

Sunday April 14, 1999(Easter Sunday)

When we woke Easter morning, Lynn told me that the Easter bunny had visited. So I went looking for my Easter basket and found it behind the mini-bar. Had a nice breakfast at Raffaelli Hotel in Forte dei Marme including chocolate spread with our croissants.

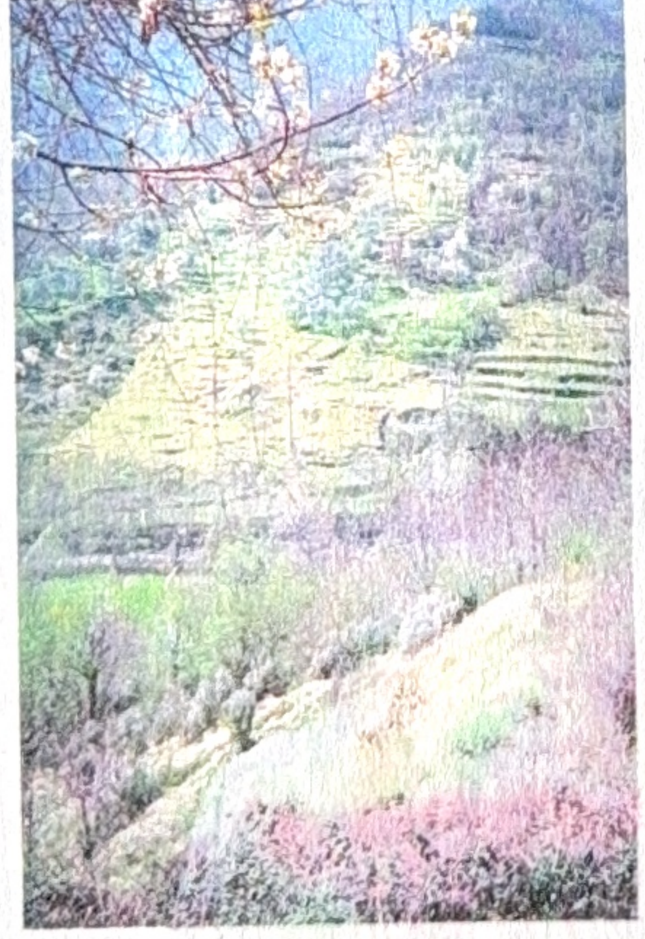
Drove from Forte dei Marme to Chiavari without any directions for finding Alpicella. Stopped at gas station in Chiavari and asked for a local map. They only had large Italy maps and none with the detail we would need to find such a small town.

A young gas station attendant, about 25 years old, said something to me that I thought was "what are you looking for, where are you going?" He only spoke Italian. I told him Alpicella. He asked if I was talking about a hotel, I think. I told him No. I am looking for Alpicella, a small small town, making motions with my fingers (you know, International sign language for tiny).

He started giving all kinds of arm signals and speaking very fast in Italian. The woman behind the counter wrote down about every 50th word that the young man said. Here is her writing. It is all we had to go by. All I knew was we were going to look for the word CARASCO as we drove around Chiavari and then go that way and hopefully find a Valley named AVETO.

In our first pass through Chiavari we didn't see any signs for Carasco, but we did see a sign for the Monte Rosa Hotel. We tried to find the Monte Rosa but missed it. On the second pass through Chiavari (a beautiful town with colorful houses) we saw a sign for Carasco and later a crossroads with SS 586. After taking this road, we quickly got a sign saying 60 kilometers to S. Stefano d'Aveto. We had a feeling that this town must be in the Aveto Valley that we were looking for. We did not know yet that San Stefano was the only town of any size up there on the mountain.





From Chiavari we immediately started going up and up. And left and right. And up and up. It kept getting more beautiful as we climbed some very windy roads up the mountains. After about 30 kilometers of windy roads, we finally got a sign saying winding roads next 6 km. We got a good laugh from that and wondered what we were getting ourselves in for if the last 30 km wasn't considered winding.

After going over one mountain peak there would be another and the winding path became tighter and narrower. After about 45 km I was beginning to wonder how that gas station attendant knew about such a little town so very far up in the mountain and so far away from Chiavari? Maybe we were way off track.

Just when we needed some reassurance that we were on the right path, we saw a 40 year old man along the right hand side of the road out in the middle of nowhere with his dog. Lynn rolled down the window and asked "Alpicella, small town?" Again he didn't speak a word of English but understood our universal sign language for "we're lost". He shook his head and said San Stefano and pointed in the direction we were heading. Then he squeezed Lynn's hand and Lynn could tell he was excited about our adventure and confident we would find it.

With renewed confidence, it wasn't long before we were sure we were in the Aveto Valley. Then we saw Borgonova and then Borzonasca, two other town names on our little sheet of paper. Now the only question was Alpicella really here in the Aveto Valley, or was this town really just in the imagination of someone who grew up in Appalachia?

And then Lynn screamed as we saw a sign saying Amborzasco first right, Alpicella second right. We stopped the car and took a photograph of the sign.



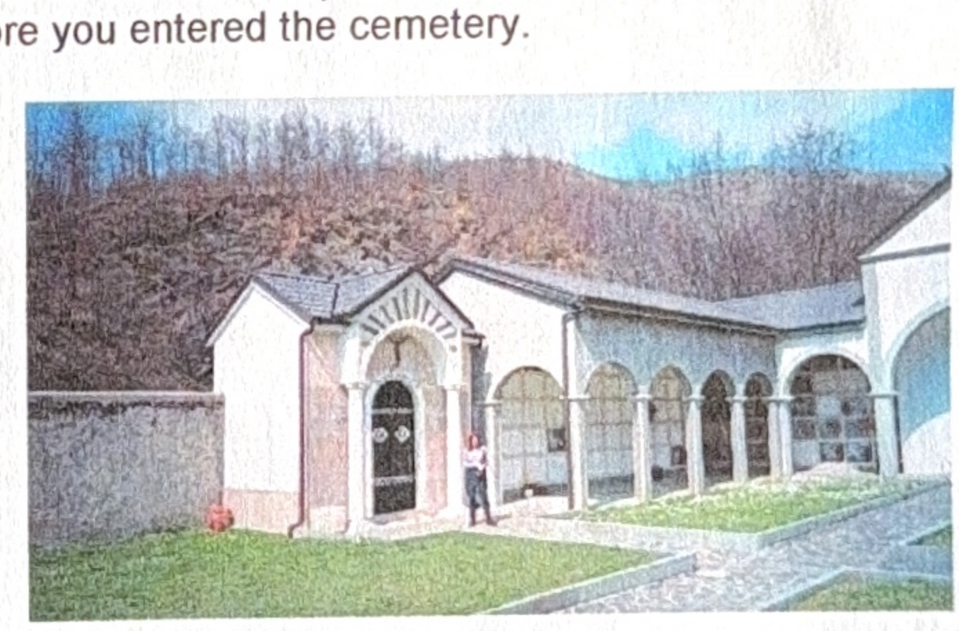
And then we saw the second Alpicella sign. This one was all bent up and in front of a beat up building with broken windows. And I had a flashback that maybe this was Appalachia after all. Again a photograph.



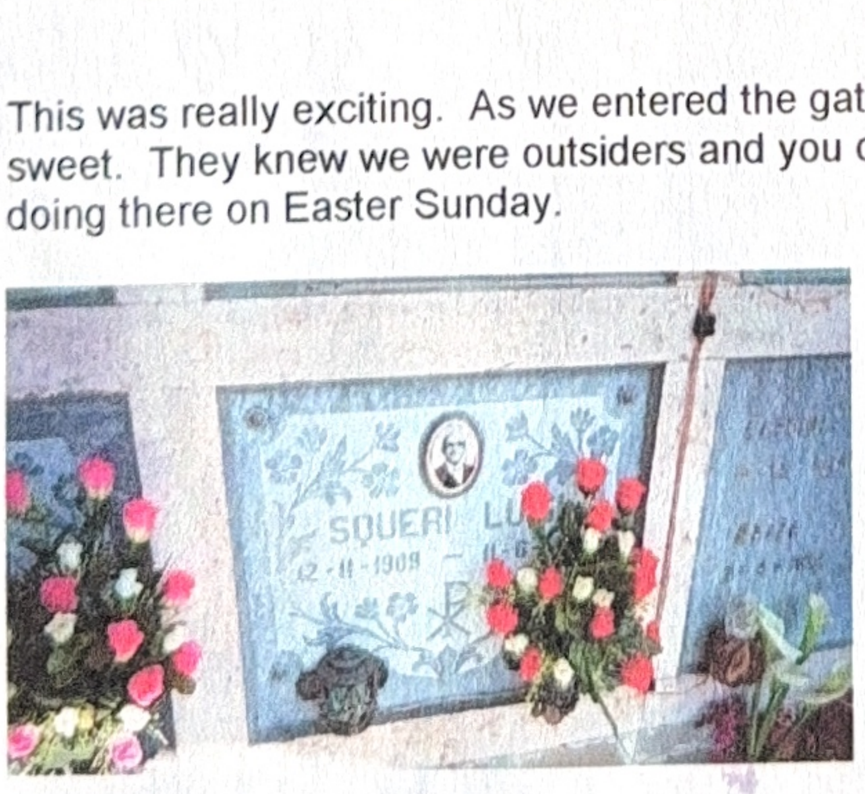
And then a third sign with the town in the background. Lynn got out of the car to take our third picture of a road sign when a dog came charging off a porch running straight at Lynn. With dog barking, I start yelling to Lynn to hurry hurry take the picture!! Both of us were laughing and screaming as Lynn got back into the car just in time.

The first thing we noticed in the town was the church. But instead of stopping at the church right away we decided to drive through the town to see what it looked like overall. Within one block, the town had ended at the cemetery. We parked the car at the cemetery and walked towards it. You could see FAMIGLIA MAZZA on the left even before you entered the cemetery.





This was really exciting. As we entered the gates, we saw one couple in the cemetery. They were so sweet. They knew we were outsiders and you could tell they were a little curious about what we were doing there on Easter Sunday.



Lynn decided to strike up a conversation with the couple. She told them "I'm a Mazza, I'm related to Mazza and Squeri". They started showing up all the sites with Mazza and Squeri. They showed us how to get into the mausoleums. They were trying to help us figure out which Mazza and Squeri we were related to. As they did this, we started to realize just how small this town really was because everywhere you looked there was Mazza and Squeri.





I went back to the car to get Ginny's letter to get some more specific names that could help us. Again, the nice couple spoke only Italian so communication was very difficult. When we showed them the letter and they saw the name Frederico they got so excited. She was saying "my niece is related to Frederico". She took out here cell phone (interesting) and started calling various people in the town.

Then she called Patricia and in Italian was saying "help me, help me… I have a Mazza here from the USA and I can't speak to her." Then she gave the phone to Lynn and said "talk". Patricia said she was 10 minutes away in the next town over. We waited for her at the cemetery.

Just then, by chance, Frederico drove by the cemetery and they called for him but he didn't hear them. So the nice lady started running down the street after Frederico. I took a picture of her running because it was very cute about how excited they were.





People started arriving at the cemetery because the word was out that the town had visitors. Then Patricia and her father came to the cemetery to meet us. We talked for awhile and then we started walking but we were not really sure where they were taking us. And then the nice lady popped her head out the window and said "come in and talk to grandfather who knows all the town history.

The grandpa lives by himself. His daughter is Elisena Squeri who is married to Frederico. Grandpa's name and address is:
Amrogio Mariani
Amborzasco perr Alpicella D'Aveto
Prov. Genova, Italy 16040

We had coffee and the traditional Easter Dove bread here and we started to hear stories. We learned that our Mazza family had a nickname like many of the Mazza and Squeri families. With so many families with the same name, they mostly used nicknames. Our Mazza family was "TAPPETTI" meaning small people.

Lynn brought up the subject of Monsignor Mazza. They weren't sure what she said so Lynn said "you know, the one who stole all the money." They seemed totally surprised and a little embarrassed at first that someone from America knew about their big scandal. But then it was a big joke and they talked about it a lot.

They knew all details about the Bill Clinton and Monica story. They think it is a big joke as they are much more used to political corruption and sex scandals. No big deal... his own business... is their view of the whole matter. They know lots of Monica jokes.





We walked up a hill and took pictures. Then we came to Elisena and Frederico's house and first she showed us the cows. The cows are kept in the lower level of the house. There were many of them and they were all laying down while they were eating. Then she showed us how she made the bread and cheese. She cut some cheese and had a big basket full of bread, and offered us some sausages/ salami hanging from the ceiling. Most of t he people in the town are farmers.

Once again we had coffee and also had wine, cheese, and bread. Later she brought out the traditional Easter Dove bread. Many more people came here to meet us including some of the Mazza's most closely related to the Monsignor.

Grandpa wanted Lynn to send him over a woman from America. Many people continued to come to the house to meet us as the word got out. Elisena Squeri met us here and she wanted to show us her house.



They wanted us to stay later so they encouraged us to cancel our reservations in Genova and to stay nearby in San Stefano instead. They got us a room and then called to cancel our Genova hotel where they found our we didn't have a reservation anyway.



Next, Frederico came home. Everyone is always making jokes with him and teasing him about being a big salami. Salami means "someone who is not too bright". Frederico is never serious. Always joking. We talked again about the Alpicella Festival and told Frederico he should come. He is afraid of flying. They are fascinated that someone in the USA would have an Alpicella Festival. They kept telling this story over and over again as new people kept coming in.

After visiting in this second home, we were invited to a third house for dinner. But first we were going to tour around and learn the way to our new hotel nearby. First we went to the church in Alpicella where Grandpa Mazza was baptized. Elisena and Patricia were showing us around. They gave us Italian coins so that we could light a candle. We lit candles in many churches during our trip but this one was special. The church is very beautiful. We then said goodbye to Elisena with double kisses at the cemetery where we left our car earlier.



Frederico and Elisena Squeri
Alpicella Nr. 104
Amborzasco D'Aveto
16040 Genova Italy
phone 0039 0185 899037





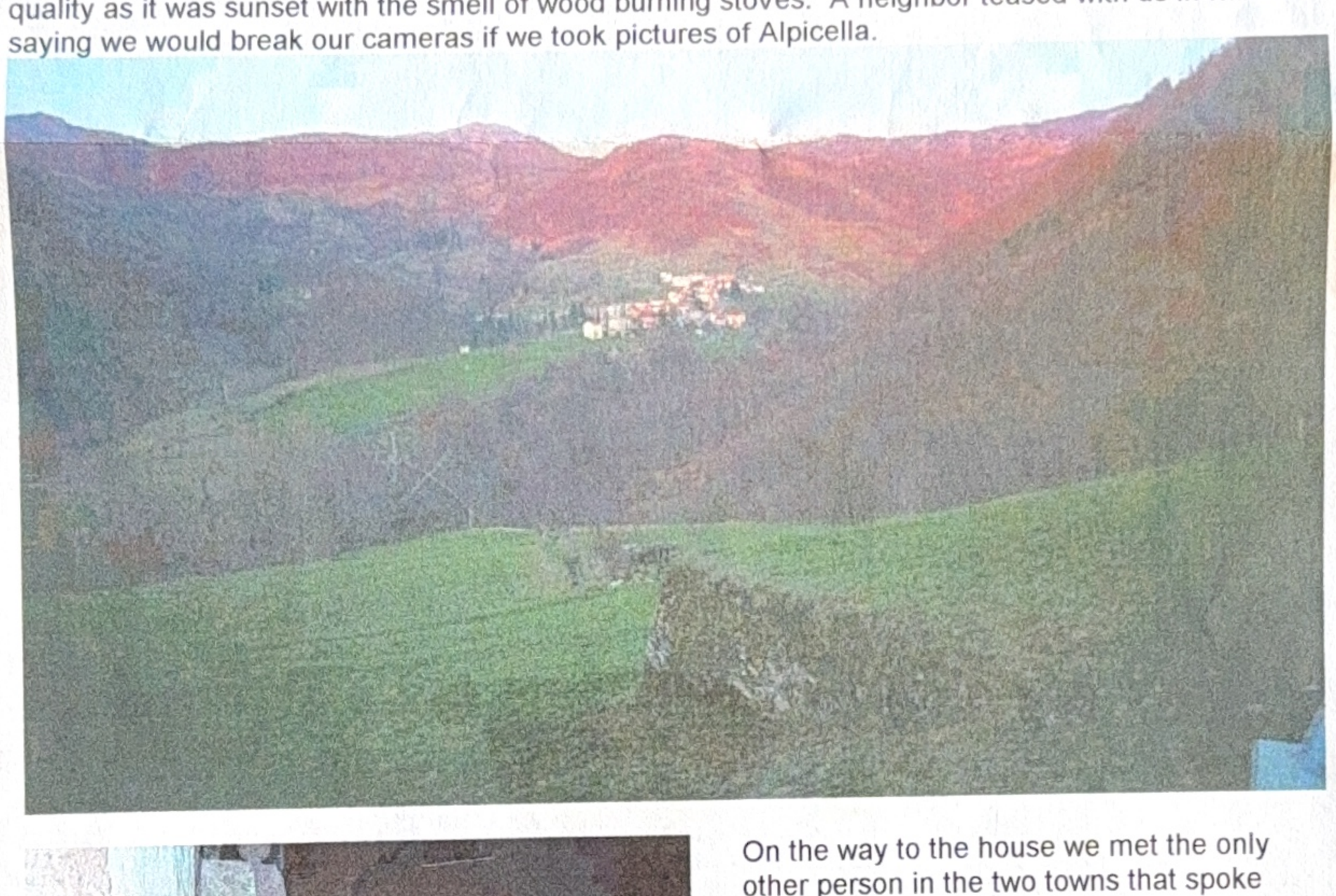
We drove to San Stefano with Patricia and checked into our hotel. We then did a little tour. Patricia took us to a little pastry shop and bought us a red apéritif drink, and two Easter eggs with little charms inside. We went to a few shops and bought some Champagne for dinner and Patricia bought some special cookies. I bought some big chocolate Easter eggs wrapped in bright foil for the triplets. There is a toy inside the eggs.

After San Stefano, we went to our third house in Amborzaco. This was the home of Paticia's mom and dad. Phone number here was 0039 0185 899227.

Patrizia Ferretti
Wiesengrundstr. 6
CH - 8800 THALWIL
0041 - 1- 7211000
Email Patrizia_Ferretti@swissre.com



From this town you get a tremendous view of Alpicella in the distance. There was a special light quality as it was sunset with the smell of wood burning stoves. A neighbor teased with us in Italian saying we would break our cameras if we took pictures of Alpicella.





On the way to the house we met the only other person in the two towns that spoke English. Here is where I took a picture of the small boy at the spring fountain.

For dinner we had tow types of home-made pasta. The first was ravioli soup with meat. The second was spinach ravioli with no sauce and only parmesan cheese. Both were incredible. We also had s special red wine and a homemade lemon liquer.

All through dinner Patricia was translating for everyone. Her mom and dad are precious. The mom had a classic Italian look. The dad had the kindest, sweetest face that showed you how pleased he was that someone wanted to know the family history. But he was so so tired. You could see it in his face. He needed to go to bed because he always went to bed early and took an afternoon nap. But because of all the excitement in the town today he had missed his nap. We had a special desert from Naples and the Easter Dove bread for the third time today. We said goodbye and made our way to San Stefano. A very special day.