

MY IMPRESSIONS OF BERNALDA WHILE EXPLORING MY ROOTS:
SIXTH TRIP (2024)

L.F. Dell'Osso

Because of the COVID epidemic, our planned trip to Bernalda (2020 or 2021) was delayed and in the interim, both our cherished friend and teacher, Maestro Antonio Salfi and Don Mariano passed away. Being in Bernalda without their companionship would be both strange and sad for they had been there from the beginning (1992) and had always helped me in my genealogy research and shared many good times.

Friday to Saturday, August 30-31, 2024: Cleveland-NY-Amsterdam-Florence

After parking our car at the Cleveland airport, we met Zhong and Hiro (my former student and her companion) at the gate and flew to New York, where we had our shortest (22 min) layover before boarding the flight to Amsterdam. We made the connection and from there, after a few hours in Amsterdam, we flew to Florence. All baggage arrived; we took a taxi to the hotel.

Sunday, Sept 1, 2024: Florence

We began our wine tour of Tuscan wineries and visited several, tasting about 4 wines at each. After resting at the hotel, we had a great Florentine steak dinner at Francescano.

Monday, Sept 2, 2024: Florence

After checking out and storing our luggage, we toured Florence on foot and by cab. We had lunch near the Ponte Vecchio and dinner at the hotel's roof-top restaurant. We took a cab to the Railroad station and boarded the train to Bologna. In Bologna we switched to a sleeper train to Taranto.

Tuesday, Sept 3, 2024: Bernalda

In Taranto, we took a taxi to the car rental company and picked up our car. We then drove to Borgo San Gaetano in Bernalda. After checking in and resting, we walked to Via Archita (fka Strada Dell'Osso) and all the way to il Castello and Chiesa Madre, stopping to show Zhong and Hiro Palazzo Dell'Osso. We had a classic dinner at Fifina's.

Wednesday, Sept 4, 2024: Bernalda

We drove to the Greek archeological site and then to Metaponto Lido beach, where we had lunch by the sea. We walked on Corso Umberto I, had Luigi Dell'Osso Bernaldese cocktails, and had dinner at Ristorante Pennetta.

Thursday, Sept 5, 2024: Bernalda

We drove to Matera and toured the Sassi. We then drove to Alberobello where we had lunch in the Trulli square. We drove back to Bernalda, walked around, had Luigi Dell'Osso Bernaldese cocktails at Cinecitta Bar Bistrot, and had dinner at Al Vecchio Garden.

Friday, Sept 6, 2024: Bernalda

I dropped Zhong and Hiro off at the Bernalda Railroad station for their trip to Rome. We visited the church on the Corso but Don Giuseppe was not there. With the help of the staff at the Borgo, we arranged to meet with Michele tomorrow. After resting, we had Luigi Dell'Osso Bernaldese cocktails and dinner at Cinecitta Bar Bistrot.

Saturday, Sept 7, 2024: Bernalda

We drove the rental car back to Taranto and took a taxi back to Bernalda. As we were walking back from the pharmacy to meet with Michele, I heard my name, "Louis" called out. I turned around and saw Angelo, who had recognized my back after 8 years! We greeted each other and arranged to have dinner the next evening. We met with Michele at Cinecitta Bar Bistrot, where we, of course, had Luigi Dell'Osso Bernaldese cocktails while we discussed the interesting interactions between Agostino Coppola and my grandfather, Luigi Dell'Osso. He was impressed by the possibilities and said he would look into finding out more about Luigi's tenure as parish priest in Bernalda. We had dinner at Pitagorici.

Sunday, Sept 8, 2024: Bernalda

During our early walk on the Corso, we ran into Angelo Dell'Osso and had Luigi Dell'Osso Bernaldese cocktails at the Shumaker bar. We agreed to meet at Al Vecchio garden for dinner later. We enjoyed a nice dinner there with Angelo and his wife.

Bernalda 1992 - 2024

So how has Bernalda changed in the past 32 years when I first visited at the age of 51, searching for my ancestors? Don Mariano was 28, and Antonio Salfi was a spry 66. Although modernization has made its imprint (and here I am restricting myself to the old part of town and the Corso area) it has done so without destroying the charm that has been Bernalda for over 400 years. Also, the friendly, helpful people I first encountered remain, uncorrupted by today's harsh world. A quick look in the mirror however, finds a much older man of 83 who has lost two friends, one 23 years younger and the other 15 years older. It was a bittersweet experience walking the Corso without them. I recalled the experience when I, a non-priest, had the honor of marching in 1992 side-by-side with Don Peppino, Don Mariano, and Don Mimi at the head of the parade honoring Bernalda's patron saint, and having the eerie feeling that I had done that very same thing many years before, as the young priest, Don Luigi Dell'Osso had done at the turn of the century (1903-1905). Is genetic memory possible? Bernalda may have remained the same charming village it was 400 years ago but time takes a greater toll us humans.

Monday, Sept 9, 2024: Bernalda-Rome

In the morning, we took a taxi to Metaponto Railroad station and boarded our train to Rome. Unfortunately, it arrived late at Naples and we had to wait on a long line to rebook on the next train to Rome, which we just made after a little running with baggage. There was a long line for taxis (due to the taxi strike) so we took a chance on a "gypsy" cab to our hotel. It went well. We checked in and had dinner at their restaurant, meeting Zhong and Hiro afterward.

Tuesday, Sept 10, 2024: Rome-Atlanta-Cleveland

Uneventful flights punctuated by a long (2 hours) wait to clear passport control and customs that almost caused us to miss our connection to Cleveland. We made it, arrived on time, and our baggage also made it.