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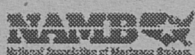
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## Italy

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like the safest route, damned if those horses weren't instantly on our heels again. Tom was unable to continue the climb, as he was doubled over in hysterics: he swore I looked like Jerry Lewis running for my life from these horses.

### Catholic Relics: Nothing to Die For

The Catholics seem to really revere dead things. Tom, whom I caught dipping his fingers into the holy water and crossing himself (I married a believer!), dragged me into the basement of St. Peter's Basilica to see the dead Popes. I kid you not: the basement is full of dead bodies, all mummified, with tourists from around the world snapping photos to show the folks back home.

In St. Andrew's Cathedral in Amalfi we got to see St. Andrew's body, but his head is at the Vatican. We saw the bones of this saint, the chains that held another, a scrap of clothing, a tooth here and there – fragments all, as if in some frenzy priests divvied up the dead bodies and everyone got a bone chip, a toenail, or some chest hair.

Most gruesome of all was the blood of St. Somebody-or-other (honestly, with all these saints you'd think the world would be a better place), which they proudly display in the cathedral in Ravello. Legend has it that in July of every year the blood begins to boil and refreshes itself (from thick, coagulated sludge to the ruby color of a fresh kill), but no one could recall this happening in their lifetimes. I thought I might vomit. Is that what these relics are for – to test the stomachs of the faithful?

One can only imagine the feeding frenzy over The Cross. We saw splinters of The Cross literally all over the place. I began to think we'd seen enough splinters to reconstruct a split rail fence from P-Town to San Francisco. How huge was that thing? And just who carried it – Christ or Goliath?

On our return to Rome for the flight home, we were left with a final afternoon during which to pursue additional Catholic Relics. And we hit the motherlode! Tom dragged me to the Cathedral Santa Maria Maggiore in the rain. I was sick (the wrong pesce?), and opted to sit in a pew on the side aisle, determined to hold it together, with a promise that I would get up if there was something I simply had to see.

After scouting the place, Tom returned and offered, "They've got The Crib of Christ here." Well, this seemed worth an effort, so I walked across the room – maneuvering through a nun convention – to get a good look and prepared myself to be amazed.

I stumbled my nauseated way back to the pew where I had left Tom, sat down, and calmly reported, "I read that book, honey, and at no time did it suggest that Christ slept in a chafing dish." He had sent me to see a baroque chafing dish (I would not have been surprised to see little

sterno cans set out beneath it, keeping the 'crib' cozy), completely covered in silver and gold angels and cherubs and the like. It was intensely ornate – way, way over the top (a.k.a. "Italianate"). As if Joseph was Harvey Fierstein and he ran a catering company.

Tom, who is nothing if not patient, explained to me that there were little windows in the sides of this "chafing dish" through which I could see the twigs purported to be of The Crib of Christ. So once again I hauled my pathetic ass down the stairs, elbowing those determined little nuns out of my way, and sure enough there was something dark inside the small frosted panes on the sides of the chafing dish. The Crib of Christ, I'm sure.

### Final Thoughts (Because They'll Never Let Me Cross the Borders Again!)

My take on Italians: the women are loud. The men are *gorgeous*. Not appealing in any kind of remote or subtle way, but truly gorgeous in that "I can see I'm making you sweat – will that be all, sir?" kind of way. What you would really call "service with a smile."

Many Italians do not have phones in their homes. Instead they make do with cell phones. As soon as we got on the train from Rome to Florence, everyone dialed up their cell phones. We were essentially trapped in a Verizon commercial, with a train full of Italians querying, "Can you hear me now?" It was unrelenting.

They only seem to have Italian food in Italy. Breakfasts in the hotels were advertised as "British," which means lots of jams and sausage. But beyond that, everything was pasta and pesce. I love pasta, and I love fish. But by the end of two weeks I wanted a hamburger more than anything. Don't the Italians ever eat Chinese?

And finally, do yourself a favor and invest in a decent camera. I took 12 rolls of film on a \$20 camera with a plastic lens, and it shows. The guy at the photo shop had tears in his eyes when he handed them over (and I teared up when I had to pay for these murky shots). If you're going to go to the trouble to haul a camera around Europe, lug one with at least the potential to capture worthwhile shots!

By all means, go. Tom and I took advantage of a traditional honeymoon to take a trip that we had both found reasons to put off for years. We had such a spectacular time that we spent the flight home plotting future trips to Spain, Britain, and Greece. They sell shoes in Spain, right? ▼

Bennett Law lusts after "old fashioned" Italian shoes in Bethel.