

The Bookseller (His actual comments are preserved offline)

When I left my room every morning to explore Florence, I wasn't always sure where my adventures would take me. Several times I walked by a bookstore on my way to the Piazza della Signoria. One day, I noticed a title in the window which I later ended up buying. It was about World War II in Florence. I hadn't come across something so specific in my research at home, so I went in to inquire about the book.

I met the owner of the small, used bookstore—an older gentleman named Enrico Rossi. Here is my Facebook post from that day (August 20, 2015):

"...on my way to eat lunch-I noticed a book store with Florence history in the time I am writing about. I went in, talked to the owner, who was 7 in 1943!! I understood him, but he had some trouble understanding me. Just then an American retiree came in, and offered to translate. I now have my answer on the blackout. Little light was allowed before midnight. After midnight-nothing was allowed. He spoke about his experience-that his father was anti-fascist. After awhile, he said talking about it made him sad. He was so sweet-and a painter as well. I bought the book-but he said to come back on Saturday. He wants to give me a drawing. That gives me time to make a drawing for him. What a day! I couldn't make these connections without actually being here. (Photo is the one and only sign for the store. Nothing on the outside.)"

I found an amazing guide, Antonia Lanza d'Ajeta, who agreed to help me translate for the interview. I took a photo of his storefront, and made a watercolor painting for him as a thank-you. The interview itself went phenomenally well, thanks mostly to Enrico's willingness to share stories, and Antonia's gentle questions. I wrote notes furiously. He mentioned that his Jewish grandmother lived on the same street as the rest of the family, and it wasn't a big deal. Italy treated its Jewish citizens very differently than other European countries. It wasn't until Germany occupied the north after the fall of Mussolini in 1943, that the political winds changed, and people had to fear the Nazis directly.

Enrico told an amazing story of his friend that was helping his father at the synagogue (which I took a tour of, and it's beautiful). The Nazis were capturing people, and the friend told Enrico to go find a particular family and warn them before they were due to arrive at the synagogue. At age 7, Enrico found the family en route, and warned them about the Nazis. They heeded his advice, and fled Florence, finding refuge eventually in Israel. As Antonia translated this story, I was in awe—this deserves its own book. She asked if the family stayed in touch with him, and he said they stayed in touch until the flood of 1966, when he lost their

information. But he knew they were all right, which I think was more than he could say about his friend and the friend's father.