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Living to Learn in Italy

Margo L. Connell
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Living to Learn in Italy

Margo L. Connell
B.A. University of Minnesota 1964

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for
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This project by Margo L. Connell is accepted in its present form.

Date _____

Project Advisor _____

Project Reader

Ruth E. Wilmot

Living to Learn in Italy is a personal account of the time I spent in Florence and Torino, Italy, and the challenges I faced in adapting to a new environment, as well as the personal issues that surfaced as I moved through major life transitions.

I have organized this paper chronologically in three sections, orientation, adaptation, and elaboration.

The first section, orientation, recounts experiences from my first months in Florence. This was the initial, exploratory phase of my life in a foreign culture, and during which I was not as involved with the people, language and way of life as later.

Adaptation, the second section, refers to the time after I left Florence and moved to Torino, which marked the beginning of my real adjustment to the Italian culture and daily life.

The final section, elaboration, examines an issue which became of more critical import to me the longer I lived in Torino, that of social relationships and friendships.

ERIC Descriptors

- Intercultural Communication
- Cultural Influences
- Cross Cultural Training
- Cultural Awareness
- Culture Conflict
- Cultural Differences
- Cross Cultural Studies

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Introduction

My purpose in writing this professional paper is to give others, prospective teachers of TESOL in Italy, or anyone who may wish to live cross-culturally, some insight into the personal issues which confronted me, and will certainly, to some degree, confront anyone who encounters transition periods in life.

A foreign student of mine coined the expression "dark comfortable" to describe his feelings when at home in the political tinderbox of the Middle East. Those words take on significance for me as well, they reveal the relationship that I have had with myself and with Italy during the last four years. Even now, months after my return from Torino, when someone asks me if I enjoyed living there and what life was like, my mind repeats "dark comfortable." It was a mostly comfortable existence, yes, but with a certain darkness, a pall cast over it, for I never felt quite at home there.

In 1981, I divorced and made a decision to go to Europe for a time, trying to gain a new perspective on life. Twenty years earlier, I had lived in France, and it had always been a dream of mine to return to Europe someday. Ultimately, I decided to attend a language school in Florence, Italy; for having been a tourist there years before, I was left with wonderful memories of the amiable out-going Italians and the renaissance beauty of the city and her artistic masterpieces.

In developing this paper about my experiences in Italy, I have come to recognize that throughout the four years I spent there, I struggled with as many personal issues related to life-transition as I

did with issues that emerged directly from living in a culture different from my own. At times for me, it has been enigmatic, clarifying which were distinctly issues of transition shock, which were related only to culture shock, and which were a blending of both.

Contributing to the clarification of these issues has been Janet Bennett's article, "Transition Shock: Putting Culture Shock in Perspective," which has been most helpful in that it has substantiated conclusions I had already reached about my adaptive process in Italy. It suggests that culture shock is simply a subcategory of transition experiences, manifesting itself in feelings of personal loss of the tangible as well as the intangible. One reacts to these losses as one would who may have experienced death or divorce: with disorientation, frustration, anger, helplessness, loneliness and depression. According to Bennett (46), the symptoms of culture shock differ in type and intensity from individual to individual, and thus the experience of culture shock becomes a very personal one.

The model of environmental adjustment as postulated by Clyde Sergeant, cited in Bennett's article, has also been most useful in defining the psychological stages of adjustment represented in each of the phases of my adaptation, which I will refer to in my paper. Sergeant theorizes that there are four stages: fight, flight, filter and flex (1973, 42-45).

"Fight," the initial stage, commences with high expectations and a honeymoon feeling for the new environment. It is the exploratory period in which all aspects of the new environment seem wonderful, and the similarities, rather than the differences are noted between the old and

new environments. Ultimately, however, the new environment is begun to be seen more realistically, i.e., it is at odds with the old world view, discouragement follows and a "fighting" stance is assumed to protect the old world view.

The second stage, "flight," refers to the desire to escape the experience. In this stage, one may quite literally flee from the new environment, or more commonly, one may isolate oneself from the host culture and its people by associating only with one's own countrymen, or by criticizing any and all features of life in the host country, in wishing to protect the old world view. It is also a time when, again, in attempting to protect oneself, one may become rebellious, and, for example, refuse to participate in the required social behavior of the new environment.

"Flight" moves on to the "filtering" stage which requires conscious efforts to resolve the cultural conflicts. This stage marks the beginning of recovery and adjustment to the new environment. Self-awareness is heightened, and the realization that the host culture cannot possibly be all wrong, all of the time, permits the lowering of protective mechanisms and allows the development of increased understanding and sensitivity to the new environment to proceed.

"Flex," the final stage, means accommodation to the new environment, and demonstrates one's willingness and ability to separate from the old world view. In "flex," adjustment is nearly complete. There is a stronger sense of who one is, and one is no longer threatened by the differences in the host culture.

As this paper evolved, and I reflected on the episodes which highlighted the stages of my adaptation in Italy, I have observed that Sergeant's stages, fight, flight, filter and flex, were not necessarily separate stages that I methodically moved through one step at a time, completing one before moving on to another. Oftentimes the parameters were not well defined, but rather were blurred and indistinguishable from each other; furthermore, even as I reached the higher plateaus of psychological adjustment in most aspects of my life, I oftentimes found myself regressing to the earlier stages of "fight" and "flight" whenever I was confronted with new, "untried" experiences.

To aid the readers of this paper, I have organized it chronologically in three sections, the first being orientation, which recounts a few experiences from my first months in Italy, in Florence. This was the initial, exploratory phase of my life in a foreign culture, and during which I was not as deeply involved with the people, language and way of life as later. The second section, adaptation, refers to the period of time after I left Florence and moved to Torino, which marked the beginning of my real adjustment to life in Italy. Here, I relate experiences in becoming acquainted with an Italian family, looking for work and housing, getting around the city, and shopping. Elaboration, the third section, explores an issue which became of more critical import to me the longer I lived in Torino, that of social relationships and friendships. It is the issue which I believe was least resolved during my adjustment to Italian culture and perhaps of ultimate interest in considering what is possible in adapting to other cultures.

The three sections of my paper have been developed around various themes, or "awareness episodes" (Batchelder and Warner 1977, 147) which highlighted the challenges of my cross-cultural experiment, and the demands they made on me cognitively and affectively. Whenever possible, I have explicitly stated my reactions, my responses to them, and at times, how I consciously attempted to resolve the conflicts between me and my environment as I grew to a new awareness of myself in transition.

I earnestly hope the following pages will convey some of the sense of excitement, bewilderment, awe, frustration, fear, self-assurance--the list is endless--that I experienced during my sojourn in Italy.

The material for my writing has been gleaned from a journal that I kept the year after I was in the MAT program at the School for International Training, letters sent to and received from friends, and finally the memories and impressions that have remained with me from that period of time.

In reflection, I see that not only have I been the curious Pandora, I have been the box as well, and that which was released, though not evil in the true sense of the definition, nonetheless, was totally unexpected and never-ending in its assault on my consciousness.

Orientation: Florence

The day of my departure came, December 30, 1981, and I was a bundle of nerves. The past weeks I had not concentrated my thoughts on what I was going to find in Florence: a different language, culture and way of life, but instead, I had been preoccupied by what I was leaving, my children, my friends, and my home. Again and again I asked myself if I had made the right decision. My answer was always the same. I was more fearful of the personal consequences of not going than what might happen in going.

For years I had known almost to the hour what each day would bring. Now, suddenly, I knew little about the future and that thought, although somewhat alarming, was freeing.

The first day of the New Year, I was in Milano, where Paolo, a friend from Torino, had met me at the central train station the evening before. We had celebrated my arrival, along with that of the New Year's, with a bottle of champagne, and early the next day boarded the train for Florence where I was to begin classes on the fourth of January.

I was exhausted from traveling and lack of sleep, and the train trip to Florence was difficult. Because it was a holiday period, the train was overcrowded and most of the eight-hour journey was spent standing shoulder to shoulder in the narrow aisle that ran parallel to the compartments. Later, I was to discover that being crowded is the rule, rather than the exception, in Italy.

All this brightness and yellowness was a perpetual delight: it was a part of that indefinably charming color which Florence always seems to wear as you look up and down at it from the river, and from the bridges and quays. This is a kind of grave

radiance--a harmony of high tints--which I scarce know how to describe. There are yellow walls and green blinds and red roofs, there are intervals of brilliant brown and natural looking blues, but the picture is not spotty or gaudy, thanks to the distribution of the colours in large and comfortable masses, and to the washing-over of the scene by some happy softness of sun shine (James, 1909, 122).

I marveled at this description of Florence by Henry James, written almost eighty years ago, for the magnificence of color in Florence was what I, too, immediately experienced. The sense of sight being influenced first before any of the others, may be a unique reaction to a new environment, I do not know. What I do know is that even in what is inarguably the most joyless time of winter in the Midwest, January, Florence was alive with color. It seemed to me a child's kaleidoscope and whichever direction I faced, a new, distinctly different pattern of color emerged from the interplaying hues of the beautiful, paisley woolen shawls that each woman wore around her shoulders, the street vendors' freestanding compositions of cut flowers and plants, and the incredible displays of merchandise in shop windows. All of this was set against a backdrop of yellow ochre walls and red tile roofs, pleasingly interrupted by wrought iron balconies, gates, and green shuttered windows.

My first days in Florence were consumed by survival activities, though generously sprinkled with sight-seeing as well, and always with Paolo in charge. From morning until night he was instructing me on the "how to's" of everything: how to use the city buses (how to signal my stop, how to validate the ticket, even how to place my feet in order to stand without falling), how to use the public telephone, how to use the citofono, how to let myself into my apartment building, how to order

coffee and cappuccino, how to order from a menu, how to convert dollars into lire, mentally, and at the bank, how to, how to, how to, ad infinitum. I was overwhelmed, and, it seemed, as helpless as a baby. I could not do anything for myself without doubting what I was doing. Life, which had been predictable and automatic for so long, was abruptly the contrary. To make matters worse, Paolo was going to be with me for only a week; then he had to return to Torino. Then what? I would be completely on my own and very unsure of myself. As Bennett (45) implies in her article, I was reacting to loss, the loss of a familiar environment as well as a familiar role. I was accustomed to giving help, not to receiving it or needing it.

In those first days, I was as troubled by my feelings of helplessness and insecurity as I was moved by the centuries-old beauty of Florence and the hills that embraced her. This regression to dependency was unexpected and unwelcome. In my new environment Paolo knew everything, I knew nothing--a complete reversal of our previous roles only a year earlier in the United States. The week flew by. We visited San Gimignano and Fiesole, and in Florence, climbed to the top of the Duomo, crossed over the Arno on the Ponte Vecchio, toured the Pitti Palace, and the Uffizi gallery, stopping during these forays to relax at a sidewalk cafe with a cappuccino or an aperitivo and letting the beauty soak in. That week I lived the part of a tourist much like the one mentioned in the travel guide that I used:

In Florence the story is told of a Frenchman who came to the city to seek comfort for a mourning heart and sin-heavy conscience. He walked about, climbed the hilltops and sat at cafes, gazing at the crowds and letting the city's spell sweep

over him. After a while he sought out a friend and said to him, "I have found peace at last. Florence is the city of forgiveness (Holiday Magazine 1960, 9)."

I, like the Frenchman, had begun to find solace and relief from the emotional stress of the previous months in the splendor of Florence.

Orientation: The Language

My peace did not last. I had started school, and every day from 9:00 to 1:00, I went to my Italian class and tried to understand what was happening. We had two teachers, Paolo and Giovanni, and they divided the class time between themselves. Some days Giovanni would teach grammar and Paolo conversation and vice versa. There were fifteen students in the class, all European with the exception of myself and another American. For four hours a day, five days a week, we heard nothing but Italian. The others seemed so comfortable in the classroom, understood what the teachers were saying and were able to respond unhesitatingly when they were called on. I was another story. I was in a total fog. I understood nothing and was lucky if I could reply at all, let alone make a correct response. I reached a point where I could feel the anger building inside me as I listened to Italian being spoken everywhere, in class, on the streets, in buses, in restaurants and shops. Wherever I went it was Italian, Italian, Italian, and I wanted to scream, "Shut-up, I can't stand to listen anymore." I am certain it took me three weeks of the four-week course just to become accustomed to listening to the language, recognizing certain patterns of sounds as words and phrases, and acquiring some listening comprehension skills along with a very few basic speaking skills. To me, what had been cacophony bordering on the

sound of parrots squawking at the outset, finally began to take on some form and structure.

Three months later, as I was returning from Marseilles by train to Torino, having visited family friends, I remember almost to the exact kilometer on the route where suddenly, without being cognizant of the reason, I started to feel very relaxed. Moments later, I knew why. We had arrived close to the Italian border, and most of the people in my car were now Italians, speaking Italian. Without realizing what I was doing, I had automatically tuned in to the language, and its familiar sounds and rhythms made me feel at ease.

When I recall my early attempts at conversing in Italian, I am reminded of a paragraph in Garrison Keillor's book, Lake Wobegon Days, where he speaks of Norwegian immigrants in America:

America was the land where they were old and sick, Norway where they were young and full of hope--and much smarter, for you are never so smart again in a language learned in middle age, not so romantic, brave or kind. All of the best of you is in the old tongue, but when you speak your best in America, you become a yokel, a dumb Norskie, and when you speak English, an idiot (1985, 65).

Keillor's words about the immigrants echoed my own thoughts as I experienced the daily challenges of living in Italy, using the language and meeting the culture head-on as an American, and not less significantly, as a single woman.

One weekend, my second month in Florence, I was on my way to Torino by train to meet Paolo. It was the first time I had traveled alone in Italy. I was in a compartment by myself, next to the window, when I was joined by a nice-looking man. He sat down across from me and to my left,

just the right distance away, not too close and not too far, I thought, for me to practice Italian. My expectations for the language event about to take place were high. After the usual greetings had been exchanged, I continued with the conversation, hoping to keep his attention long enough to practice my limited vocabulary.

Before long, I realized--intuitively, I think, because I could not possibly have understood all of what he said to me--that the conversation had taken a few wrong turns, not to mention that he was moving closer and closer, even though he was still sitting opposite me. Moments before he had asked me about Ronald Reagan, and now I heard him saying in Italian, "Reagan is the cowboy of war, but I, I am the cowboy of love." I understood the words that he was saying, but I did not want to believe the message that they were communicating. Then, he boldly asked me if I would be agreeable to getting off the train with him at his stop, Empoli, and finding a room where the two of us could be "alone" for a while.

I was stunned. Everything was happening so rapidly I could not think fast enough in Italian to say all that I needed to say. I was searching for the words, "What kind of a woman do you think I am," or something to that effect, when he reached over, put his hand on my ankle, and gestured for me to stand up so he could look at me. I was shocked and angry and would have said a lot in English if I had been confronted in the same manner by an American man, but because the whole interaction had been in Italian, and he had control, not only of the language, but the situation as well, thanks to my naivete, the only words that came to me were, "Non, sono stanca. (No, I am tired)." I felt so foolish!

Here I was, in circumstances that would have been difficult enough in an American setting, but in an Italian one, they were impossible. I wanted to say, "Leave me alone, go away, fuck off"--all of these--but I did not know the words. My primary reaction was disgust with myself for letting the situation accelerate to that point, and then, for not being able to stop it in a more intelligent manner.

The scene that was being played out involved much more than a language barrier. I had not been a single woman for twenty years, and even when I was single, had never traveled alone. I simply had forgotten how it was to be single, and what behavior was required of me. If I had been in an English-speaking environment, and had I not wanted to be bothered by others, I would have put up barriers, merely by looking straight ahead and avoiding eye contact, or burying my head in a newspaper or magazine, but I had unwittingly encouraged this man's attentions by starting to chat, so enthused I was about using the language.

As I spoke the words, "No, I am tired," even though they did not communicate the real message, I must have communicated it with the look on my face and my body language. He suddenly stopped his aggressive behavior and within seconds the train had arrived at his stop and he quickly exited from the compartment; or perhaps he knew that he had to get off the train very soon, and thus, resigned to that fact, ceased his pursuit. The entire episode had taken less than half an hour, but to me it seemed like an eternity, and I kicked myself the rest of the way to Torino. Upon arriving at Paolo's, I related what had happened and asked him how to say in Italian, "Leave me alone," for I did not want to be caught unprepared if there was going to be a next time. In addition,

I reminded myself that if one does not wish to be propositioned, one must learn appropriate behavioral barriers.

From the train episode, I learned that my reactions were typical of the advanced phase of Sergeant's (in Bennett 1973) fight stage moving toward flight. Although I was still enthusiastic about being in the new environment, I was experiencing the clash between the old and new world views, and placed myself in position for battle, having reached the crisis point.

My cultural values had told me that it was acceptable for a woman to be open and friendly in public, and to initiate a conversation, using the target language in the interest of developing my proficiency. His world view held that a woman, traveling alone, who initiated conversation, was not only fair game, but in fact was extending an open invitation to him, and he was not about to refuse it. When he accepted my "invitation" the conflict in world views erupted, and I reacted spontaneously with bewilderment, feelings of impotence and anger. At that time I considered myself the victim, the "innocent abroad," and him the aggressor, and I was unable to view the situation from any other perspective. Then, to protect my old world view and shield myself from the new, I fled, taking refuge from this alien culture by, first, learning to say leave me alone (the message being, it is your behavior that is inappropriate, not mine), and secondly, to insulate myself from further threats, by vowing to erect barriers, e.g., avoiding eye contact, being occupied with newspapers and magazines, while traveling in the future.

Expanding Sergeant's model, Bennett (45) states that there is always a sense of loss experienced in transition and change, manifested

in feelings of disorientation, anger and helplessness. The loss for me in this case was the predictability of the event.

For once the predictability of events has been invalidated-- whether from the collapse of the internal structure of purpose or of our ability to comprehend the environment-- life will be unmanageable until the continuity of meaning can be restored, through a process of abstraction and redefinition (Bennett 1977, 45).

I had expected only conversation from my traveling companion, and when my prediction was invalidated, I was left bewildered, with a sense that somehow I had lost control of what, to me, had always been a very routine social interaction.

Just as significant is yet another occasion when I felt less than intelligent speaking Italian, which happened weeks later in a bar as I was having coffee between classes. On that particular day I had made a pact with myself to practice using Lei, the third person, feminine pronoun used in formal address to a stranger, a person of higher authority, or someone older, a nonexistent concept in contemporary English. Lei is, however, also the pronoun for "she." I had known that I should not always use the informal tu, but I was uncertain about when to use Lei and also a bit lazy, and since I did not meet many people that I absolutely had to say Lei to, I did not use it. However, that day I had decided to practice. As I was sipping my coffee, an old woman came up to me on my right and out of her handbag she took several colorful religious cards with pictures of Christ and the Virgin Mary on them, holding them up for me to see. I did not know what she was doing, or what I was expected to do, so I looked at a young college student on my left and said to her, "Cosa vuole Lei, la moneta?" The young woman gave me a strange look and

said, "Non, ce l'ho." Suddenly it came to me that the young woman thought I was addressing her with the formal Lei, and to her I had just said, "What do you want, some change?" She had replied, "No, I have some," and with a very strange look on her face, as though I had slapped her, she wheeled around from the counter and walked out the door. She obviously had taken offense, or at least thought me to be a bizarre foreigner, and did not want to stay around me any longer than she had to.

What I had intended to say to her was "What does she want," referring to the old lady, and in fact, the grammar was correct, but I was looking directly at the young woman as I spoke, and not the old one. I still do not understand exactly how I should have spoken then, but after discussing it with some Italian acquaintances, it seems that the misunderstanding could have been alleviated by more specific gesturing and facial expression, including the directing of my glance more obviously towards the old woman. Then, too, if I had used the noun, old woman, instead of the pronoun, it would have been clear whom I was speaking about. After the young woman rushed out, I wanted to do the same. Her reaction had been a surprise to me, followed by embarrassment and then my own desire to escape from the scene, feeling far less the risktaker with the language than I had earlier in the day. Why did Italian have to be so difficult? At least in English one would never have the problem of formal and informal. It would be a long time before I would take a chance with Lei again.

Here, too, was a perfect example of Sergeant's (in Bennett 1973) fight-flight responses to dissonant world views. I began with very high expectations, then, when I failed linguistically and socio-linguistically

to communicate the correct message, because of an intricate linguistic feature of the Italian language, I wanted, first, to escape and to defend my own world view by criticizing the language for its complexity. Then, in keeping myself out of "high risk" situations by not using Lei, I was effectively isolating myself from the general populace.

Orientation: Space

In Edward T. Hall's book, The Hidden Dimension (1969, 105), he states that man must feel oriented in space for his survival and sanity, for "to be disoriented in space is to be psychotic."

Beginning with the day that I took the train from Milano to Florence, I continued to have experiences, with reactions ranging from mild anxiety to absolute panic regarding space. Depending on where I was and what was happening around me, I would feel anger, be ill at ease, confused or even afraid.

The crowded train ride had been my first experience in a country that is densely populated. Italy has an area one-thirtieth the size, but a population one-fourth that of the United States. Even though the area of Italy is thirty times less than that of the United States, the topographical features are the same, with several ranges of mountains sparsely inhabited. Always being crowded made a great impression on me, especially while I was in Florence, and this impression stays with me today.

I was born and raised in the Midwest, specifically in Western Minnesota, on the edge of the Great Plains. Looking to the west of town as far as the eye can see is the rich, flat, treeless farm country of

the Red River Valley and a view of the horizon that is endless. To the east, the lake country begins, punctuated from time to time with gently sloping hills, and nestled between, acres and acres of cornfields and too well-groomed groves of hardwoods. I was accustomed to space. When I arrived in Florence, an ancient city having very narrow streets and avenues forming a radiating star pattern, I easily became disoriented. For the first week or so, getting to school was a test for me. After getting off the bus, in the central piazza, in order to arrive at my school I had to walk several blocks behind the Duomo, along a narrow little viale, which was for all practical purposes, a labyrinth. Finding my way through this labyrinth became a source of frustration and anxiety because I could not identify anything familiar as I walked by. The school was located in a residential area, and to me each building was identical to the other. They were all about three stories high, all of the same color, ochre, and all had the same style and color shutters, green, and identical wrought iron balconies. There was nothing I could recognize as a landmark and say, "Oh yes, I have to turn right here." In the Midwest, in residential areas, the homes are varied styles and one or two stories high at the most. There might be a bungalow on one corner, then a ranch, up the block an A-frame and down the block, a split-level, each being a different color, with another color for the window trim, shutters and doors. Even the roofs are of varied shapes and materials. In Florence they were all the same, or so it seemed, and each one covered with terra-cotta tiles. I was like the person who says all black labrador dogs look alike. They are black, with no other identifying characteristics. The labrador owner knows this is not true. Simply put,

the naive (untrained) observer does not know how to look at the dogs to perceive the differences (Hall 1969, 68-70).

Not only did the similarity of architecture, or, rather, my lack of experience in discriminating visual cues, contribute to my disorientation, but the fact that I could never see the horizon also hampered me. As I mentioned earlier, I grew up in an area where the horizon was ever-present, and in Florence, particularly the old quarters that are dominated by central piazzas, the streets are so narrow and the buildings so high, some parts of the old city never see the sun, let alone the horizon. It was a need then and now for me to be part of an expanse of space with a visible horizon to feel comfortable. One of my favorite places in Italy is a small village, Corniglia, located high on the cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. When I am there, the sea and horizon before me, I become part of that grand expanse of space, and feel completely free and unencumbered.

Space: Crowding

In America, especially small-town America, we take space for granted. We have so much of it, and do not know until the time comes when we do not have it, its significance to us. Living in Italy, a country with a large population and much of it crowded into ancient urban areas, many people depend on public transportation to get to and from work daily, and on weekends, to the seashore and the mountains.

February is the month for carnival in Italy, and there are two grand centers of celebration, Venice and Viareggio. Some friends and I

decided to go by train to Viareggio to take part in the festivities. I had been in Florence about five weeks then, and carnival sounded as though it should not be missed. I arranged to meet Paolo there as well. It was a wonderful weekend of fun, dancing, parade-watching, walking on the beach, drinking and eating. Then it was time to go back to Florence Sunday evening, and as we approached the station and looked around, it seemed as if the thousands who had been in Viareggio for the weekend were leaving en masse on the same train I was scheduled to go on. As we reached the cars going to Florence, I began to feel apprehensive. Paolo had given me a bouquet of flowers late in the afternoon, and I was holding it in one hand and my backpack in the other. Now it was time to board the train. We had not even said good-bye and I was sucked into the crowd and drawn up into the train car. My feet had not even touched the steps. I saw Paolo standing with a helpless look on his face. The crowd was pushing me and shoving and I was carried into the compartment area of the car. I was holding my bouquet high in the air so it would not be crushed. Someone sitting close to the window saw my plight and took the flowers from me, rescuing them. People were still piling in and I was being pressed up against a glass partition, unable to move. I was sure the glass was going to break, and mentally prepared a speech in Italian, apologizing for the accident that I thought was about to happen. I was claustrophobic from being hemmed in on all sides and barely able to breathe. When I realized that I might have to ride to Florence that way, I became panicky. Slowly but surely, as the train moved towards Florence and stopped at villages along the way, people got off, a little space opened up and I was able to sit down at last. The memories of that

evening on the train will be with me forever, for I had never realized how intensely I would react to being crowded, until I experienced it.

I have long since learned to breathe more freely in crowds, whether on buses, trains, waiting to get into the cinema, special events, or the marketplace, because they are part of daily life in Italy. As long as I am not squeezed on all sides by other people, I can maintain my composure fairly well; however, there is one situation that continues to unnerve me. When city buses are crowded, aisles completely filled with people and there is hardly room to stand, it is almost impossible to work one's way through the crowd to the exit door in time to get off. It is also a quite impossible feat to ride a bus careening through heavy rush hour traffic without holding on to the overhead handrail running the length of the interior on either side. That means there are continuously people trying to get to the exit door and brushing my head with their arms as they go by. It is bad enough to be so crowded you cannot move, but to have people touching and brushing against my head annoys me. There is no chance to move back and away from the contact. I usually toss my head and jerk it away. Nonetheless, I am trapped until it is my turn to exit, standing stiff as a board and attempting to hold my patience.

In concluding this section of Orientation: Space, I refer again to Bennett's article and her discussion of the reactions to loss and change during transition. As I was living out the aforementioned anecdotes, I was not aware that my spatial disorientation and fear in crowds were reactions to loss, because I was too close to each situation to analyze it. However, as Bennett cites Peter Marris, "even changes which we scarcely think to involve loss, may be analysable in similar

terms" (Marris 1975). In effect, I had lost space, which had been a significant part of my life until then, and when I did not have it any longer, I reacted with anxiety, fear, frustration and annoyance. It was only after I had been living in Italy for some time, had learned to discriminate visual cues again through retraining my way of perceiving, and knew, from being in crowds every day, that my life was not in imminent danger, that I began to live more comfortably.

January and February flew by in Florence. I had met many new people and had made friends or at least acquaintances with other Americans, Portuguese, Germans, Swedes, Australians, South Africans--people from all over the world, for Florence is an international city. The entire time I was there, the only Italians I met were my landlord and the staff at the school. I had wonderful times in Florence and mixed emotions about leaving, but I wanted to go to Torino to see another part of Italy, to meet Paolo's family, and be with Paolo. The first week in March, I was on my way North, towards the Alps.

Adaptation: The Family

The train raced through village after village, finally reaching the grey, sad-looking suburbs of Torino. This time I was startled at the contrasts between the two cities. My first impressions of Florence had been of color, light and beauty.

Now, in remembering how different my impressions were, it strikes me that they were somehow symbolic of the stages of my adaptation to life in Italy. In Florence, I had lived as a tourist in a relatively

light-hearted, carefree manner. My impression of Torino, on the other hand, seemed to foretell of a more arduous time to come.

Torino, the capital of the province of Piemonte, is an industrial city, and my acquaintances in Florence could not imagine why I wanted to spend any time there. It is a city of two and one-half million people, where many of Italy's industries are headquartered. FIAT is the major industry, and more than 90% of Italy's automobiles are manufactured there. It is situated in the Po River Valley, and is flanked on the west and north by the Alps, only one to two hours distant, and on the east by the Langhe mountains. Torino is an ideal location if one wishes to vacation at the seaside or in the mountains, because both are readily accessible.

A big city, with big city momentum, all activity is full speed ahead. The hustle and bustle of Florence translates to frenetic energy in Torino.

It was originally a Roman garrison, and unlike other cities in Italy with pasts rooted in medieval feudalism, it is laid out in a rectangular gridiron plan with long avenues and streets, very much like an American city.

I was amused to read this passage from a travel guide to Italy, describing Torino:

A city of a million inhabitants whose collective personality seems solemn, austere, and downright chilly. In our view, anything more than the briefest stopover would be an act of kindness (Gloaguen 1985, 18).

These certainly are not words that anyone penned in portraying Florence. The two cities are in stark contrast to each other. Florence retains the charm of a small town, yet is sophisticated and international.

Torino is a lumbering giant with ugly suburbs, nondescript apartment buildings--a city with a provincial temperament and few foreigners. Nonetheless, Torino does have a certain beauty, and the national distinction of having the most green space for her citizens. Valentino Park, which runs along the west bank of the Po, is a hub of weekend activity for many Torinese, the year around.

New Roles

Upon my arrival in Torino from Florence, Paolo and his family met me at the train station. From the station, we drove downtown and had tea at one of Torino's most elegant bars. The conversation over tea was awkward for me, for I still had limited proficiency with the language, and had to depend on Paolo to translate. Furthermore, I had been extremely apprehensive about meeting his family for the first time. Even though they knew all about me from Paolo, I did not know how they were going to react to me in person. As we sat there drinking tea, my mind was filled with doubts. Did I look all right? Was I acting properly? Did they understand my Italian? What was their impression of me?

When I remember how uncertain I was about myself at that first meeting, I am reminded of a quote from P. D. Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous (1965, 239), because it exemplifies an issue central to my adaptation to Italy, most particularly within Paolo's family.

You must realize that each man has a definite repertoire of roles which he plays in ordinary circumstances said [Gurdjieff] . . . "He has a role for every kind of circumstance in which he ordinarily finds himself in life, but put him into even only slightly different circumstances

and he is unable to find a suitable role and for a short time he becomes himself."

Along with experiencing the predictable effects of culture shock in Italy, I was even more profoundly experiencing the effects of major life transition. From the start in Italy, I had been coping with the loss of significant roles, namely wife and mother, the acquisition of a major new one, Paolo's girlfriend, and how I was to make a meaningful niche for myself with the structure of his family in that role.

Upon my introduction into Paolo's family, I was aware as I had never been before that with the loss of my longtime familiar roles, I felt I had also lost much of my identity, and I did not know "who" I was any longer.

I had been living a very predictable life with the roles that I had been playing absorbing most of my time and energy. In fact, there had been little time to devote to myself. Over the years the "I" had gone into hiding, and instead I had become the parts that I played. As I found myself in the process of letting go of the old roles and acquiring new ones, I also discovered that the process was much like it must be to learn to read all over again or to learn a new skill, when at first nothing makes sense and a state of confusion prevails. At times it resembled the stages of the human grieving process after loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

I had been a married woman. My children, who had been with me every day, were no longer living with me. Nothing of my former life remained except in my thoughts. I was learning to live a completely new life in a foreign country, and I felt isolated in the midst of

Paolo's active family, even though they were all kind, warm, responsive and trying to make me feel part of it.

Probably the most difficult adjustment I had in assuming my new role was related to the age difference between Paolo and me. Paolo is much younger than I, but for the two of us, age was never an issue. For his mother, Anna Maria, it was, only not as one might have expected. She never commented about it to us, or anyone in the family, and I never felt unaccepted by her, even though I was almost as old as she. She did accept me, not as a woman who was of her same generation and who had shared many similar life experiences, but rather as a much younger woman having the same age as her son. As the "younger woman," I was frequently left feeling frustrated, rebellious, helpless, embarrassed occasionally and even amused by our interactions.

For instance, washing clothes took on monumental importance to both Paolo and me. We were not allowed to wash our own clothes while I was staying with the family, and even after, when we had our own apartment (because we did not have a washer, we washed the laundry at his family's), for, we were told, we could not get them clean enough! Emma, the housekeeper, upon Anna Maria's advice, would take over our washing even though we had instructed her to leave everything alone, and let us do it. Paolo and I both became fed-up with this interference, and I for one was irritated and defensive. After all, I had been doing laundry for a family of four, for years. Certainly they were aware of that! Worse yet, Emma washed laundry by hand, with a gigantic wooden washboard, though there was a modern, automatic washer standing in the bathroom, and I did not want anyone putting that much work into washing for me. Later, in

our home, I washed by hand, myself, because I wanted to avoid Emma's doing our laundry as often as possible. We ultimately reached somewhat of an understanding between all of the parties concerned and allowed Emma the dubious honor of attending to our laundry on a very occasional basis, but most often arranging to do it ourselves, in the washer, when both Emma and Anna Maria were known to be away from home. That way there were never any scenes and I did not have to experience the sense of helplessness that comes with one not being able to perform even the simplest of tasks for oneself.

In my journal on October 1, I wrote:

Role: That's really important to me at this moment. It's strange, but when I'm in the U.S., I usually don't think about my roles. Here, I'm forced into it. For example, I never know what role to play when I'm in Italy. Within Paolo's family, it's really difficult. Last night we were all talking about the apartment in Via dei Mille. Everyone knew exactly what furniture we should put in it, how we would furnish it, what we should buy, shouldn't buy. No one asked me what I thought or even stopped long enough for me to say something, not even Paolo.

and on October 22:

Paolo's parents have been great about the apartment. Paolo's dad painted all day. Anna Maria has bought a lot of things to help get started. The only problem is that she buys things without asking us first. This bothers Paolo a lot, and me too, only because I don't want her to buy us anything at all. Now today we're supposed to go and look for couch material with her (she bought yellow and white striped last week, but Paolo turned it down). What am I, a little girl? I think that because Paolo and I are together, she fails to consider me an equal (adult) and considers me as she does Paolo, her child. Or maybe she doesn't consider me at all, because I don't speak up. I hate to tell her that I don't want her to do something. She's an Italian mother for sure. But, would I be so different? Well, I wouldn't try to impose my decorating ideas on my children.

What I learned about myself from these situations and others was

that I would almost always take the path of least resistance and try above all to keep from having confrontations, occasionally at the expense of my self-esteem. I wanted and needed their acceptance, but at the same time I was defensive and needed to take charge of my own life as I always had in the past. Bennett's article suggests that often the defensiveness that emerges from the loss experienced during life change comes not only from 'not knowing what to do, but it is more a case of not being able to do what one has come to value doing' (1977, 47).

I have often wondered what it must have been for Anna Maria when she was introduced to me for the first time. How did she rationalize my age and my involvement with her son? From the first time we met, I believe she saw me as a younger woman, her son's fiancée. Whenever Paolo and I were together with his brother and sister, and/or friends in the house, she would address all of us as ragazzi (kids). Ragazzi included me too, and I recoiled inside whenever I heard her say it.

Once, a memorable occasion for me in its sincerity, Paolo and I were leaving his family's apartment to go home one evening. It was a bitterly cold night outside, and as Anna Maria walked us to the door to say goodbye, she readjusted the scarf around my neck to make sure I would not get cold. I was embarrassed, and yet touched by the gesture, for it was obviously one that a mother would use with a child, but, at the same time, it was comforting to know that she cared for me.

During the weeks I stayed with the Tosellis, and the years that I lived in Torino, my fondest memories are those of the times that we spent in their kitchen, around the table, eating and talking, for the

kitchen was the room in which the family spent most of its time at home. It was, and is now, I am sure, the gathering point for their family and friends, and the place I felt most comfortable while in Italy.

Mealtimes are central to the well-being of Paolo's family, for they serve not only as a time to eat, but as a time for the entire family to be together. Each family member comes home for lunch every day including Saturdays and Sundays, unless someone has plans for the weekend.

Lunch was never simply lunch as Americans know it, but was a full-course meal, beginning with a first course, pasta or rice, ending with fruit and cheese, and the entire time was spent in discussion, with each person at the table offering his or her input. The topics of conversation ranged from the banal to the existential, from the latest films, to how business was going. There was never a dull moment, a lapse in the conversation, for each always had something to contribute in the typically Italian interactive style, all speaking on top of one another. I rarely offered more than responses to direct questions at lunch, because it was not unusual to have eight or more people around the table, all speaking at once, and I could not seem to find an opening for me to jump in, nor did I have the desire to try. It was more enjoyable to sit back, listen, and be entertained, for there was always a good chance that a heated discussion would erupt, which demanded that everyone at the table add his or her opinion. The first few times dining with Tosellis, I did not know what the rules were for interaction and when voices began to raise, I became uneasy, thinking a battle was about to take place. In fact, once, early on, I had to get up and leave the table during a difference

of opinion, because the raised voices had tied my stomach in knots and I could not eat or bear to listen anymore.

In my family, mealtime was supposed to be a relaxed, tranquil time, with no unnecessary chatter, no extraneous noise from radio or television, a time to eat and enjoy the food, but absolutely not a time to discuss controversial issues or engage in sibling rivalry. I can still remember my father saying "Less noise, Margo." Even with my own children, when bickering began between them, they were asked to stop or leave the table. Being around an Italian table, then, was not easy for me to become accustomed to, but in time I grew to enjoy it.

In the evenings, there were fewer people around the table, most often only three or four because Paolo's father arrived at 9:00, after everyone else had finished dinner. Then, jumping into the conversation was easier for me, there were fewer people to compete with, and I did not find the rest of the family as intimidating to speak with as his father. Although I understood his father's Italian, and would try to interact with him, he would often correct my grammar and pronunciation, but even more disconcerting, whenever he spoke to me, even if I were sitting next to him at the table, he would increase the volume of his voice and instead of using normal speech patterns, would begin gesturing and speaking in a modified telegraphese, as though I were not only deaf, but retarded as well. For example, to any of the others he might say, "During the war, I was just a boy, and I remember the German soldiers came to our apartment once, searched it and threatened to kill all of us unless we gave them our money." (He has always been fond of telling war stories.) However, with me, the conversation would go something

like this:

"Margo--war, I [pointing to himself], boy [gesturing a child's height with his hand], hai capito? [do you understand?]

"I, boy--German soldiers come, search apartment, want money [more gesturing] . . . capito? Money--want money or kill us-- [more gesturing--drawing his finger across his throat while grimacing, as though he were having his throat slit] Kill us-- . . . capito?"

I knew from readings in second language acquisition that this was common behavior for native speakers when interacting with a non-native speaker of the language, but there were times when I considered stopping him in mid-sentence to say that I was not deaf or backwards. However, I always held my tongue because I was so intent on being accepted by his family. Paolo and I had spoken many times about his father's inability to speak to me as another adult, and when his dad would start his gesturing and babytalk, Paolo would catch my eye and for a few moments it was all we could do to keep from breaking out in laughter. Until the day I left, he was still speaking to me in the same way, but I had long since become accustomed to it, and his manner was a source of amusement to me.

We considered that one reason he was never able to change his way of speaking was because the two of us had little opportunity to interact, and he was not aware that my level of proficiency had changed. If I examine more deeply why his father and I interacted so little, I believe that I avoided interacting with him, due to my tenuous role in the family. I was another adult woman within the family, and yet not really part of it, not kin, and I believed it would have been inappropriate behavior to speak with him alone much of the time. I tried to put myself in Anna Maria's position, and knew, that if there were a

divorced woman staying in my home, approximately the same age as I, I would feel threatened if she were always singling my husband out to talk to.

Where Paolo's father was concerned, I deliberately chose to accept the role that he had placed me in, that of the foreigner who does not understand very well, instead of defending myself, in order to avoid making trouble, and risking the family's rejection. On the other hand, I felt much more sure of myself speaking one-to-one with Paolo's mother. I sought out interaction with her, for the same reasons I avoided it with Paolo's father. Then too, as women we had more interests in common, and it seemed from the start, an easy rapport. Frequently we would spend time talking as we cleaned the kitchen, at the table after everyone else had left, or over a cup of tea.

From the start, it seemed my level of self-awareness was much higher due to the predictability of issues that were raised by transition experiences, e.g., role changing, as opposed to those that were more clearly related to living cross-culturally, and therefore not anticipated.

I knew that I would have difficulty adjusting to the role of girlfriend, particularly within Paolo's family. Here, in contrast to those of Florence, the conflicts that I was engaged in were predictable, although I obviously did not know in advance how they would manifest themselves or be resolved.

Going back to Sergeant's (in Bennett 1973) model of fight, flight, filter and flex, I believe I began my adjustment within the family at the filtering stage. I was able to view the conflicts from their

perspective as well as my own, and I tried not to evaluate their behavior toward me, because I was aware that my relationship with Paolo was culturally non-traditional, and it caused them some agonizing moments.

Even though my immediate reactions to conflicts of the type described in the preceding anecdotes were spontaneous and representative of those found in the stages of fight and flight, I knew why I was reacting, was able to stop myself, and think about resolving the problem. Many times I had dialogues with myself, and many more times, discussions with Paolo, all in an attempt to sort out my feelings as well as theirs, and validate them. In this way I enabled myself to find positive ways of adapting to the challenges of my new role which always seemed to affect my level of self-esteem and the ability to take charge of my own life.

My motivation to adapt was very high, because I felt I had much more to lose in not trying to. I needed to be accepted by his family, not only because of my ties to Paolo, but because at that time, his family represented security for me, a safe haven in the storm of transition.

Adaptation: Looking for and Finding a Job

After two months of living with Tosellis, I left Torino in May in order to be back in Wisconsin for my son's high school graduation.

My re-entry into the United States after five months in Italy found me in the latter phase of the flight stage and ushered me into the filter stage, as I continued to cope with major life transition. On the one hand, I was still noticing the effects of life in a different culture, observing and making comparisons with my own, and trying to

accommodate myself to my own culture once again. But even more, I was working at separating myself from my past and sincerely acknowledging what, to that point, I had valued most in life.

The uncertain feelings I was working through were like those described by Peter Marris in Bennett's article, as common to transition experiences:

The need to reestablish continuity, to work out an interpretation of oneself, and the world which preserves, despite estrangement, the thread of meaning; the ambivalence of this task as it swings between conflicting impulses; the need to articulate the stages of its resolution; and the risk of lasting disintegration if the process is not worked out (46).

I boarded my flight to Minneapolis where my children were picking me up to drive me to Wisconsin, the final leg of my journey home, which I had been anticipating with enthusiasm and even some apprehension. My children met me and we started off on the five-hour drive that would bring us home.

Hours later as we came to the crest of a hill, I saw the tremendous expanse of ice-blue water, Lake Superior. The land around was perfectly flat and I could see miles of undisturbed horizon. Gazing at the familiar view, an almost undetectable sense of separation came over me. I did not feel the surge of happiness as I had upon every return home in years past. Now there was the faintest sensation of not belonging, of being a stranger there.

Graduation came and went, and the dark green hues of summer appeared. I had thought about going back to Italy in autumn, but I knew I could not go back as a tourist. I did not have the financial resources to do that another time. I would have to work, but at what?

First of all, there was the ever-present language barrier, and then, I had no professional skills that would enable me to find a job. I was not sure what I could or should do.

My house had been listed with a realtor for the past year, and I found myself relieved at the thought that I still had it to come back to if I chose to go to Italy and work for a while. I could come back to my children and my friends, because my house was still mine, after all. I had a place of my own.

One day, my realtor called and said he had a buyer. It took me by complete surprise and I found what had been so easy to think of in the abstract became emotional torture as the closing came nearer and nearer. I suddenly knew that my house meant a great deal more than shelter to me. It signified home, family, security, permanence and centeredness. The day came, and my house was sold.

A few weeks earlier, Paolo had written to me saying that it was possible for me to get a job teaching English in Torino and he had the names of several institutes where I could interview. I made plans to leave in October. Now I had money to use as a cushion in case the job did not materialize. I knew too that I would be back in Wisconsin the following May, regardless of what happened in Torino. My daughter was graduating from high school then, and I would spend the summer with my children.

The days flew by and as the time for departure came closer, I was experiencing misgivings which were the result of a growing awareness that I had taken a final step toward breaking with my past. Now I no longer had a house and I was not sure that I liked being rootless, of

being without a home.

I was in Torino again by the first of October. Paolo had already arranged interviews for me with several institutes which made job-hunting much easier. As I went for each interview, in every case the interviewer asked if I was "legal," which of course I was not. Being "legal" means that one has obtained a work permit, a document extremely difficult to get for an American unless one is married to an Italian. However, if one is a citizen of Great Britain or any of the commonwealth nations, one can easily procure a work permit by virtue of the fact that Great Britain is a member of the European Common Market, and citizens of common market nations are free to move about in member nations, working or studying at universities, and being eligible for all benefits they would receive at home.

As each interview concluded, I was told that when I could prove my legal working status, I would be hired immediately because I was a native speaker of English, even though I had no academic background in education or in English.

Finally, I was interviewed at Wall Street Institute by the director of curriculum, Signora Caroline Carbone. She hired me without question, not seeming to care if I was legal or not, or if I had any education at all. I was a native speaker and that was enough. There was even a contract for me to sign. I was to teach full time, which meant from twenty to twenty-five hours a week. Then she asked me to come back the next day and we would talk about my responsibilities.

Polychronic versus Monochronic

The next afternoon I arrived promptly for my appointment with the Signora and was asked to wait in the reception area, as she was busy with one of the teachers in her office. I waited half an hour and finally she came out of her office and greeted me warmly, gesturing that I should come in and sit down. For the next hour I was totally overwhelmed by her conversation. She could not keep it focused on one topic and follow it to a conclusion. She was jumping from company work, to institute work, from testing and evaluating new students, to possible contracts with prospective clients. At the same time she was taking phone calls and talking about getting to an appointment that same afternoon. I wanted to shout "Stop! One thing at a time, please." My mind was reeling. Other people were coming into her office, causing additional interruptions. This unbalancing conversation with the Signora was the first of many that I had over the time I was employed there. In my journal entry of September 19, I have written:

I saw Caroline coming out of the elevator, just as I was waiting for it, and she asked me to go out and have a coffee with her. I spoke with her at some length about work. She will put me on full-time, but I was really disappointed with the salary after what she had told Paolo. She has plenty of work for sure. She's as fragmented as ever though. It was very hard to talk with her because she is so impossible to pin down to one subject. She talks of many at a time. One second it's Italgas, the next, the Casa di Risparmio and she forgets which she's on and skips to another.

These excerpts from my journal are representative of most interactions I had with Caroline over three years, and it made no difference if there was only me in the office with her, or if there were others

present. The pattern was the same. She would look at her desk which was covered with papers, pick up a pile, speak about it, answer the phone, and looking at me or anyone else, bring up another topic. I left feeling agitated and bewildered and wanting to tell her to slow down and cover one thing at a time because I had become confused.

In Beyond Culture (1977, 150), Edward T. Hall says, in reference to polychronic behavior:

While I mentioned earlier that high-context people have a greater commitment to complete action chains than low-context people, I must amend this statement somewhat. High context people also tend to be polychronic, that is, they are apt to be involved in a lot of different activities with several different people at any given time, a pattern that characterizes most Mediterranean cultures. Monochronic people, in part because of the way they schedule their lives, are more comfortable if they can take up one thing at a time. It is the high involvement factor, of course, that produces the greater degree of context. To the low-context, monochronic, one thing at a time person, polychronic behavior can be almost totally disorganizing in its effect, which is identical in its consequences to overcrowding. Action chains get broken and nothing is completed. The two systems are like oil and water. They do not mix.

The last year that I worked for the institute I knew what to expect from the Signora and even though I finally understood where she was coming from, a polychronic culture, and I, on the other hand, was monochronic, I was never able to completely control my internal emotional reactions to her penchant for discussing a dozen topics simultaneously. At the last, I knew, because of previous experience, what my job involved and I could carry on without being in a total state of confusion after I had left her office. Often, not only in my professional milieu, I found myself to be a monochronic victim of the polychronic society in which I was living.

Other Italians that I knew well, including Paolo, frequently demonstrated polychronic behavior with regard to time. It was not unusual for him to spontaneously decide to involve the two of us in several activities with various people in different parts of the city, all to be accomplished within a three-hour block of time, say, on a Saturday morning, in order to be at his family's apartment for 1:00 lunch. As we discussed our Saturday morning plans, I was exhausted before we had even walked out the front door. For me it was enough of a challenge to mentally digest all of what he wanted to do, let alone carry it out. Because I needed to organize my thoughts, I would abruptly stop whatever we were talking about, say I was overloaded, and could not go on or go out unless we prioritized the activities of the morning, made a schedule, and worked through each one, a step at a time.

At the time, even though I could not define my frustrations as the conflict between polychronic and monochronic time, I believe that I began my adaptation to polychronic behavior when I reached Sergeant's filter stage and my awareness permitted me to see that in having experienced similar incidents over and over again, there was a cultural force operating in conflict to mine. I could not go on labeling all of Italian society "disorganized." As I progressed to the flex stage, the strategy I chose to enable my adaptation was to make others who were intimates of mine aware of my limitations by admitting them, and what I needed to have in order to act at all, whereas with others, those whom I was not so familiar with, I chose to remain silent and reminded myself that I was living in a polychronic society and I could not change their behavior to suit mine.

Adaptation: Apartment Hunting

One aspect of my Italian experience was learning to adapt to a polychronic culture, but another, equally significant, was learning to understand and accept cultural assumptions that were in opposition to mine.

Luigi Barzini (1964, 106) states in his book The Italians that behind the faces Italians present to the world, one of amicability, playfulness, and show, there is the real person who is convinced that life is full of dangerous and evil forces that are at work to make his life miserable and impossible and which he must try to defeat. One of these forces is fear, and according to Barzini, it is by far the most harmful. To further illustrate his perceptions of the Italian world view, he goes on to say:

Even when violent death is not lurking in the shadows, when things look pleasant and peaceful and life seems secure, prosperous and easy, an Italian must remain on the alert and move with circumspection (113).

An Italian learns from childhood that he must keep his mouth shut and think twice about doing anything at all. Everything he touches may be a boobytrap; the next step he takes may lead him over a mine-field; every word he pronounces or writes may be used against him someday (113).

Fear has taught Italians to go through life as warily as experienced scouts through the forest, looking ahead and behind, right and left, listening to the smallest murmurs, feeling the ground ahead for concealed traps, taking notice of signs on the bark of trees, of broken twigs and best grass (114).

I found fear, manifested by suspicion and distrust, to be conspicuously present and operating in many facets of Italian life, but particularly in business transactions that I attempted to carry out with Italians.

Of these transactions, the most illustrative example of fear at work was one in which Paolo and I were dealing with a woman whose apartment we wanted to rent. It was at this point that I again discovered my world view to be in juxtaposition to the Italian one, causing such conflict within me that it temporarily undermined my desire to stay in Italy.

Finding apartments to rent in Torino is next to impossible due to a federal law equocanone (literally translated, equitable law), which fixes the amount of rent that an apartment owner can charge for his apartment. More importantly, equocanone guarantees Italian residents, as opposed to foreigners (those who have transitory status), the right of occupancy. Once they are in an apartment, they cannot be evicted, even though an owner may want to sell the apartment, or for some other reason, remove the current tenants.

Therefore, with equocanone, there is no incentive for owners to rent apartments and instead, the law creates a glut of apartments for sale. In a city the size of Torino, two and one-half million people, it is common to find only five or six apartments for rent, listed in the classified section of the daily newspaper, and these are usually rented through agencies which charge a commission of at least two months' rent. Occasionally there are private rentals advertised which do not require a commission, but nevertheless, the law of equocanone is an ever-present spectre, which can determine at the end if one rents the apartment or not. Conversely, in the United States, renting an apartment is a routine matter, and, at least by law, one is usually restricted only by one's ability to pay.

An entry from my journal dated September 29 addresses the conflict that resulted when the force of fear, fueled by equocanone, dominated our business transaction and prevented it from being concluded.

My impressions about the week since Tuesday. Mostly I feel the frustration of apartment hunting in Torino again. These thoughts are overwhelming. It seems impossible to find a place to rent that's decent and not depressing for the rent that we can pay. It's always the same story, though. We saw a private rental up in the hills the other afternoon. It's a great place, on the ground floor, lots of light and we'd both feel good living there. It's in a villa that has a garden and overlooks the city. I could walk to the bus. Very tranquil and nicely furnished. We spoke with the owner for an hour and a half. I couldn't believe it! She made the whole thing so difficult and it didn't have to be. She's afraid of my trying to become a resident eventually, and attempting to get her place on equocanone and giving up my transitory status. I never would have considered it if she hadn't brought it up. Above all, my impression of making business deals with Italians is their intense suspicion of everyone's motives. It's a real comedown for me, because if I'm nothing else at all, I'm honest and I don't lie to people about my intentions. I sat there and said pazienza to myself about a hundred times. Paolo handled the whole situation very well, especially when he told her we were scacco matto [in chess, meaning checkmate, or backed into a corner]. He told her she should have la fiducia (trust), but it didn't seem to faze her. She asked a million questions about me and us, and wanted to do the rental contract through my mother in the United States, who could never become a member of the Italian proletariat, and therefore would not be eligible for equocanone. She asked me how much I make a month, was I sure I could afford the apartment, how could I document that I have money in an account in the United States, etc. It was too much! Some of the references that we gave her were good enough for her, some she crossed out. When we finally left, we both needed an aperitivo desperately.

On the surface, equocanone was the issue that prevented us from reaching a rental agreement, but it was her intense fear that I was going to take advantage of her, her suspicion of my motives and her complete lack of trust in me, my word, and my background that destroyed the business transaction for us.

In the book The Character of Americans, edited by Michael McGiffert, there is an excerpt from an article entitled "National and Regional Values" which states that for an American, "honesty or frankness in human relations has high value ideally, while dissimulation is 'bad'" (Gillin 1955, 219).

As an American, then, and being the person I am, I had not expected that my honesty and trustworthiness would ever have been doubted. In one brief moment, everything I had always believed to be true was being questioned, and I became defensive, discouraged, and convinced that she was paranoid. After an hour and a half with her, all we wanted to do was get away and try to forget the entire episode. What should have been so easily executed, by American standards, two parties coming to a rental agreement, had instead become an enormous cross-cultural impasse.

It was only much, much later that I was able to understand her behavior and the behavior of other Italians in similar incidents. Eventually, having reached the filter and flex stages of adjustment, I was able to go back and analyze this situation, along with others that were analogous, could understand her behavior and view it from her perspective as well as my own. Barzini's book was an invaluable tool in helping me identify the source of our conflict, and thus enabled me to appreciate, but not evaluate, the disparities in our world views.

Adaptation: Getting Around

Italian cities today still exhibit their traditional flavor, having preserved the same city plans as when they were first developed. Even the new areas of cities which we refer to as suburbs are still

designed as neighborhoods, and in Torino, at least, one will not find huge shopping malls like those of the United States. The blocks of the *quartieri* are today what they were yesterday. Buildings are seldom razed, parking lots do not spring up like mushrooms after a rain, narrow streets are never widened, and life goes on as it has for centuries. The city itself is composed of *quartieri* (quarters), each one divided into neighborhoods which cover about four square blocks in area. One rarely has to go outside the neighborhood for anything, because all necessary services are provided within a block or two of home. In the morning one can run downstairs, cross the street to get a cup of coffee at the bar, stop at the newsstand for the morning paper and run upstairs again, all of which takes ten minutes at the most.

For the three years that I was in Torino, I lived directly in the center of the city. Depending on which neighborhood I was living in at the time, the days and nights ranged from noisy to very noisy. People shouted to each other from their balconies overlooking the courtyards and shot fireworks off from the same balconies on Christmas Eve and New Year's. The first year I experienced fireworks, I felt like I was in a war-zone as they exploded outside my windows, only a few meters away.

Late night theater and restaurant goers were in proliferation at two and three o'clock in the morning and took to the sidewalks on their way home, stopping often under my bedroom windows to say their final goodbyes of the evening.

In spring, young people race up and down the avenues on their motorbikes in groups of twos and threes, the sound of the engines not unlike that of swarms of angry hornets, only decibels louder. And of

course there is the rush hour traffic at 7:30 in the morning, 1:00 in the afternoon and again at 5:30, each with its accompanying symphony for horns played so punctually you could set your watch by it. Living in the center was convenient for me, because, as previously mentioned, everything I needed was in the neighborhood, my apartment was not far from the institute, only a ten-minute walk, and within walking distance of companies where I worked as well. If I was not within walking distance of my job, I would merely walk up the street from my apartment to the garden in front of the train station and take a tram or a bus.

Being a pedestrian in Italy is definitely not the same as being one in the United States. For example, in Vermont I have observed that a pedestrian always has the right of way. Even if one is not crossing the street at the cross-walk, drivers will stop well in advance to permit the pedestrian to cross safely, and in some cases I have noticed that all I need to do is stand on the curb and communicate with drivers non-verbally that I want to cross and they come to an immediate halt. I will have to admit that before living in Torino, I had not had much experience with being a pedestrian in the United States, but as an experienced driver I always knew that I must slow down and stop to allow pedestrians to cross at a relaxed enough pace without fearing for their safety. Unlike Vermont, in Torino pedestrians never have the right of way unless they cross at an intersection with traffic signals, and even then they cannot be assured of their safety crossing the street, for Italian drivers do not always heed red lights.

Initially, living in Torino, I was surprised by the amount of traffic in the streets and the speed at which vehicles traveled in the

city. I did very little driving while I was there, and even when riding along as a passenger, more often than not I was white-knuckled, clutching the door handle as the driver would weave his way in and out of the traffic, honking the horn, gesticulating wildly at other drivers and pedestrians alike as they failed to get out of our way quickly enough to allow our unimpeded progress along the avenue.

People speak about defensive driving in America. As a pedestrian in Italy, one must act offensively and aggressively. In my journal entry from October 22 I wrote:

The traffic is terrible here. You can't trust drivers to stop at a red light. I'm actually afraid to cross streets, and I see fear on the faces of many pedestrians. Yesterday, crossing Corso Vittorio, a police car ran a red light without using the siren to warn people. Fortunately, I wasn't in the way, but it was fairly close. The other people crossing just looked bewildered. Someone could have been hurt.

A line or two later I commented that now I had to be cautious, for I had reached the same point in my cultural adaptation process as I had on several previous occasions, where the honeymoon period was over and reality was setting in, and I found myself beginning to criticize most every aspect of Italian society, striking out against friend and foe and all things, to compensate for my feelings of insecurity with the world around me. The absence of the familiar, the tried and true ways of managing daily existence, had brought out the worst in me before, but at that moment in my journal, I wrote with a certain resolve:

I think I just have to say forza and keep trying. Is it always my expectations that get me in trouble? I doubt it. I think I've toned them down considerably. What is it, basic value conflicts?

It seems strange to me now that the incident with the police car would initiate such a serious dialogue within myself, but from that point on, I resolved at least to change my behavior as a pedestrian, and to become aggressive and not give in to my fears. Recognizing that in the past I had let the apprehension and uncertainty of events control me, leaving me with a sense of failure, was another turning point in my life in Torino.

Becoming an aggressive pedestrian was not an easy task. It meant calling up enough courage to step off the curb and put my life on the line. From my journal entry of November 20:

When there are no stop lights, I'm really frightened of crossing streets, and I try to be aggressive, but I must have a look on my face that says I'm scared as hell. Last week, twice, I tried to be aggressive. Once I put my hand up (stop) directly in front of a woman driver's face, hit her car and said aspetta (wait) so I could cross the street before she whipped around the corner. Then, the other day a bus driver deliberately drove in front of me while I was trying to cross the street. I had had to go way out in the street to see around him because he was parked on the corner. I gave him a terrible look and raised my hands and arms to show that I was saying "What are you doing? You are a hell of a lot bigger than me, you dummy." He gestured from inside the bus, raising his shoulder and hands in a way that makes me so angry, communicating "Gee, I'm sorry, but there wasn't another thing that I could do." He darned well could have waited until I crossed the street!

Over the next few months I worked on my courage and found myself stepping off the curbs, looking straight ahead, never to the right or left, using my peripheral vision to its maximum, and walking out into traffic. I discovered that if one does not look directly at the cars and into the faces of the drivers, they will come to a stop, or at least slow down. It is an absolute necessity to exude complete confidence walking across the street. I have since walked straight out

into four lanes of traffic with cars driving by me so closely at times they almost touch my kneecaps.

One morning, not long after, as I was walking home after finishing a lesson, I came to Corso Re Umberto, one of Torino's widest and most frequently traveled avenues. As usual, the traffic was heavy, and as I approached the avenue to cross, I saw a little old gentleman with a cane who wished to cross too, but the traffic would not permit him. I told him I would help him and I took him by his elbow, we stepped off the curb and started confidently across the street. He thanked me when we reached the other side, and at that moment, finally I knew I had control over a very small part of my life in Italy, but this incident symbolized more for me. I now felt for the first time that I was able to exert some influence on the world around me, and not always have it be the other way around.

When I was not a pedestrian in Torino, I was a patron of the city's mass transit system. For a year or so Paolo and I had owned a car, but we found that being car owners and living in the center just did not mix. Torino, as with all ancient Italian cities, is plagued by the lack of parking space. Italians, unlike Americans, believe in the historical preservation of their old architectural triumphs and therefore one does not find these wonderful vestiges of the past being razed to permit the construction of yet another asphalt-paved parking lot or multi-leveled parking ramp. Historical preservation aside, parking is a problem of great proportions and cannot be ignored if one is living in the center, unless one has the patience to cruise endlessly around the neighborhood searching for a parking place, and the financial resources to pay the

parking fines imposed when one, in exasperation, finally parks in a no-parking area, hoping that the city police will not be by. I used the trams and city buses, no muss, no fuss, very convenient, cost-efficient and always on time unless there was a strike or a snowstorm.

The first year that I was in Torino, I had a teaching position with Italgas located off Via Nizza, about a twenty-minute bus ride from the center where I lived.

It was my normal routine two evenings a week to catch the #34 bus at its capo linea (the beginning of the line), alongside the garden in front of the train station and adjacent to Piazza Lagrange. The capo linea was only a five-minute walk at most from my apartment, and taking the #34 meant that I would not have to cross Corso Vittorio at 5:30, the beginning of the evening rush hour. It also meant, because it was the capo linea, that if I arrived early enough, I almost assuredly would get a place to sit down, an infrequent luxury. Hence, every Tuesday and Thursday I took the #34 to Italgas at 5:30 and back home again after teaching at 7:30.

One winter evening I was waiting for the #34 to arrive in Via Nizza and take it home after work. It was a cold evening in February and I had been waiting, it seemed, for too long. I looked down the street and saw a tram coming in the distance and as it came nearer, I saw that it was the #1 and knew from past history that the #34 would be arriving soon after. The #1 stopped, picked up her passengers, swerving and swaying on her way to the center, towards the train station. Sure enough, following close behind I saw the #34, and because I was the only person waiting on the pedestrian island, I held my arm up and waved my

hand to indicate to the driver that I wanted him to stop for me, which he did. I climbed up the steps, thankful to be in the warm interior and to know that within minutes I would be home where Paolo was preparing dinner. I started to make my way to the back of the bus to punch my ticket when I was suddenly aware that the bus driver was speaking and then I realized he was speaking to me. He was saying, "Signora, Signora." I walked back up the aisle and asked him what he had said. In very terse language he replied, "Signora, la prossima volta, ti lascio in piedi" (Ma'am, next time I'll leave you standing). It took a moment for his words to register and when they did, I was incredulous. Leave me standing in the street? For what reason? I was not going to let this go by without getting to the bottom of the matter, so I stood next to him and asked what I had done to make him speak that way. He replied curtly that I should have taken the #1 because it was the same as the #34, and I should not have made him stop. I stood my ground, saying that it was not the same as the #1 because the #1 stopped at the train station in Corso Vittorio and I, on the other hand, wanted to get off across Corso Vittorio and down the street by the garden. Then I started down the aisle again, incredulity commencing to flare into anger as I considered the very audacity of this bus driver to tell me which bus I could take, and which I could not. I turned around after punching my ticket and returned to the front of the bus, doggedly explaining to the driver that I took the #34 twice a week because it brought me exactly where I wanted to go. He, as stubbornly as I, continued by saying that I had made him late for his arrival at the capo linea. Finally I took a seat and rode, fuming, the remaining distance to my destination, all the while thinking that I was

not going to let the matter drop. However, I was going to change my tactics, discontinue the role of the injured party and play on his sympathy. When we reached the capo linea and he turned off the ignition, there were only the two of us left on the bus. I moved confidently up the aisle one more time, stood next to him and sweetly said, "Are you still angry with me?" To which he replied, "Non, Signora, ti chiedo scusa" (No, Ma'am, I ask you to excuse me). Then we exchanged a few pleasantries and said goodnight. I felt great walking home because I had accomplished what I wanted, his apologizing to me. I had turned the tables on him and was proud of it.

Opening the door to my apartment, I blustered my way in and began to give Paolo a fiery, detailed account of my interaction with the bus driver from the beginning to the bittersweet end, lashing out at all bus drivers, shopkeepers, and public servants everywhere. I demanded to know just why the old axiom, "The customer is always right," had never caught on in Italy. After all, I was a taxpayer, in addition to being a customer who purchased tickets and made his job possible, and he should have known better than to treat me like a criminal. Paolo patiently listened, not visibly shaken by the tale of my grisly ordeal, for it was not the first time that I had come home raving about injustices dumped upon me by his countrymen. As I concluded the account, I gloated over the apology that I had wrenched from the driver.

For days after the bus-driver incident, I tried to analyze my behavior on that evening, specifically my persistence in pursuing it to its surprisingly satisfying end. I concluded that I had done so because, more than needing to know I was justified in my indignation, I needed to

reach out to someone. The time preceding the incident had been a particularly lonely one for me, I was homesick for my children and friends. Because of our circumstances, we had few friends in Torino, not much of a social life, and my interpersonal relationships centered around Paolo, his family, and my students. Therefore, I attributed my persistence as the need for more personal contact.

I have reflected a great deal since that period, and now, although I am sure at the time I had the need to reach out socially to another human being, I see it as springing from yet another source. It is apparent to me that I was also reaching out to prove to myself that I could have control over the outcome of an event. Edward T. Hall says in Beyond Culture (1977, 6):

To continue our basic theme, many people's sense of worth is directly related to the number of situations in which they are in control, which means that many people have problems with their self-image because they clearly are in control of so little. (Notes to Introduction: By being in control over a situation I do not mean in a power sense. I only mean to be in control of all or most of the communication systems, verbal and non-verbal, so that the individual can make himself felt, be a factor in the equations of life.)

Hall is speaking here of one's self-worth within one's own culture, as he describes the destructive effects that bureaucracy and institutions can have on us. He goes on by saying that over a period of time "powerlessness and lack of self affirmation lead to aggression as repeatedly asserted by psychologists and psychiatrists" (6).

It is my conclusion that feelings of low self-esteem and powerlessness arise in cross-cultural living as well, for the very same reasons. When one is not in control of many situations, one's self-image suffers. That evening with the bus driver I finally recognized that I had the

ability to be in control.

Adaptation: Shopping

The neighborhood marketplace is a hubbub of sensory activity every day of the week, with the exception of Sundays. Here is where the best prices can be found, deals can be made and all that one would ever need to buy, from alabaster to zucchini, is located within the parameters of the bancarelle (covered stalls) arranged row upon row.

As the shoppers walk by each stall, vendors call out enticing offers to attract the attention of the passers-by, hoping to lure a few in and coerce them into some serious bargaining. Each business deal, whether it be an etto (gram) of salad greens or a fur coat, is a personal transaction, carried out with the usual pleasantries being exchanged, and at times even obscenities as the case may warrant.

On Saturday mornings, Saturday being the busiest market day of the week, the shoppers are packed into the marketplace like the proverbial sardines in a can, energetically purchasing the necessary comestibles for the weekend, chatting amicably with neighbors and browsing through the vast arrays of merchandise that each vendor has displayed. The best time for me at the market, however, is between 12:00 and 2:00, over mezzogiorno (midday), when everyone else has gone home to prepare lunch. Then I can roam more freely and not be preoccupied with pushing and shoving my way through the stalls a meter at a time. As colorful and entertaining as it is, I continue to be most content when I stay out of the market during its most frenetic hours. Unlike me, Italians are a high involvement, polychronic (Hall 1969, 173) people and the market is

a perfect example of their need to be together, sharing physical contact. As a member of a monochronic culture, I find that when necessary, I can reduce the polychronic effect and the involvement by merely staying away during these times. This, as Bennett suggests in her article, is typical of the "flex" stage, where one finds a "variety of adaptations which may be employed to reduce dissonance in the new culture" (1977, 48).

Apart from the marketplace, the neighborhood is the shopping hub for Italians. Whatever is needed can be found within a few blocks of where one lives. Small, privately owned businesses are the backbone of the Italian economy. In all of Torino, there are at most two or three department store chains and supermarkets. In the United States, there are dozens of large discount shopping chains in and around metropolitan areas the size of Torino. In Torino, there is a total of two large discount operations, both branches of the same chain. There are no shopping centers.

Grocery shopping is still transacted in a very traditional manner in Italy. Much of it is done on a daily basis. My American shopping habits absolutely did not transfer to Italy. Whereas at home, in Wisconsin, I would buy enough food to last for a week or two, with occasional stops at the store for milk and bread in the meantime, in Italy I shopped almost daily. Every morning Paolo or I went to the panetteria (bakery) for fresh bread and to the latteria (dairy store) for a liter of milk. Once or twice a week we bought fresh pasta at the pastificio and stop at the macelleria (meat market) and the frutteria (vegetable and fruit market) as well. Additional weekly trips were made to the salumeria (delicatessen) and the pasticceria (pastry shop). The drogheria, which is

a drugstore without a pharmacy, was also on our agenda, because it carried grocery items as well.

It was a shock to discover that shops actually close in Italy, even in the city. In the United States, one takes for granted the possibility of stopping at any hour of the day or night, seven days a week, to buy something at the supermarket. Not so in Torino. Shops are not open on Sundays. All other days of the week they close from one o'clock to four o'clock, and then reopen until 7:30. If one has forgotten a necessary ingredient for lunch, lunch goes on without it. From living in the United States, I was accustomed to taking a lunch break at 12:00 and running to the grocery store to pick up something on my way home. This was a habit that took a fair amount of time to unlearn. On Wednesdays at 1:00 all of the food shops close for the rest of the day, except for the meat markets, and Thursdays the meat markets close at 1:00 while the food shops remain open. Mondays clothing stores and the like remain closed until 1:00.

As at the marketplace, the transactions in the shops are personal and, for that reason, time consuming by monochronic American standards. One does not, like in the United States, have the choice of self-service and then go to the cashier to pay. Instead, for example, if eggs are to be purchased, one gives the order to the clerk at the counter, and he or she wraps each egg individually in old newspaper before placing them in a paper sack. Then one places an order for cheese, the piece is sliced off, weighed, and wrapped carefully as were the eggs. Each order is weighed individually by the gram or kilogram and wrapped. Because housewives can come in with very long grocery lists, waiting for one's

turn to come up is a test of one's patience.

Customers do not form single-file lines in Italy and wait for their turn, except when shopping in supermarkets where there are checkout lanes. In the neighborhood shops the customers will all crowd to the counter and the order in which one is waited on seems to be determined by whomever can make his or her presence known most acutely. It is not a game for the faint-hearted. I remember well from my early days in Torino, when I entered the vegetable market close to our apartment and waited until my turn came to put in my requests, only to discover after several disappointing trial runs that my turn never came. Customers who came in after me were waited on before me. I learned the hard way to defend my position assertively and speak up.

There were times when I had had too much acculturation experience, became fed up with the practice of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and I would rebel, such as is suggested by the flight stage of Sergeant's model. One such occasion was recorded in my journal entry from January 21:

Paolo and I have been discussing how many times we (I) have to say buon giorno when entering and leaving shops. At the macelleria the other day everyone yelled buona sera (Good afternoon) at me on our way out. It was done conspicuously for my benefit because I didn't say anything on the way out, Paolo did the honors. I didn't think it was necessary, but they reminded me that it was.

Prior to the incident, Paolo and I had often discussed the necessity of greetings and leavetakings when in shops. I had decided, stubbornly, that they were superfluous, meaningless and repetitive, and served no real purpose, for the verbal exchanges were limited to buon giorno or buona sera repeated at least three times by each, the shopkeeper and the

customer, upon entering and the same upon leaving. Normally, there were no other exchanges. I thought when the two of us were shopping together, I could remain silent, for it seemed that if they wanted to talk to me, they could at least say something a little more personal, or indicate that they knew who we were. After all, these were shops in our neighborhood, and which we patronized several times a week.

I was nostalgic for the casual, bantering conversations that I was accustomed to in the small town that I was from in Wisconsin. Those people cared enough, I thought, to ask about me and my family, or maybe the conversation was totally banal and only about the weather, but nevertheless, it gave me a sense of being connected with someone, and this connectedness was totally absent from my neighborhood life in Torino. All people, not only the shopkeepers, tended to go about their business coolly and efficiently, but with not the least bit of warmth or care expressed in interactions. My next-door neighbors rarely even said hello when we met in the elevator or the hallway outside our apartments. There was one notable exception. The woman who owned the bar with her husband, where we drank our cappuccini every morning, came to understand that I liked my cappuccino hot, so every morning she would smile at me as she handed me the cup and say, "This one is very hot, Signora." For some reason that simple gesture meant more to me than if she had said buon giorno a hundred times, for it signified that, to her, I was not anonymous and faceless, but a real person, an individual with particular likes and dislikes.

Elaboration: Social Relationships and Friendships

In this final section of my paper, I want to address the issue least resolved during my time in Italy, that of social relationships and friendships. I think it went unresolved, in part, because of environmental factors. I had left a very small town where I had been living for years, moved to a big city, and was unprepared for the anonymity and impersonality of human interactions so prevalent in city life; however, I also feel that the additional factor of living in a foreign culture and my lack of familiarity with the rules that governed the development of social relationships there contributed to its unsatisfactory resolution as well.

Certainly, a most significant part of the adaptive process when living in an alien culture is learning how to play as well as work within the host society, and learning how to play, to me, includes developing social relationships and friendships.

In her book Necessary Losses, Judith Viorst (1987, 196) comments on friendships and the influence they have on our personal growth as we move through life change.

Friends broaden our horizons. They serve as new models with whom we can identify. They allow us to be ourselves, and accept us that way. They enhance our self-esteem, because they think we are OK, because we matter to them. And because they matter to us--for various reasons, at various levels of intensity--they enrich the quality of our emotional life.

Paolo and I never lacked for things to keep us busy in our free time. There were activities to participate in every night of the week in Torino, if one so desired, and every weekend as well, as we wanted. However, going here and there, to the cinema, to jazz concerts, to the mountains

for the weekend--going, going, going--was not enough to make up for the easy, informal social relationships and intimate friendships I had left behind in Wisconsin.

Viorst goes on to say (199):

Analyst McMahon writes that growth demands relatedness and that intimacy produces continuing growth throughout our life, because being known affirms and strengthens the self. He quotes Martin Buber, who says that all real living is a meeting between I and Thou, and that "Through the Thou"--through close encounters in which we open ourselves to each other--"a man becomes I."

In Torino, I felt not only the loss of having friends, but of being a friend as well. As Bennett (1977, 45) discusses in her article, whenever there is transition and change in life, a feeling of loss accompanies that change, and we react to it by grieving for it, by needing to readjust and bring continuity back into our lives.

When I left Wisconsin, the friendships that remained behind were those that had been nurtured for years and were a vital force in my life. I did not have many intimate friends, at the most I could count them on one hand, but they were such that I knew I could depend on them for anything, and they me. On the other hand, in Italy, the only person that I was close to and could depend on was Paolo.

I do not believe that my expectations for making friendships in Italy were too high. I have always known that true friends are not made overnight. I predicted that it would require time and effort on my part, and I was prepared to do all that was necessary to make friends. I have always believed the old adage, "To have a friend, be a friend."

During the time that I taught in Italy, three of my students did, in fact, become friends of sorts, in that we would invite them over for

dinner occasionally, and they us. Sometimes we would attend concerts together or go out for dinner at a local trattoria. As many times as we met socially, though, the true seed of friendship never took root and grew. At the most, to me, the dinners in each other's homes appeared to be a case of one paying back the other for the last dinner given. Finally, the last year I was in Torino, after a dinner held at our apartment just before Christmas, we never heard from them again. We could never understand why, and the more time that lapsed without hearing from them, the more uncomfortable we felt about calling them up to try to arrange another social evening, thinking that for some reason, they did not want to socialize with us anymore.

We had other acquaintances, too, colleagues of Paolo's from the university, and mine from the institute, which we would meet infrequently for beer and pizza, but nothing deeper ever developed from these relationships either. The evenings were merely filled with what I call "cocktail conversation," nothing more profound or intimate than that.

We tried many ways, and so often, to socialize, thinking that certainly at some point we would "click" with someone and the relationship would develop into a budding friendship, but our efforts always seemed doomed from the beginning. Indeed, as I tried harder to make friends of some of my acquaintances, I began to agree with the travel guide I cited earlier in this paper, that the personality of Torino and her people was "solemn, austere, and downright chilly" (Gloaguen 1985, 18). If I had been told once, I had been told a hundred times by the Torinese themselves, that it must have been difficult for me to live in Torino, because the Piemontese are "such cold, closed, unaccepting people."

One of my students, a business executive originally from Naples, and in Torino for only two years, told me that the Piemontese were very different from his people in the South. In my journal on October 22, I wrote:

We've talked about the differences between the North and the South. He says the Piemontese are a closed, cold society, but it doesn't bother him much because he has his family and his work here. He said it would have been more difficult if he'd come to Torino when he was younger, when he needed people.

I vacillated from blaming the Piemontese to blaming myself for the loneliness and emptiness I was feeling, without having friends to share with.

I am sure that in my desire to become part of Italian society an unwritten rule that I had made for myself largely contributed to my feeling isolated. I had concluded early on that if I wanted to get into a foreign culture and truly become part of it, I could not depend socially on the members of my own culture and other native English speakers. This streak of independence, having the need to go it on my own, no doubt, is what Edward Stewart (1981, 19, 19n) refers to in his book American Cultural Patterns, when he writes, "to many, perhaps most Americans, self-reliance connotes an extreme form of independence--the attitude that led the early pioneer to move on when he could smell the smoke from a neighbor's fireplace. Frequently this is explicit in their definitions of the term."

Hence, in striving to become part of Italian society, I purposely avoided anything more than occasional social contact with other Americans and British. There were several social clubs and cultural organizations in Torino whose memberships were largely made up of native English

speakers, but I did not join them. Therefore, in cutting myself off from other Americans and British, I also eliminated any chance of meeting and forming friendships with others who were in my same situation.

One particular time, however, I was so desperate for socializing at a more meaningful level and with someone who spoke my language, I invited a British colleague of mine over to our apartment after work. Even that attempt at nurturing friendship failed. He had to teach until 9:00 that evening and had not had dinner when he came. I offered him some pasta, which would have taken five minutes to prepare, but he politely refused. All he would accept was a cup of tea and a piece of bread. We had a marvelous time talking, discovering a bit about our lives, and when he left, Paolo and I were both content with the evening. I asked him over again a couple of weeks later, but he refused, telling me that his apartment was not as nice as ours and therefore he could never reciprocate our invitation. I was extremely surprised by his response and told him that as far as we were concerned he never had to reciprocate, that we enjoyed his company and would love to have him over anytime, but he would not hear of it. A few weeks later, he invited us out for a beer, but he never again came to our apartment.

Throughout my life I have had many chances to examine my strengths and weaknesses with regard to interpersonal relations, and I have always known my greatest strength in this area to be my openness and my ability to relate to people. However, after living in Torino as long as I did, and finding that this was not enough to nurture "acquaintanceships" into friendships, I concluded that as a product of American culture, I did not have the appropriate vehicle, i.e., the cultural wherewithal to find my

way into Italian friendship circles.

In Wisconsin it had been easy to meet people, especially since I lived in a small community. I originally met most of my close friends through coincidence--one was a neighbor, another happened to be at the same party as I, yet another that I met was at the city park when I was there, and we were both watching our children using the slide. The friendships evolved and became closer over the years, and I told a friend on one occasion that in developing our friendships we had really created a family in which every member shared with and supported the others when support was necessary. For instance, there was a time when the mother of one of my friends was dying in the nursing home, and she called me to ask if I would go with her and wait with her until the end, for emotionally she could not manage alone. Even though I was apprehensive about being with someone who was dying, I stayed with her because I knew she needed me.

Other friendships that I had, not as intimate, though, were made by attending special interest meetings, going to church activities, and participating in school and business organizations. Perhaps these are the typical American modes used to form "specialized friendships" suggested by Stewart (1981, 54) in his book.

Torino was not a small community, however, and the Torinese did not respond predictably to the ways I was accustomed to using to meet people and make friends. There was little chance to interact with neighbors, for every encounter was limited to a perfunctory buon giorno, and sometimes not even that. I think that big city life encourages anonymity amongst people, and therefore they hesitated to open themselves up to

doubtless--in all of us--an inner core of self we may never reveal, it matters to us enormously that we matter to others and that we are not alone. "I need to know," says Kim, "that there is someone besides myself who really cares about whether I live or die." An old proverb puts it another way: "One would not be alone even in Paradise!"

There were so many times before I left Torino that I berated myself for not being able to stay there alone and survive by myself. I needed a strong support system, but I had only one person to turn to, a young British woman whom I had met my first year teaching in Torino. Our friendship had originally been based on our mutual need for speaking our own language and for sharing our feelings about life in our new environment. We no longer saw much of each other because she and her family had moved away from Torino. Nevertheless, it was she who was my sole source of support, and who cared about me, who knew how lonely I was, during the weeks before I decided to go back to the United States.

Ultimately, I accepted myself as I knew myself to be, and admitted that I could not continue to live there without the support of family and good friends to encourage me and give me the boost that my self-esteem sorely needed. I had to be where there were people who loved me and cared about me, where I would not be alone. I made the decision to go back to the Midwest where my family was, where I had close friends, and where I could begin my healing process. Once again I was in transition, and I needed to adjust, to re-establish continuity and meaning to my life.

What I have learned from Sergeant's model is that even though one may have reached the highest level of adaptation, "flex," in many aspects of one's cross-cultural experience, there are some that are never wholly resolved. In our case, I believe that Paolo and I, in having tried over

and over again to establish friendships, in feeling rejected by people when we tried, in having limited opportunities to meet new people and my not having the cultural awareness of how to enter into social relationships, caused us to retreat from people, and thus we created a world in which there were only the two of us. Even though we had reached a level of intimacy in a relationship that some people never attain, for though we were lovers, we were also best friends, it was what finally drove us apart.

Bennett (1977, 48), in describing the "flex" stage further, writes that this stage of adaptation "does not imply a surrender of world view, but rather, suggests a variety of adaptations which may be employed to reduce dissonance in the new culture."

If I could relive my Italian experience, I would not surrender my world view again, with regard to social relationships and friendships, as I did by avoiding social contact with people who shared my own language and culture. Rather, I would include another strategy to help resolve this issue.

Because of what I have discovered about myself, that in order to feel content with my life I need to have meaningful relationships with others, no matter where I am living, I would choose, rather than avoid, social interaction with members of my own culture. Being with other people who had this in common with me, I feel, would have enabled me "to reduce dissonance," or more simply stated, provided me the emotional support that I needed as I worked on adapting myself to other challenges of my new environment.

Recently, when I went back to the Midwest to live for several months after I returned from Italy, I used this strategy. I had not lived in my hometown in more than twenty years, and therefore it was much like entering a new culture. I found most of the residents to be rather conservative in their views, compared to me. My first step in attempting to adjust to life there was to immediately seek out people whom I thought might share values and life experiences similar to mine. I found these people by participating in a peace vigil on New Year's Day, and by teaching a culture course for the foreign students at the local community college. Reaching out to people with similar values and experiences definitely gave me the support that I needed while adjusting to my "new" environment.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described various "awareness episodes" (Batchelder and Warner 1977, 147) which have furthered my understanding of myself as a product of American culture and as a woman going through life transition. As I wrote in the introduction--not only have I been the curious Pandora, but I have been the box as well. My time in Italy brought about the opening of the box, out of which flew the essence of me--my persona, myself as a cultural being, that until then had been enclosed and undisturbed. Once released, however, I was forced into confronting myself and the issues that were raised by my living cross-culturally and being at a transition point in my life.

I believe, as Bennett (1977, 45) has theorized in her article, that culture shock is after all a subcategory of life transition experiences,

and that my reactions throughout my cross-cultural experiment were similar, if not identical to, those present during any major life change. Anytime there is change in one's life, one experiences loss, and the reaction to loss is shock, expressed by feelings of "grief, disorientation and the necessity for adjustment" (Bennett 1977, 45).

I certainly experienced transition shock living in Italy, and, particularly at the beginning of my time there, my self-awareness was not developed well enough to permit me to react with anything more than automatic, spontaneous responses to the stimuli of my new environment and lifestyle.

During the earlier stages of my adaptive process, I felt traumatized by and, much of the time, quite negative about my Italian experience. It was only later in my adaptive process, when I had been challenged to reach a heightened level of self-awareness through constant re-examination and analysis of the personal and cultural conflicts that emerged, that I began to view my experience in Italy as being more positive and one in which I was actively and consciously participating in the outcome of events in my life.

Much later, even as I was developing this paper, I began to see that my living cross-culturally had been an exceptional experience, leaving me with the knowledge that as one lives through periods of great change and suffers loss, in the end one can also realize gains. Some of the gain is in the development of adaptive life skills and personal growth.

I feel that these gains can be readily applied to other life transition experiences, utilizing them as building blocks in the continuous evolution of the self. Each time we go through transition, we

have the chance to become more in touch with ourselves and more completely developed human beings.

As Judith Viorst so appropriately writes:

I've learned that in the course of our life we leave and are left and let go of much that we love. Losing is the price we pay for living. It is also the source of much of our growth and gain. Making our way from birth to death, we also have to make our way through the pain of giving up and giving up and giving up some portion of what we cherish. . . .

. . . And in confronting the many losses that are brought by time and death, we become a mourning and adapting self, finding at every stage--until we draw our final breath--opportunities for creative transformations (1987, 366).

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