

How to Fall in Love with a Place You've Never Been

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How can you feel at home in a place that you've never been to before? The deep green hue of the towering trees, the beautiful detailed architecture of a town, the buildings each so uniquely colorful and their own; it all feels like it's *yours* yet you've never even stepped foot there before. How can you fall in love with a place you've never seen in person before? Not only that, but to feel like you belong there, like that little place owns a special spot in your heart that nothing else can seem to replace. No matter how far you move, how drastically your life changes, or how different a person you become. That place is home to you.

In my personal experience, hearing about my culture is what did that.

When one thinks of Italy, they often think of Rome, Venice, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, or even the Colosseum. But nestled deep in the Italian countryside, all the way down towards the tip of the boot, is a very lovely town. This town is way too often forgotten about, overlooked by some of the more popular wonders that Italy offers. This quaint little town, one of culture, life, and happiness, is called Rogliano.

I have known about Rogliano since I was a little girl. My grandmother, who in typical Italian fashion is called Nonna, made it a point to teach us about where our family had originated from. She had bright paintings that depicted Rogliano in great detail, from the winding pathways, to the beautifully detailed churches, and many other aspects that seemed to make Rogliano unlike any other town that I've seen. There were intricately carved water fountains everywhere, and people decorated their window sills with colorful flower pots, each filled with blooming orchids. Behind the town was vast acres of farmland, home to all sorts of plants and animals. Pigs, cows, sheep, you name it, it was there. My family had once owned a large farm there,

growing all sorts of plants. Ranging from peaches to wheat, apples to figs, and even prickly pears, which I did not know was a real fruit until I heard about it in the stories about Rogliano.

What fascinates me most about this quaint small town, is the personal stories there. Yes, the town in itself is beautiful, and always will be, but the stories there are what really matter. Would I be drawn to this town if not for my culture and family history here? Honestly, probably not. Like how people would dance the tarantella in the streets, the only music being from stomping, clapping, and drumming on walls or nearby pots. In case you didn't know, the tarantella is a traditional Italian dance that is done at weddings, parties, or any type of social gathering. It didn't have to be a special occasion for them to celebrate, just another day of life was a celebration in itself. The people of Rogliano would get in a circle, in the middle of the town, and just enjoy dancing. Two people would get in the middle of the circle, feel the music of the tarantella, and be caught up in the moment dancing. The rhythm flowing within, stomping their feet in tune to the music made by those around them. They would fling their arms out in happiness, as if soaking in the joy of the moment. It was a form of love and appreciation, especially for your partner and those around you. It was a sense of community: a celebration of life, a celebration of love. After a pair was done, another pair would go in the middle, and the cycle would start anew.

“Up, up.” my Nonna exclaimed while grabbing my hand and pulling me out of my seat and up into a standing position.

“Now *this* is how you do the tarantella.” she added with a smile as she clicked the screen of her iPad. Immediately the room filled with music, the same melody as the music that often fills the streets of Rogliano. She grabbed my hands in hers, and we started tapping our feet and

dancing to the music. It wasn't the best dancing, but it didn't have to be, that was the point of the tarantella.

This traditional Italian dance should not matter to a young American girl who has never been out of the country. But when me and Nonna were doing the tarantella on the cold yellow linoleum of her kitchen floor, it somehow became important to me. I was somehow transported to that Italian countryside, basking in the golden sun of a warm Italian day. I was not hearing the music from an iPad, I was hearing it in the forms of stomps and clamps, in words of Italian that I could not understand, but I could still sense the joy that strongly radiated through them. Culture is hearing about where you are from, but more importantly than that, *experiencing it*.

Living it.

Feeling it.

Culture is being one with your heritage, and embracing where you come from. Learning about the region you came from, with all of its fun little quirks and traditions.

I'm going to be honest, this story had a different plan. A different trajectory. A drastically different way of going in my head, what should have been, and how it should have played out. Talking about the joys of culture, how culture means the small things too. Like laughing whenever "Dominick the Donkey" comes on during Christmas time because that's not a real Italian tradition, making fun of Olive Garden, or calling your relative a baccala.

That's the way it should have been.

That's the way I wanted it to go.

But life is crazy and unpredictable, and things happen. Unfortunately, it's not always good things that happen. Sometimes we can't bask in the warm Italian sun, and we must face the harsh coldness of real life.

We found out recently that Nonna has cancer. I won't get into the details, as it's just bad news after bad news. One after the other. It hit us like a freight train, and now it won't stop running us over.

Again.

Again.

Again.

It feels like it won't stop coming, like there's no end in sight for the unbearable amount of diagnoses, meetings, and tests.

Life is too short to not know about your culture. To not experience it. Relish in it. Live it. Even if that's photos or videos, practicing traditions and holidays, or even visiting where you come from. Life is too short to not know where you came from, to not have that sense of identity and belonging. To not love a random little Italian countryside, or to not learn what a prickly pear is for the first time, and then be shocked when you try one and it tastes really weird. Whether your culture is a large part of your life, or only a small one, it still needs to be there. To be explored and ventured into, to learn about what makes you, you. Culture defines the road map of our lineage, as it twists and turns when families move or marry others of different cultures. It can give us a connection to those we have never met, or even a love for a place we've never been.

Life is too short to not dance freely on the cold yellow linoleum floor.