

## Being Jewish in WWII Italy

When making this book, I constantly thought about how Italians protected their people as well as their artwork. Specifically, I wanted to know if Renato could wander around freely in Florence if his background was from another country and/or Jewish. In Elizabeth Bettina's book, *It Happened in Italy*, there are numerous accounts of Italians treating foreign and Italian Jews with respect. For example, Jews did not have to wear a star on their sleeve, could choose what towns to live in, and though they couldn't work or own a business, they were given the same rations as the rest of the population. The Italians falsified identification papers to hide the Jews, and generally did not turn anyone in the way other European countries did. Prior to September 8, 1943, Jews in Italy did not fear for their safety. Once Italy joined the Allies, German occupation in the north made life much more dangerous for everyone. Germans deported as many Jews as they could find to concentration camps outside Italy.

Here are my notes on Bettina's book. I don't condone how poorly Jews were treated even here, but it's worth noting the difference in quality of life they experienced in Italy:

1. Unlike the rest of Europe, Italy was the only country that allowed Jews to enter without a visa. (Bettina 31)

2. For Jews that were detained in Italy, it was a far different experience than anywhere else in Europe. "After the Wolffs were reunited in Ferramonti, [an Italian internment camp] they had the opportunity to be transferred to their choice of one of several towns. This was called *internato libero*, or internment that was free, meaning they could live in a town amongst the Italians. They only had to stay in the town, sign in at the police office daily, and seek permission from the *carabinieri*, the police, if they wanted to leave for the day. Walter and his family received a list of various approved places to live and—because it had an active Jewish community and a beautiful synagogue—they chose a small town in northern Italy called Casale Monferrato, near Torino and Milano." (Bettina 35)

"During my time in Campagna, we were treated well, we were able to mix with the people of the town, walk around, play soccer, and I helped the people with medical questions, as did the other doctors in the camp." This is a direct quote from Dr. Kleinman, a Jewish internee at Campagna. (Bettina 210)

3. Prior to September 8th, 1943, Jews did not fear for their lives in Italy. It was after Italy switched sides to join forces with the Allies, that German occupation became dangerous for them. At this point, Germans actively searched for Jewish internees to deport them to Germany. (Bettina 184)

"Did you ever feel you were in any danger while you were in Civitella del Tronto?" [Elizabeth Bettina] asked. "No. Not in the beginning. It's difficult to comprehend that during the time Mussolini controlled Italy, I felt safe and lived as

normal a life as I could, given the circumstances," he said. "There was a war going on, and times were difficult for everyone in Italy, not just the Jews. We had what they had, the same rations. Before September 8, 1943, we were safe. After that it changed." (Bettina 99)

"After September 8, 1943, when the Germans began marching through Italy, living in Milano was too dangerous. The family became one of the many sfollati, Catholic and Jewish people who fled the cities all over Italy..." (Bettina 133)

4. Italians helped ensure the safety of Jews in Italy by: 1. Providing false identification papers (Bettina 36) 2. Helping them hide (Bettina 99) 3. Not enforcing the Nazi rules, or making them wear the Star of David on their arms. (Bettina)

"Walter [Wolff] continued, 'It's important for people to know what happened in Italy. We've been surprised that the Italians do not know what happened in their own backyard. If it were not for the many 'Giovanni Palatuccis' of Italy, who chose to listen to their own hearts instead of following orders of people who were crazy... well, none of us would have survived, and I have many friends who survived because they were in Italy. If we had remained in Germany, we probably would not have lived.'" (Bettina 76)

5. There was one and only one boat from Naples to New York, which left in July 1944. This was the Henry Gibbons, and 982 Jewish refugees were taken to a base in Oswego, New York by executive order from Franklin Delano Roosevelt. (Bettina 196-198)