always be, the grandson of that gentle man whose hands had quarried and hewn a lifetime of rocks with which he built houses that would last for centuries; and his calloused, comforting hand will always have that same firm, reassuring grip on my own unsure hand, and will continue to guide, protect, and restrain me.

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Not long after my grandfather died, my father came to the United States. In 1954 he and two other stone masons from our town received a work contract and workers' visas to carve marble in Quincy, Massachusetts. They all left their families behind and went to make marble tombstones in America. Their intention was to make and save as much money as possible in a year or two and return to their families in Italy with a tidy nest egg. And, in fact, my father did return to Petrella after two years. He hadn't particularly enjoyed living in America and was glad to be back home, with his family and friends, where he knew the language and the customs, and where he was an insider. However, he had indeed made good money by the town's standards. What's more, he had discovered that in America women could work in factories as well as men. My mother, anxious to assure me and my sister a more promising future, talked my father into returning to the States, applying for permanent-resident status and requesting that his family join him. There was a quota system, which meant that we had to wait several years before our request would be processed.

We finally received our papers to emigrate in 1958. We were to leave in the late spring. I had mixed feelings. I wanted to be with my father again. My mother and other relatives had always made it a point to tell me how much I was like him: I had his blue eyes and light complexion, liked the same foods he did and ate them in the same manner, walked like him, talked like him, and thus was always encouraged by them, by my mother, and by him in his letters to identify myself with him, even though he had been away for almost half my life.

I was also anxious to see this mythical place called "America" where so many people from my town had gone to "make money." My father would occasionally send packages from "America." They were like messages from another world: strange candies and clothes that I had never seen or smelled before, toys which did not exist in my world. Once he sent a cap gun with several rolls of caps, which made me the star and the envy of the town among my friends. No one had seen or heard anything like them before. We had always used sticks for guns and rifles. Indeed we used sticks or stones (and our imaginations) for just about all our games. If we were lucky, we could occasionally get scraps of wood of different sizes and shapes from the carpenter's shop.

The most alluring items in the packages from America, however, were the coloring books and other children's books (probably Dick, Jane, and Spot books), which my father occasionally included. These books seemed to depict a strange fantasy world, a world where people not only spoke an undecipherable language with a lot of alien consonants in the words, but where everything was different: the houses, the clothes, the children's toys, the dogs, even the way people looked and smiled at each other.

The children always seemed to have a red wagon, or a pedal car, or a funny-looking, massive bicycle that looked more like a motorcycle. Our own toys were mostly home-made: discarded hoops from old wine barrels that we would roll down the street or the stone sidewalks, guided by one of those ubiquitous all-purpose sticks; sling shots made with the elastic from an old pair of home-made underpants, or sometimes from a new pair, in which case we had not only to cope with the discomfort of our underpants not staying up, but had to live in fear of the

punishment which would surely be meted out on the next wash day when our mothers would discover the crime.

Unlike our own houses, which were made of bare gray rock and attached to each other, and the areas in front of the houses which were also paved with rocks, the houses in the pictures in the American books seemed to come in all colors and shapes, and seemed to be made of different materials: bricks, wood, even some kind of metal. But most intriguingly, they seemed to be surrounded by green grass and bushes and flowers and trees, and some by wooden enclosures, fences. Sometimes there seemed to be paved private roads leading to another building near the house--driveways and garages, I would later learn. And sometimes these short roads, or the roads passing in front of the houses had automobiles on them--enormous, shiny things that seemed to be entirely too large and extravagant to be real.

The children's clothes seemed to be more colorful as well, and always clean and new. Maybe there was no dirt in "America"; and clothes never tore or got dirty, and underpants would stay up even without the elastic that your mother had to buy for such and such a price from the vendor who came only on such a day of such a month! Maybe kids never got scolded or punished, and never got into trouble in "America".

I was anxious to visit this strange new world. I had a frequently recurring dream in which airplanes flew overhead and dropped miniature versions of those gigantic American cars for me and my friends to drive all around the countryside. Sometimes I would drive into the pictures in the books, looking for my father, smiling at those clean, well dressed American children with their red wagon, trying to look as if I belonged there too.

And yet I dreaded the thought of leaving my own world, my extended family, my friends, my "places." I told them--and myself--that it would just be an extended vacation, a kind of scouting adventure. We would surely be back in a year, two at the most; and I would tell them all about those cars and funny houses surrounded by grass and the meaning of those strange words with so many consonants in them.

I genuinely believed this. So did my mother. At least that's what she had always told me. So, I was somewhat perplexed that my grandparents--my mother's parents--and my aunts and uncles cried as disconsolately as they did when it came time for us to leave. Part of me was almost amused by this unusual spectacle: the normally impassive adults crying while the kids, who were usually crying or screaming about something, were relatively gay and excited, as if we were about to embark on a fabulous adventure.

However, another part of me, on seeing my grandparents' unusual behavior, became more fearful, especially when my grandfather, Nonno Seppuccio (from Giuseppe, Joseph), a very large, imposing, stern man, clutched me almost desperately to him and cried like a child, imploring me not to go, not to leave him, that he would never see me again. What did he mean? Did he and the others know something I hadn't been told?

The thought that I would not return, that I could abandon my home, them, my family, my companions, my world, forever, was not even conceivable. That is I simply could not formulate such a thought; or at least I could not let it surface in my consciousness. But perhaps the seed of doubt was planted somewhere in my mind. And as we boarded the car that took us out of the town, I was filled with an anxious sort of excitement and anticipation along with a profound sense of dread or panic, an overwhelming sense of awful, irreparable loss.

I couldn't wait to get going. Why was the car so slow? Why did it have to take so long?

At the same time I couldn't bear to leave everything that belonged to me, and to which I belonged. Why was this car moving away so fast?

Why wasn't there more time to say good bye, to look at everything and everyone again? They went out of sight so fast!

One more turn around those trees and my town, Petrella, would be out of sight for good. Where in the world was I going?

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Boston was where we were going. My father had traveled by ship four years earlier, but we went by propeller plane. As the plane approached the Boston airport I looked out the window to get my first look at this new world. It did look like those pictures in the books: individual houses of different shapes and colors surrounded by grass and trees. "Pare un presepio!--It looks like a creche!" I said to my mother. She agreed, but didn't particularly want to look out, especially when we were banking and the houses seemed to glide by right under our window.

My father, who has always enjoyed making things with his hands, had always made beautiful creches for the Christmas season, fashioning houses, churches, palaces, and huts out of cans and boxes and painting them. It's a tradition he continued in this country. So it seemed not only quaint but somehow appropriate, even a little reassuring, that this land where he now lived and where we would find him and live with him should resemble one of his creations.

My father and several of his friends were waiting for us. I was the first to spot him. He looked the same as I remembered him, and yet completely different, foreign.

By "us" I don't mean just my family. We had travelled with two other families. One of the stone-workers who had migrated with my father was Egidio Camino. They had travelled together, worked together, and had rented houses right next to each other in Quincy, Mass. Egidio's wife, Rosina, and his four-year old son, Walter, travelled with us all the way from Petrella.

Egidio had also called over his younger brother, Aldo, whose family also accompanied us: his wife, Carmela, who had lived across the street from us, and their two-year old toddler, Antonio. In Petrella we had watched Aldo's and Carmela's courtship from our window. I recall

one winter day when Aldo was visiting Carmela, or hanging around outside her door--it must have been in the interim when my father had returned from his first stint in the States--when a raucous snowball fight erupted between Aldo and my father and eventually involved much of the neighborhood, as the street echoed with the shrieks, shouts, and laughter of many of our neighbors, men, women, and children, who had gone out to watch and ended up participating. It's a scene with which I always associate Aldo, a plump, jovial fellow, always ready for a good time or a good joke.

He was also the most emotional member of the party when we left Petrella. He cried the most loudly. When we reached Campobasso, the provincial capital, he implored the driver and the rest of us to please go back to Petrella! He didn't want to leave. He was later afraid to get on the airplane and, to the somewhat anxious delight of the children, had to be coaxed on by the women. We never let him forget those moments. He later claimed that he had been faking to make us laugh.

As it turned out, Egidio actually owned one of those colossal cars from the picture books: a Pontiac; 1949, I think, with a little bust of an Indian mounted in front of the hood: Pontiac himself! We all piled into that and another cavernous car that belonged to the third "musketeer" from Petrella who had gone with my father originally, Giovanni il Marmista--the Marble-worker: a DeSoto. Egidio hadn't had the car very long, and didn't drive it much. He and my father took the bus to work. But we all had our picture taken in front of it several times, so that we could show people in Petrella how prosperous we were and make them envious.

If the houses looked quaint from the outside (and from above), they were like something out of a fairy tale once we went inside: wood and carpeting, rather than stone or marble tiles, on the floors; an oven and stove, rather than a fireplace, for cooking; a refrigerator, rather than just a pantry; stuffed easy chairs and couches, rather than just straight-backed wooden chairs with straw or wooden seats; and, most magical of all, a television set!

I was mesmerized by it when my father first turned it on, and soon became an addicted viewer, particularly on Saturdays: Rin Tin Tin; Broken Arrow (which I called Cochise); Fury; Mighty Mouse; The Lone Ranger. Just listing the names evokes some of the same open-mouthed wonder and excitement I felt then in front of this futuristic marvel. Within a few weeks I knew the TV schedule by heart, knew the names of the characters and the actors, and recognized all the theme songs: Wanted, Dead or Alive, with Steve McQueen; Have Gun, Will Travel, with Richard Boone; Frontier Doctor, with John Payne; 77 Sunset Strip, with Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., and Roger Smith; Wagon Train, with Ward Bond; Zorro; Leave It to Beaver, Gunsmoke, and so on, and so on.

I watched as much TV as I could get away with, often preferring it to going outside to play. Though my parents would often send me to bed because it was late or chase me outside to get some air and exercise, they generally indulged me in my new addiction. It kept me off the streets of this strange new world, where who knew what could happen to me. There was so much traffic in Quincy compared to Petrella, where the kids had practically owned the streets for their games, except for the two or three times a day when the buses to or from Campobasso

passed through. And it was also teaching me and my sister this country's apparently incomprehensible language.

So television was my teacher. Because we had arrived in June, I did not have to go to school until the fall. I had the entire summer to learn about this place. I learned some things from the children in the neighborhood: a few words, money, where to shop for what, a peculiar American sport called baseball, which made very little sense and seemed to be extremely dull. However, I did not learn a great deal because most of them were also recent immigrants from Italy themselves, and we talked mostly in Italian or our respective dialects, or a mixture of our dialects corrected with some standard Italian and sprinkled with a few English expressions.

Indeed, the experience of that first summer was as informative and interesting in what it revealed to me about Italy and Italians, about their various dialects and customs, as what it taught me about American language and culture. It was probably in Quincy, Massachusetts, that I first realized what a complex and rich patchwork of languages and cultures Italy is, that there are in fact many different Italies. And it was strange that I should encounter these other Italies in Quincy, Massachusetts, indeed that I could only encounter them in such a place. In Petrella I never had and probably never would have met Italians from other regions. However, on that little street in Quincy, Water St., there were families from Sicily, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont: a veritable microcosm of Italy. So, when I ventured outside our half of the duplex we were renting, instead of America, I actually found a window with a view of Italy.

My true picture window to America was the TV set. Through that window I peered in fascination to catch black-and-white glimpses of how Americans dressed, moved, talked, laughed (and punched, hit, stabbed, and shot each other a lot!) on such all-American venues as American Bandstand, I Love Lucy, The Wonderful World of Disney, and the Ed Sullivan Show. It was not only the language I picked up, but much of the ethos of the culture: the values, ideas, and beliefs which defined the characters and determined their conflicts; although I certainly wasn't consciously aware of all this at the time. And this ethos, I now realize, was radically different from the ethos which had formed the basis of life and social interactions in my previous world.

Flint McCullough, the scout on Wagon Train, was one of my favorite characters, in one of my favorite series, of my favorite genre, the western. The heroes in the westerns which dominated the TV airwaves at the time seemed to embody the American ethos: self-reliance; a certain reserve or reticence, a need for privacy; a stubborn, single-minded adherence to a personal code of justice and fair play; a willingness to fight, even to the death, for this code (but a reluctance to talk about it): the pioneer spirit that conquered the west, the wilderness: good old American individualism.

I wanted to be like Flint, the scout: stalwart, brave, serious, quiet, reliable, strong, fast and accurate with the gun, fair but dangerous, steely-gazed yet shy, honorable. I tried to walk like him, talk like him, think like him. I looked at myself and my life from the outside as if I were watching a TV series and patterned my behavior, my gestures, my "attitude," my very

thoughts on those of Flint McCullough and Matt Dillon and the Lone Ranger. I americanized myself by this kind of playacting.

The identity I was putting together in this fashion was very different from the one I had fashioned in my previous existence in that other world, where people and heroes had never been quite as silent, as indomitable, as self-reliant, or as forceful and potentially violent as the Lone Ranger. There, it seemed, communal values, social interaction, familial and societal ties were more important than the individual's personal code. One's identity was determined to a larger extent by one's place and function in the group. One lived more by customs, communal expectations and dictates, folk wisdom, the conventions of the elders, who were considered sages, not because they had read books, but because they had lived for many years and had been educated by life and their own elders.

These two identities, my Italian self and my American self, have probably remained tangled within me, neither one fully developed, neither one ever abandoned. I thus continued to stradle two worlds during my adolescence. At home I lived by the standards, values, and customs of my Italian hometown. I always talked to my parents only in our native dialect, and continue to do so to this day. At school and with my American playmates I spoke a different language and wore a different mask. These two worlds never fully merged, and I continued to shuttle back and forth between them in my daily life.

Eventually I came to feel slightly out of place in both: a foreigner with a strange name among my school friends, one who brought strange foods in his lunch bag and who had a unique background, childhood experiences he didn't share with the American children; but a foreigner at home as well, an American child in an Italian household, who found it difficult to share his outside concerns, activities, and problems with his parents and their community because we did not share the same points of reference. I felt that they couldn't really understand what I was learning in my American school, what I was reading in American books, what I discussed with my American friends.

This, of course, is the situation of all adolescents vis-a-vis their parents. However, for me, and I suppose other immigrant children, it was more pronounced, more obvious, and therefore perhaps more understandable and easier to resolve; or not to resolve, because to a certain extent, it has never been resolved, but to live with, to accept, without ever blaming my parents for anything or coming into true conflict with them.

The negative side of this life experienced in stereoscope, dangling between two cultures, was that I did not feel comfortable, really at home, in either situation, a condition which enhanced my natural proclivity to shyness and reticence. Though always friendly and considerate, I was not very outgoing. I preferred to remain an observer on the sidelines, rather than a participant at center stage. I blushed easily whenever put on the spot, which included being called on in class, and, since people noticed it and found it quaint or "cute," I would become even more self-conscious.

And yet, probably because I had grown up in a secure environment where I learned to trust people and rely on them, I had no problem making friends. I liked just about everyone I met, and have always felt that just about everyone liked me. My difficulty was in making intimate friends or belonging to a tight-knit group of "best friends." I was friendly with everybody, but good friends with nobody.

In a way this negative side of my condition was also the positive side in that being an observer allowed me to also remain more objective, more tolerant, more understanding of various points of views. I seldom got caught up in crusades, causes, passions, or hatreds which seemed to appeal to so many of my peers. My adolescence was a strange mixture of awkwardness and anxiety on the one hand, a feeling of being different, of not fitting in, and, on the other hand, a sense of serenity, of being removed from the fray, an outsider looking in at life through a window.

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That adolescence was not spent in Quincy, Massachusetts, but in Cleveland, Ohio, where we had moved in January, 1959, after spending only half a year in Quincy.

There was a large community of paesani, people from our hometown, in Cleveland, about thirty families or so. My father and Egidio had been in touch with some of them who convinced them that they could get better jobs and have a more pleasant life there. In fact, these paesani eventually did find jobs for them and both families moved to Cleveland together, sharing one moving van. My father and Egidio both worked at the Boiardi Tile Factory, owned by the son of Ettore Boiardi, better known as Chef Boyardee.

Aldo and his family, on the other hand, chose to stay in Quincy for another year or so. But eventually they too moved to Cleveland, but with a larger family. Carmela had given birth to a girl, Diane, whom we referred to as "l'americana," the American, since she had been born in this country. We all found houses near each other, and close to many of our fellow townspeople from Petrella in the Collinwood area on Cleveland's east side, an ethnic enclave with many Italians from all parts of Italy, but mostly southern Italy, as well as Slovenians, Poles, and some Hungarians and Germans.

In a way it was like returning to Petrella for my parents. There were several people of their generation who had migrated to Cleveland, friends with whom they had grown up. They could keep talking their own language, refer to places, people, and episodes of their youth, keep observing their same customs--in short, be themselves, not have to invent a new American self. As a result they never really felt the need to learn English. They worked with Italian, shopped at Italian stores, went to church where the priest spoke Italian, and did just about all of their socializing among themselves.

And there was a lot of socializing! All holidays and special occasions--weddings, funerals, christenings, even children's birthdays--were an excuse for the community to get together. We were constantly exchanging visits with other paesani. Even if we went shopping

we would often stop at someone's house to visit "since we were in the neighborhood." For my birthday or my sister's it never occurred to us to invite our school friends or our playmates from the neighborhood. We always invited my parents' friends and their children, who brought many gifts. We were then obligated to reciprocate for their children's birthdays. The same thing happened for first communions, confirmations, baptisms, weddings, graduations, etc. As a result my social life, as well as my home life, remained very "Italian," with the consequence that as I got older it was very uncomfortable for me to socialize with my American friends. I did not know what to say or do.

I now wonder whether the very fact that my parents were able to find this little Petrella away from Petrella in Cleveland made it possible for us not to return to Petrella, that is to postpone the return until it became too late. Ironically, those very conditions which made them a little more comfortable in this foreign land ended up preventing them from adjusting to their new home as well returning to their old home.

Had we stayed in Quincy, where our four families were the only ones from our town, perhaps we would have returned to Italy after two years, as we had promised our relatives and friends. My father didn't particularly like his work or the environment in Quincy. My mother had found work shelling clams and mussels--not a life-enhancing activity. There was little time to socialize and few people with whom to do so.

In Cleveland, however, the hours were shorter, the wages better, the social group larger and more supportive. Life was easier and more enjoyable for them. It was easier to put off returning for another year. And then another. And another. Until they discovered that my sister and I were speaking English to each other. Indeed, once she started school, my sister started to speak English even with them, reverting to our dialect only when they couldn't understand her, even though they always continued to speak to her in dialect. I myself soon forgot standard Italian, since our dialect was practically a different language. My sister had never learned standard Italian since she had not gone to school in Italy. Furthermore, we had become used to having those comforts we had never had in Petrella: refrigerator, TV, heat in the winter, ice cream, bananas and watermelons. Could they now take us back to the Middle Ages?

They kept putting it off. And eventually they were stuck in America for good, without ever really having committed themselves to staying here permanently, forever strangers in a strange land, a land that was destined to become stranger yet as the cohesive community of paesani in Collinwood eventually began to disintegrate as the children grew up, married "Americans," moved away, often drawing their parents away as well. Few, if any, are left in the Collinwood area. Some of the older generation have died. Most have moved to different suburbs, no longer in proximity to each other.

In the early years they really didn't need to know English since they had a "little Petrella" readily available; and therefore they made little effort to learn it. Now that their children have moved away and their hometown away from hometown has itself disintegrated they find themselves more isolated than ever before among "foreigners," struggling to cope in a language they never mastered.

Actually, it's not nearly as bleak as I make it sound. With phones and cars the paesani of my parents' generation do manage to keep in touch with each other on a fairly regular basis. In fact, one of the sociologically interesting recent developments in their lifestyle has been the use of a shopping mall as the equivalent of the piazza, or square, in the Italian hometown. Now that my father and many of the other men are retired they meet in the mall to stroll or sit on the benches and talk, just as my grandfather and his friends did in the streets and squares of Petrella when I was a child. The community may be much more loose-knit than it was thirty years ago, but it's still there.

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However, I fear that with these digressions I will never finish this autobiographical account, which I started several months ago. So, I'll have to try to be more concise in covering the rest of my life: my schooling, my military service, my professional activities, my marriage and family life.

Despite my excessive shyness I did quite well in school from the outset and was generally well liked by both my teachers and my peers. I had finished the fourth grade in Italy. In Quincy I went into the fifth grade. The teacher assigned me a mentor, an Italian boy in the class who could translate for me when necessary. For reading and writing I started with first-grade Dick and Jane books. In the other subjects I worked along with the rest of the class as best I could. After two or three weeks I moved up to second-grade readers, and so on, so that by the end of the semester I had caught up with the class. When we moved to Cleveland in January I was able to work at grade level in all subjects. By the time I finished elementary school I think I had lost my accent and spoke English more or less like a native.

My parents, neither of whom had finished grade school in Italy, my father having gone to the fifth grade, my mother to the fourth, both valued education, had always encouraged me to do well in school, and had always taken pride in my accomplishments. I had been a good student in Italy and I was expected to continue to be a good student in America. My parents kept close tabs on my schoolwork, and made sure that I did my homework thoroughly, even though they couldn't actually help me with any of it directly.

They made a big deal of my achievements with friends and relatives, rewarding me by showing me that they were proud of me, making others proud of me, and thus making me proud of myself. The result was that my academic success came to be an essential part of my identity. I was perceived as "Sante the good student," rather than "Sante the good athlete" or "Sante the trouble-maker," and thus came to perceive myself the same way.

There was an element of "Us against Them" or "We'll show Them!" to all this. Probably like all immigrants, the people of Petrella felt insecure and threatened in this country, made to feel inferior because of their lack of education, the relatively menial jobs they held, their linguistic and cultural deficiencies. Yet among themselves they naturally liked to believe that they were actually superior to other groups, and I became a token of sorts.

It turned out that I was the oldest of the children in the Petrellese community who would pursue an education. There were children older than I, but they were adolescents who had come over expecting to work and only went to high school because the law required them to do so. If I could excel at school it would make a statement about the entire community. Thus, when I got straight A's on my report card the news quickly spread to the rest of the Petrellese community and became a topic of discussion at all the parties and a source of general pride. I became their Joe Louis, with school as my ring and "America," whoever or whatever it might be, as my "opponent": "So, Sante got straight A's again, eh? Atta boy! We'll show these Americans who we are and what we can do!" Such remarks were actually addressed to my parents as much as to me, as if the achievement was really theirs and of the Petrellese community at large, and as if my parents, as their delegates, should keep up the good work. And, in a way, it was their achievement.

In any case, I came to be regarded as a good student from the very beginning. Even before I had learned English well I could do well on tests, because I had developed good study skills in Italy, where we were in school for fewer hours but were assigned much more homework and were required to memorize facts, verses, tables, etc. Thus I probably studied more and remembered more facts than many of my classmates. I was particularly good at spelling bees, possibly because most of the words were new to me and I had never learned to spell them wrong, and partly because I would pronounce the word to myself not only in English but as if it were an Italian word, that is phonetically, so that when I repeated it in my head with the Italian pronunciation I automatically knew how to spell it. My teachers and classmates mistook such tricks and techniques for intelligence and I thus got a reputation which I subsequently had to live up to.

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Collinwood was a large urban school of more than 3500 junior high and high school students. It included grades Seven through Twelve. The Cleveland school system at that time had a half-year system. The academic year started either in September or in January, depending on one's year of birth. I started the seventh grade at Collinwood in January of 1961, and was graduated from High School in January, 1967.

It was a rough school, a real ethnic stew, with considerable rivalry and tension among the various ethnic groups. The number of African-American students (or Negro or Colored students, as they were known then) increased steadily during my six years there leading to a lot of inter-racial strife during the mid and late sixties, the years of civil unrest and the civil rights movement. During my last two years there were many fights and several out-and-out riots which were covered in the national news.

One had to steel oneself every morning for the inevitable confrontations to be encountered during the day. How would you react to provocation? Flight, fight, appeasement, irony, sincerity? What kind of attitude should you wear? Meek, menacing, indifferent, kindly, sensitive?

I must confess that I felt a great sense of relief when I finally left such a tense atmosphere, to attend Kenyon College in its pastoral, almost monastic rural setting in central Ohio, with its relatively homogeneous, middle-class, mostly white, all-male student body. I didn't have to worry about getting into fights or getting stabbed or putting on an attitude every morning. And yet, I felt a sense of loss as well, guilt even, that I had fled to an ivory tower removed from the pressing problems and issues of the day. At such a selective liberal arts college it may be true that I soon realized that, despite my many awards, I had not received a very good academic preparation at my inner-city school compared to my classmates from elite Eastern prep schools, but I also realized that I had received a much more thorough education in human and social relations than many of them. My sense of relief was tempered by a sense of exclusion, of removal, perhaps even of betrayal to the inner-city friends I had left behind.

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When I started the seventh grade at Collinwood I was plunged back into the anonymity and insecurity of the "greeny," at the bottom of a very long, six-year ladder: new classmates, new teachers, no reputation to sustain me or make me visible or noteworthy. Being very timid and reserved, I was actually very comfortable with this relatively new invisibility. I didn't even have an accent anymore to make me stick out, just a funny name. But there were so many Italian Americans in the school, that even the name wasn't sufficient cause for much notice.

I thus hid in the crowd for the first year or so, content to remain in the background, seldom volunteering to give answers in class, doing very little to bring attention to myself. However, I continued to study hard and to get good scores on my tests and assignments, and eventually reemerged as a "good student" in the eyes of teachers and students. And once classified as such, the label to a certain extent became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Toward the end of my six-year academic career at Collinwood it seemed that teachers were compelled to give me A's regardless of what I actually did or didn't do in class simply because by then they all "knew" that I was an "A student" and was bound to get an A, no matter what.

The reemergence into the academic spotlight, which for me was a mixed blessing, began in the eighth grade. Mr. Molinaro, my English teacher, and an actor in local theater, had asked us to write an essay on one of our relatives. I wrote a remembrance of my Nonno Seppuccio, my maternal grandfather, whom I had left in Petrella with the promise to be back in two years. The following day Mr. Molinaro made a big deal about one of the essays he had received, calling it one of the most moving and "exquisite" essays he had ever received (but I don't think that he'd been teaching all that long). The surprising thing, he said, was that this essay had been written by someone who had been in this country and had known English only a few years. The rest of the class should learn a lesson from this about the value of hard work, applying oneself, and so on.

He read the paper out loud. To my shock, partial delight, and deep dismay, it was my paper. I blushed and sank in my seat. Perhaps he wouldn't identify the author. No such luck! He walked to the back of the room, where I had managed to remain fairly well hidden up to that

point, and handed me the paper: "Excellent, Sante. Keep up the good work." All eyes were on me, many probably for the first time that term, and I started to be known as "that smart kid with the funny name."

A little later that same year my math teacher began to pick on me a lot in a geometry class. I almost never raised my hand to answer questions. He had noticed, however, that I generally got 100% right on my tests and quizzes. So, he began to call on me in class, particularly for the harder problems that stumped others, perhaps because he suspected that I might somehow be cheating on the tests and wanted to see how I did on my own. When he found that I could usually figure out the answer, he asked me why I wasn't in the "Major Work Program." I didn't even know what it was.

It was a program for advanced students who could work at a faster pace and cover more material. In math at least he felt that I would be better off with such students, and he transferred me to a Major Work geometry class he was teaching that semester. In the meantime he had me investigate why I hadn't been placed in the program in the first place. Placement, as I recall, was based on something called LPR (Learning Proficiency Rate or Reference, or something like that), which was in turn based on a test given in elementary school.

My LPR was in the average range, not high enough to warrant an invitation to apply for admission into the Major Work Program. He suspected that was because I had taken the test when my language skills were not fully developed. He arranged for me to take the eighth-grade version of the test (for parochial students who entered Collinwood in the ninth grade) and I performed considerably better and was consequently placed with the Major Work group of my class.

Since I was in a mid-year class, which was smaller than the classes graduating in June, the Major Work students in my class were very few, no more than twenty or so. They took most of their courses together and had been together as a group since the seventh grade. I was the only new member to join in mid-stream, as I recall. So, once again I was the outsider, an immigrant of sorts again trying to join an erstwhile foreign society. But it was a pattern with which I was now more comfortable (the pattern which has perhaps become the most comfortable, for better or for worse).

In any case, my new classmates were generally friendly and accommodating and supportive, even if initially a little suspicious of my right to be there, which, given my reticence, was understandable. The courses were much more challenging, the students much more motivated and better prepared, the teachers more personal and involved. In addition to getting good scores and good grades, I began to think, to learn about ideas and thoughts and problems rather than just facts and procedures. I started to get a real education.

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Meanwhile, for reasons I've never really understood, since I didn't play sports, didn't belong to any of the social clubs, and wasn't particularly outgoing, I was becoming both widely known and widely respected and liked by other students.

I found myself elected to the student council and was invited to work on the school newspaper. In the ninth grade I was elected president of the junior high student council and editor of the junior high section of the paper. I continued to be active in both activities during senior high, eventually becoming president of the Senior High Student Council, editor-in-chief of the school paper, and editor of the yearbook.

I was also elected to office in the Key Club for several semesters, which allowed me to have lunch with the Kiwanis Club occasionally and even to travel to Columbus for state-wide meetings of the organization.

One Thursday afternoon in the Spring of 1966 I was invited to a Kiwanis luncheon and was seated at a table next to that day's speaker, a young lawyer who had graduated from Collinwood a few years earlier and was beginning a career of public service, as a public prosecutor or defender, or something along those lines. We talked at some length. He asked me about myself, probably wondering about my name as many people do when they first meet me, which leads me to tell them I'm from Italy, and so on. He graciously complimented me on my progress. When he went up to the podium to speak he embarrassed me by recounting my story to the audience to make a point about this being the land of equal opportunity in which effort, hard work, and talent are inevitably rewarded. Despite my embarrassment, I was flattered and he struck me as a very nice, decent, sincere man. It never occurred to me that he might become governor of the state someday. His name was George Voinovich, who went on to become Governor of Ohio and then U.S. Senator.

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I have always suspected that my appeal to people in high school lay partly in my name and possibly in the fact that I was a genuine Italian, not second generation. When I looked at my yearbook recently I was struck by just how many students had Italian names. At the time I took it for granted. It wasn't striking that there were so many Italo-Americans there. At a distance, after having lived elsewhere, including almost a decade in Utah, where the Italian presence is of considerably more modest proportions, I'm astounded to notice just how many names ended in vowels: -aro, -ino, -etti, -one, -illi, -ico, etc. I may have had some kind of cachet with the second and third-generation Italian Americans because in their eyes I was closer to their roots, or because I was reliving their parents' or grandparents' experience. I was an integral part of "them" and they were for me just because of my name and where I came from.

On the other hand, through my work with the school paper particularly, I came in contact with the "others": Jews, Blacks, even an occasional WASP, many of whom tended to be the more active liberal members of the school community, while a majority of my Italian peers tended to be socially and politically conservative, resentful of the "collegiates," those who combed their hair forward or to the side, rather than back in a kind of pompadour, those who would eventually

become the hippies and flower children. Many in the Italo-American community were adamantly prejudiced against "niggers" and "hebes" and "hillbillies."

Yet, for some reason, though I openly associated with such groups, was an active member of the Youth Council on Human Relations, and participated with my black friends in marches and camps for civil rights (in fact they gave me a certificate declaring me an honorary "Soul Brother"), I was never reviled or attacked or dismissed by my own ethnic group, not even during the worst days of the race riots, when as president of the student council I had to call publicly for calm and understanding and tolerance on both sides. Though toward the end of my high school career I was no longer as close to the Italian Americans with whom I had grown up and who had been my "friends" during grade school and Junior High, I never stopped being friendly toward them, nor they toward me.

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In short, my high school career turned out to be successful beyond any expectations I might have had; and it did so almost despite myself. It was almost as if I was a passive observer, standing on the sidelines, watching myself being elected to offices, awarded prizes, lauded and rewarded for merits I didn't really believe I possessed and for achievements which I felt did not result from my own initiative.

Whatever the causes of this success, my high school commencement was the culmination of those seemingly charmed years, at least as far as academic recognition was concerned. It was one of the high points of my life as well as one of the prouder and most memorable moments in my parents' lives. One of my friends later asked me jokingly if I had enjoyed the "Sante Matteo Show," referring to the number of prizes I had received and the number of times my name had been mentioned. My parents still love to recount in mock embarrassment and guilt how someone sitting behind them at the ceremony became exasperated that this kid with the funny name was hogging all the prizes.

The climax for my parents came toward the end of the ceremonies when I gave the Valedictorian address, which I had to do as the student with the highest grade-point average in the class. Even though my parents had supported and encouraged my school activities and were therefore aware of my accomplishments and offices (although by the end some of them had little meaning for them), they also knew how painfully shy I was and had never heard me speak publicly. They waited for my speech with more trepidation and anxiety than I did. They were astounded when I managed to talk in front of such an enormous crowd (I had had much practice as student council president addressing all school assemblies), and as far as they were concerned with great eloquence. They were moved to tears to hear that auditorium echo with my voice speaking what was to them still a foreign language with such apparent mastery and effect. They were thrilled and shaken by the warm applause which followed. How could this be the same little boy who had come from Petrella still wearing short pants only a short time before?

I'd like to think that that moment of pride and satisfaction paid them back for some of their sacrifices, that it made them feel that perhaps it had been worthwhile after all to give up so

much: their extended families, their friends, their homes, for a new life in this strange new world. It would never be their world perhaps, but it could be their children's world.

As I made my way slowly and laboriously through the pandemonium which followed the ceremony backstage, saluting friends, accepting the congratulations and best wishes of teachers and administrators, posing for pictures, I looked anxiously for my parents. After some time I finally saw them in the lobby, off in a corner by themselves, embarrassed, ill at ease, self-conscious, not knowing how to stand, what to say, how to look, how to be, in this setting, and yet smiling irrepressibly, virtually beaming with pride and with joy so that there actually seemed to be an aura of happiness, a glow of satisfaction, around them. So meek and so proud at the same time! It was my turn to be moved to tears, as I rushed to embrace them.

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And it was only then, after my high school graduation, that I returned to Italy, not two years after I left, but nine. My other grandfather had died in the meantime. His prediction had been correct: he would never see me again.

Since I graduated in January I had several months at my disposal before starting college. I worked for two months at the Cleveland Press. I had been a carrier for the Press for three years or so and had won a Cleveland Press scholarship my senior year based on a city-wide competition.

Before returning to Italy, I accompanied my father to Argentina where he had some relatives: his two sisters and their families, and quite a few cousins. They lived in Berazategui, a suburb of Buenos Aires. My father's older sister, Tittina, had emigrated shortly after I was born, and I didn't remember her, her husband, or her two children, both older than me, at all. She had grandchildren by now.

His younger sister, Angiolina, had emigrated several years later, and I had vague memories of her. Her first son, Domenico, was born at the same time I was, either the day before or the day after, so we had taken our first steps and uttered our first words together (actually he much before me, in both categories, I was always told). Domenico came to visit us in the States seven years later, in 1974, and liked it so much that he arranged to return to work several years after that. He now lives near Cleveland with his children and my aunt Angiolina.

I had a wonderful time in Argentina. There were many families from Petrella and they all seemed to be a very gay, carefree lot. One of the paesani owned one of the colorful buses which make the rounds around Buenos Aires (the city buses were actually privately owned, and the city granted contracts for established routes). A group of about forty or fifty people came to meet me and my father at the airport in his bus, and the whole merry gang sang and joked and laughed all the way to my aunt's house.

My entire three weeks there were one big party: cookouts and big dinners, trips to Mar del Plata on the ocean and to the mountains in the interior, dances and parties with Domenico

and his friends, excursions on the commuter train to the beautiful center of Buenos Aires, even the hint of a budding romance as my cousin Antonio's vivacious young wife, Juanita, tried to fix me up with a very pretty Argentine girl. I was much too timid to follow up, but we did smile at each other a lot.

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After this marvelous exposure to a different world, I went back to Italy for the rest of the spring and summer. I spent most of my time in Rome, where my uncles, my mother's three brothers, had settled after brief migrations to Germany.

My maternal grandmother was still living. I spent several weeks with her in Petrella, along with my cousins. It was so different! So many people had moved away! I could hardly recognize any of the young people. And yet, it was also so familiar! Most of my dreams had continued to be set in Petrella for many years, and after a few days back it fit me again, like an old sneaker. America now seemed like a dream.

I found a few of my school friends, and later others returned for the summer from the various places where they had moved to work or study. Rather, I should say they found me. Indeed, it seemed that everyone in the town knew me, no matter where I went, not because they recognized me, but because they recognized my parents in me. I'd pass by a group of men in the piazza and they would say, "Aren't you Lilino's boy, Sante? You look just like your father." A few steps later I'd meet up with a group of women at the public water fountain who would invariably say something like: "Look, that must be Sante, Giuseppina's son; the spitting image of his mother! Sante, how is your mother?"

My weeks in Petrella were also one long feast: evening strolls along the piazza with my old friends, games and chatter with a houseful of cousins, stories and reminiscences from my grandmother Filomena while eating her home-made bread with a chunk of cheese by the same fireplace where I used to be hypnotized by the dance of the flames and the flight of the sparks as a child. The bread had the same taste. My grandmother's voice had the same comfortable sound. The walls echoed with the same laughter. My native dialect had reclaimed possession of my tongue and my mind as the rightful owner. Why had I ever left this place? Why had I not grown up among these people, my people?

But how small the town now looked! Had it really only taken three or four minutes to walk from my house on the main street in the new part of town to the school off the piazza? Only five minutes to the church in the old part of town? Had the alleys always been so dark and narrow, the houses so stark and gray and dingy?

It had been a vast, inexhaustible world to my child's eyes. Now it seemed so tiny! Perhaps it really did not fit me like an old sneaker after all. Had my too well travelled feet grown too much?

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I actually spent most of my time in Rome. I had hoped to reacquaint myself with Italian language, history, and culture, much of which I had forgotten or never learned in the first place. And I did, to a certain extent. However, since I spent most of my time with my uncles and their families, who spoke in the dialect of Petrella, I really didn't perfect my standard Italian as much as I had hoped to. However, I reestablished contact with my extended family and with my country, contacts which I've maintained ever since. I managed to travel to many of Italy's major cities and get a taste of her rich culture, so that Italy now meant more than Petrella or Molise to me.

In a strange way, however, in discovering Italy, rediscovering the life of my hometown, and reestablishing my own sense of Italianness, I also found out just how American I had become. I became aware that I dressed like an American, walked like an American, generally looked like an American. Whenever vendors saw me approaching in Rome or other cities, to my surprise and annoyance they often started to address me in English: "You buy? Very cheap!" Something about me definitely told them "Here comes an American."

What's more, I found that I missed America, my American friends, the Cleveland Indians' games, rock and roll, the smell of mowed grass in the rain! I was a tourist in my own country. And, in many ways, I had come to be more at home in a foreign country! Or, rather, I was beginning to realize that I was destined to be a tourist in life (aren't we all?) whether in Italy or in America, and that I didn't, and probably couldn't ever, feel completely at home in either place. In America I would always miss and long for Italy; in Italy I would yearn for America.

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But I also yearn to get this narration over with, and at this rate it doesn't look as if I will any time soon. In order to do so I must try to limit myself to a more schematic presentation of facts and information. I think that I have probably indulged in enough introspection and self-analysis to provide an adequate idea of my background and my personality, of my strengths as well as my weaknesses, of who I was then and of who I am now.

I could obviously go on at great length to discuss my college experience (1967-1971); my army years (I was drafted in November 1971. My lottery number was 13. I served for two years); graduate school (1973-1976); the courtship (1976-) and marriage (1978-) to my beautiful wife; the long-hoped-for birth of my wonderful son (1983); and so on. But each of these topics, being nearer to me in time and interest, and thus more complex, would end up taking up even more space than anything I've dealt with so far. And I doubt that it's a book you want.

One way to limit myself to a more factual sketch is to retrieve a computer file on my professional activities and simply append it as is at this point, filling in a few of the more personal blanks afterwards. Here it is:

"Summary of Education and Professional Experience

"Born in 1948 in Petrella Tifernina, a small Italian town in the Molise region of southern Italy, I emigrated to the United States with my family when I was almost ten years old. In 1967 I was graduated from Collinwood High School, Cleveland, Ohio, as Valedictorian and first in my class.

"I received two scholarships to attend Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, which awarded me a Bachelor of Arts degree in French in 1971. After two years in the U.S. Army, in the fall of 1973 I accepted a fellowship to pursue graduate studies in Italian with Charles Singleton and Eduardo Saccone at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. I temporarily interrupted my Italian studies in 1974-75 to accept a teaching assistantship at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, where I taught Italian courses while enrolled in the French Master of Arts program. In 1975-76 I returned to Johns Hopkins to finish the graduate course work for the PhD in Italian. Miami University awarded me an MA in French in 1976. The Johns Hopkins University awarded me an MA (1977) and a PhD (1983) in Italian.

"Meanwhile, in 1976 I returned to Miami University to accept my first faculty appointment as an Instructor of Italian, a position I held until 1979. I also taught Italian grammar, reading, and composition at the Miami University Summer Language Institute in Urbino, Italy. From 1980 to 1989 I taught at Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah, at the rank of Instructor from 1980 to 1982, Assistant Professor from 1982 to 1987, and Associate Professor, with tenure, from 1987 to 1990 (on leave 1989-90).

"In 1989 I returned once more to Miami University, first as a Visiting Assistant Professor (1989-90) and subsequently, starting in the fall of 1990, as a tenure-track Assistant Professor, thereby giving up my rank and tenure at BYU, feeling that the academic, intellectual, and social environment at Miami University, especially within the department of French and Italian, would be more in consonance with my personal and professional background and expectations, and that the small-college-town atmosphere of Oxford would be more conducive to the social and intellectual needs of my family.

"I have taught courses and prepared scholarly papers and articles on all periods. My primary research interests, however, are in post-Renaissance Italian literature, contemporary literary theory, and Italian cinema. On five occasions I participated in the summer seminars, lectures, and workshops sponsored by the International Semiotics and Linguistics Center in Urbino, Italy, which have included such internationally renowned scholars as Umberto Eco, Paolo Valesio, Tzvetan Todorov, Louis Marin, and Philippe Hamon, among many others. During the summer of 1983 I participated in an NEH Summer Seminar with Edward Wasiolek of the University of Chicago on "Russian Formalism and Contemporary French and American Criticism."

"My publications include three books: Textual Exile: The Reader in Sterne and Foscolo (Peter Lang, 1986), The Reasonable Romantic: Essays on Alessandro Manzoni (Peter Lang, 1986), and Italian Echoes in the Rocky Mountains (AAIS and D. M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, 1990), as well as numerous reviews, notes, and articles on divers periods

and figures of French and Italian literature and cinema, from Le Roman de la rose and Marco Polo, to Vico, Foscolo, and Manzoni, to Jacques Derrida and Bernardo Bertolucci.

"I have been very active in the academic profession on a national and international level, holding several professional offices and editorships. I am serving a second term as Executive Secretary of the American Association for Italian Studies and Editor of its semiannual newsletter, Il gonfaloniere, and also served as Associate Editor of its journal, Italian Culture. I am on the advisory board of Machiavelli Studies, and am currently serving as Chair of the Modern Language Association executive committee on Italian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present. I have delivered more than fifty papers at regional, national, and international conferences and symposia and have organized and chaired over twenty-five sessions, panels and symposia, including the annual conference of the American Association for Italian Studies, held in Provo, Utah, in April, 1988. More than 225 speakers from all over the world, including Italy, Belgium, West Germany, and Australia, participated. I was successful in obtaining substantial grants from many sources, including Italian governments agencies, Italian Cultural Institutes, and RAI Corporation, and in inviting many prominent scholars and writers, including the novelist and poet Giose Rimanelli, the Italian-German philosopher Ernesto Grassi, and one of Italy's most important contemporary figures as a plenary speaker, the novelist, poet, and Italian senator Paolo Volponi.

"As much as I cultivate, enjoy and profit from my scholarly and professional pursuits, I value my daily interaction with students, both inside and outside the classroom, even more. I consider my profession, whether I am in the classroom, in the library, or at a professional symposium, to be primarily that of teacher or educator, by which I mean not so much a dispenser of knowledge and expertise as a contributing member of a community of scholars, or learners, which includes students as well as professors, engaged in a continuing process of questioning, exploring, experimenting, testing, researching, and questioning some more: in short, learning."

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On the home front, briefly: In 1978 I married Susan Bennett of Glen Burnie, Maryland. We had met while I was a graduate student at Johns Hopkins and she was an undergraduate at Goucher College near Baltimore. She was stunning. She had long, thick blonde hair that cascaded down past her hips and beautiful blue eyes the color of the sky on a bright summer day. She was a brilliant student of languages (including Italian) and struck me as one of the most intelligent, most attractive, and most fascinating women I had ever met.

When we decided to marry I asked her if she wanted to be married on an Italian Alp or in an isolated cove on the Italian Riviera. We opted for Vernazza, a small picturesque fishing village on the Mediterranean Sea south of Genoa, one of the so-called Cinque Terre, five lands or towns. I had been to the general region and had found it enchanting, but had never been to this town before. The Cinque Terre are built into cliffs which rise straight out of the sea. They are linked to each other by a footpath that meanders along the sides of the cliffs, overlooking the clear turquoise waters of the Ligurian Sea. The path is called "Strada dell'amore," the road of love. Shortly after we arrived in Vernazza we asked two strangers to be our witnesses and,

having done the necessary paperwork beforehand, were married in the town's city hall by a bemused mayor who had never done anything like this before: Crazy Americans!

We rented a Vespa motor scooter for the summer and travelled through Italy under the sun and rain. After a couple of weeks of travelling--to Rome, Naples, the Amalfi coast--we settled in Urbino for two months, where I taught in Miami University's Summer Language Institute. We took many weekend trips on the Vespa. In fact, it became our preferred mode of transportation in Europe for several years. The following summer we went to France for a few weeks before heading for Italy. While in Paris I bought a used Vespa. We travelled through much of France with it before going to Urbino for the summer again. I left it in my hometown at the end of the summer for use the next time. I eventually gave it to one of my cousins.

When we were married Susan was a graduate student in Russian at Ohio State University. However, she interrupted her Russian studies to come live in Oxford, Ohio, where I was an Italian instructor, for the 1978-79 academic year. While here she enrolled in the graduate program in French and completed a Master of Arts degree. She also taught Italian as a Teaching Assistant. The following year we moved to Columbus where she resumed her graduate courses in Russian and I worked on my dissertation in Italian literature for the PhD at Johns Hopkins.

The year after that, 1980, I was offered the position at Brigham Young University, where Susan also got a part-time appointment teaching Russian. In the winter of 1981 she returned to Ohio State for a quarter to finish her course work for the PhD. She eventually taught full-time at BYU for one year, then full-time at the University of Utah for three years, commuting between Provo and Salt Lake City.

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Our first child was due to be born in mid-January, 1984. Since Susan was pregnant we had not made any plans to travel that Christmas.

On Christmas Eve we were spending a quiet evening at home, listening to Christmas music and playing Scrabble. It had been snowing very hard all day and evening, leaving about fifteen inches of snow on the ground. And it kept on snowing.

At around 10:30 PM, as I was about to put down my letters to make a word, Susan said, "I think that my water just broke." I figured she just wanted to end the game since I was winning for once (although she claims that she was winning, as usual).

"It can't be. You're just imagining it."

"No, I'm not kidding," she said with more urgency.

I followed her to the bathroom: "But we're not ready! We haven't set up the nursery. We haven't even finished the birthing classes. Plus it's Christmas eve! And there's a blizzard outside! It must be something else!"

But she was sure; her labor was starting!

I wasn't sure whether we could make it to a main road from our house. The streets in our neighborhood had not been plowed. The paved roads which we usually took were uphill. We wouldn't make it to the top. I decided to use the unpaved road to the south which was rougher but was downhill. We had to barrel through the drifts. We got stuck. I backed up in my tracks and got up enough speed to plunge through a few more feet. We got stuck again. And again. Meanwhile Susan's pains were coming more frequently. I envisioned having to help deliver the baby in the car. And then what?

However, we finally managed to make it to a main street which had been plowed at some point, and we got to the hospital shortly before midnight. Susan's obstetrician was in Hawaii for the holidays. The doctor who took his place had to come in from out of town, battling snowdrifts himself. At one point, he said, he didn't think he would make it. He got there a little before one o'clock.

The baby was born only a few minutes later, at 1:20 AM, Christmas morning. What a Christmas present!

After the nurses had cleaned him up, they brought him to us in a bright red Christmas stocking. He was a beautiful baby with a full head of dense black hair (which later turned blond and then a light brown).

Everything had gone smoothly after all, except for when I called my parents and Susan's to give them the joyful tidings. I dialed both numbers wrong and ended up waking up strangers in the middle of the night, one in New York and the other I know not where: "Merry Christmas! It's a boy!" I exclaimed. "Congratulations! Who the hell is this? Do you know what time it is?" a stranger's groggy voice asked. Twice!

We had planned to call the baby Nicholas if it was a boy. It was a name that Susan had always liked, and I knew that it would please my father, whose name is Nicola, Italian for Nicholas, to have his name carried on in the tradition of our region. When the doctor said "Well, you'll probably want to give him a nice Christmasy name, like Nicholas," Susan and I smiled at each other. It was clinched: Nicholas it was. Susan started to call him with the Russian diminutive, Kolya. I often preferred the Italian diminutive, Cocco or Coccolino. Kolya has stuck, and is the name he goes by.

Kolya was a wonderful baby from the beginning: good-natured, happy, loving. He was wonderful as a toddler, and has remained wonderful as a boy. It would surely take several books to express how happy he makes me and how proud I am to have him as a son.

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Though my position at Brigham Young University was a very good one, and professionally it seemed to be ideal in terms of security, advancement, and professional rewards, Susan and I decided that it would be best for us as a family, and for Kolya in particular, to leave Utah.

We were among a handful of faculty members at the university who weren't Mormons. We were the only non-Mormon family in our immediate neighborhood. Kolya probably would have been the only non-Mormon child in his class. Even though our neighbors and colleagues were warm, supportive, friendly and non-intrusive, we felt that it would not have been pleasant or healthy for Kolya to be the odd man out socially. So, we decided that we had to relocate before he started school.

Oxford, Ohio, which hadn't been particularly exciting when we were a young, newly married couple, now seemed the ideal setting to bring up a family. When a position in Italian suddenly became available we decided to seize the opportunity, although it meant that I would give up tenure and my rank. In effect I've had to start over at an entry-level position.

Susan, in the meantime, had accepted a tenure-track position at the University of California at San Diego. She moved there for the 1988-89 academic year. I stayed behind at Brigham Young for another year to give my department a chance to replace me, and to give me a chance to find a position near San Diego (the position at Miami University materialized at the end of that year, only days before I was going to move to San Diego to finalize plans for a position at San Diego State University and to look for a house). Kolya stayed with me. We drove to San Diego (14-15 hours) once a month. Susan flew home several times.

San Diego had seemed very appealing to us at first, a beautiful city in a spectacular location with ideal weather. But, as she lived there, Susan began to realize that it wasn't the ideal place to bring up a child either: too large and chaotic, too much traffic, violence, drugs, too far from our respective families.

Oxford, Ohio, kept popping up in our conversations as the ideal place. Wouldn't a small college town in the midwest, relatively close to both sets of grandparents, be great?

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It has indeed worked out that way. Kolya started kindergarten shortly after we moved back here in August of 1989. And he has flourished even beyond our hopes. He has turned out to be an excellent student so far: methodical and thorough, conscientious, and genuinely interested in learning, and a voracious reader. This year he became a member of the RAH--Reading at Home--500 Club, for having read the equivalent of 500 books (he actually ended up reading over 850!).

All four of his grandparents, as well as his great-grandfather, Susan's paternal grandfather, are close enough that he can see them several times a year. Therefore they are no longer familiar strangers whom he would see only rarely, but people he sees fairly regularly and knows well, people who belong to him and to whom he belongs, no questions asked. This sense of belonging, of being connected to someone in addition to his parents, of having people and places, or roots, to anchor him in life, I feel is very important for a child.

In Utah and in California Kolya would have been in a wilderness of sorts, cut off from his ethnic, cultural, and family background. He would have grown up in a kind of cultural vacuum as far as his own family background was concerned. In Ohio this background is a little more accessible to him.

Oxford, furthermore, is made to the measure of a child. In a relatively short time he has come to know it. When his grandparents or other guests come to visit, he can take them around and show it off to them: "These are the formal gardens. There's a man from Scotland buried near here. This is Peffer Park, where I go sledding. This is a trail that goes to the Bluffs, where Dad and I go hiking. That's my school. That's where my friend, Shreyas, lives. . . ." It's his. When we go shopping or riding around he runs into friends and acquaintances. It's familiar, comfortable. It's home.