

Someone Is Always Singing Somewhere in the World



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If you look out across movie-land during this Christmas season, you see *Gladiator II*, which depicts how Roman rulers entertained 60,000 of their blood thirsty citizens via the famed Coliseum. When I visited Rome on my bicycle ride from Nord Kapp, Norway to Athens, Greece—I took a guided tour around the arena. Over 1,000,000 men died in that Coliseum and another 3,000,000 animals during the 400 plus years of the “games.” For some reason, even in 2024, we “love” violent movies, Stephen King’s books, scary movies, robot killing machines and all sorts of mayhem. That’s why Hollywood keeps pumping them out. It’s little wonder that our youth shoot each other at the drop of a hat in our big cities. They’ve been trained by violent video games, movies, and TV shows. Personally, I don’t watch horror movies because I don’t want that kind of “gruesome activity” scaring me half to death in my dreams. Once you see a horror movie, it remains in your head for your lifetime. I also don’t like wars, violence, or deviant human behavior. But every time you turn around, you read about disturbed people committing all sorts of horrible acts of every conceivable type.

So, for a moment, let’s get away from the violence, the horrors, the endless bad news—and take a bicycle ride with me. You may have read this story before, yet it shows the beauty that humans create through song.

The mystique of bicycle travel fascinates most people. Why would anyone “endure” the pains of providing their own locomotion via pedaling rather than the comfort and speed of a car, boat, plane, or train? The answer lies in the antiquity of “pedaling bliss.” It thrives in the meshing of your energy with the vivacity of the universe. It rushes into the secret corners of your mind to explore the world on your own terms. Too much comfort leads to tedium or the indolence of life. Once you swing your leg over the saddle of a bicycle, a whole new mental, physical, and spiritual dimension opens to every cell in your body. You “fly” at the “perfect speed” with a comet’s tail of memories following you into eternity.



(Frosty Wooldridge, outside the Coliseum in Rome, Italy.)

On a bicycle tour through the enchanting history of Europe, my friend Gary and I sweated our way into the Italian Alps. We pushed our bikes around hairpin curves, through boreal forests and across mountain ramparts. At Spluggin Pass, we coasted 37 kilometers along a winding, sharply descending mountain road

that carried us through dark tunnels that led into bright sunshine and flowery Italian meadows.

Ancient Roman ruins dotted the landscape. At lower elevations, 1,000-year-old stone homes housed farmers who worked the land. At the bottom of the Alps, we entered Lago Como (Lake Region) for a ride south into the enchanting land known as Tuscany. If you watched the movie "Under the Tuscan Sun" with Diane Lane, you felt the romance of that vineyard-filled region of fine wines and superb dining.

When you travel through Italy, you travel back in time to walled-cities that protected their inhabitants from the constant charges of competing armies from other towns. Whether you travel through Sienna, Cali-val- Delsa, Florence, Naples, or Rome—all those cities once featured or still maintain thickly layered brick ramparts surrounding their main living and commerce areas. And always, each walled-city features an ancient, marble church with tapestries, paintings, stained glass windows and stunning architecture.

One night, we pedaled through a hilly region of Tuscany until we reached a river with a hill that swept upward.

"Let's bed down up on that ridge after we take a bath in the river," said Gary.

"Roger that," I said.

Upon washing the day's grime off our bodies, we walked the bikes up the hill about 150 feet above the highway to a flat spot. We pitched the tents, cooked dinner, and watched the night sky reveal millions of twinkling stars.

Next morning, we pedaled along the same road until, in the distance, we discovered a walled-city perched high on a hill.

"Let's check that one out," said Gary.

"I'm with you," I said.

We pedaled through woods and fields until the road spiraled upward toward massive 150-foot-high brick walls over 1,500 years old. Along the way, we passed a small, abandoned chapel where a work crew repaired furniture. We stopped to see old paintings and statues along the church walls. Those repairmen didn't think much about working with artifacts and antiquities from centuries ago.

Finally, after sweating up the road, we reached the massive 20-foot-high wooden gates of the city. They hadn't been closed for a hundred years or more. Once inside the city, we stopped at a water fountain to fill our bottles and splash cool liquid into our faces. Around us, shopkeepers and patrons walked along the inside of the walls. A few kids pedaled their rusty bikes as they stared at us. About 100 feet from the fountain, a gray, marble cathedral soared toward the sky. At the top, stained glass windows perched atop beautiful carved frescos.

"Do you hear kids singing?" I asked Gary.

"Sounds like a children's choir inside that cathedral with someone playing a guitar," he said.

"Let's check it out," I said.

We walked up the marble steps of the church. "Look at these steps," Gary said. "They're worn down an inch at least from the centuries of worshipers coming to church. Generation after generation for over 1,500 years. Man, this is living history."

We entered the church to sit in 1,500-year-old wooden pews that sat 100 people. In the front, about 20 children and a guitar player practiced their songs in Italian. Their young voices mesmerized us.

For the next half hour, children's voices carried like musical chariots across the inner chamber of that ancient church. The sun shone through the stained glass windows like colors from a double rainbow. The scent of history permeated every

painting. Gray marble columns rose 150 feet over our heads. A stunning statue of Christ hung from a cross with blood dripping down from his hands and body.

For the next 30 minutes, we sat in sublime joy with Italian songs floating through the air. We couldn't understand the language, yet our hearts and spirits felt their beauty.

While my bicycle carries me into magical moments on this planet, that day in the cathedral with a children's choir lifting their voices to the heavens must be one of the most sublime moments of my lifetime. Afterwards, we thanked the children with, "Grazia" and "Molto bene" (exceedingly good) from our limited Italian language talents.

Back into the sunshine of the day, we remounted the bikes for our journey through the enchanting countryside of Tuscany. I thanked Gary for his friendship. I thanked the children for their voices. I thanked my lucky stars to bear witness to the beauty humanity offers in music, spiritual quest, and architectural beauty.

On our touring bikes, we added another thread into the tapestry of our lives.

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