

# Heartfelt Stitches and Glorious Adventures... Italian Style

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Hello to all the wonderful, kindred appliqué lovers of this world. I am so honored to be able to write and share my quilt journeys over the years with each of you. I was born in northern New Jersey and now reside in Milford, Pennsylvania. I was fortunate to begin traveling at a young age with my mom and dad. My father was born in Keil, Germany; and my mother is of Northern Italian heritage.

She is the only girl and the youngest of 13 children. The family named her Gloria as in "Yay...Glory be...halleluia... it's a girl!" My mom's mother, Noni, lived with us (Noni, grandmother in Italian); Dad spoke German with his friends; and, of course, English was the predominant language in our family...so, I was raised speaking all three languages.

My parents were, and are still, proud Americans. When we traveled overseas as children, mom made sure my sister, Lorraine, and I would never be lost in a crowd; so we were dressed in the brightest of red, white and blue... and yes, of course, stripes and stars. We were tiny, blond haired, blue eyed, American walking billboards; and we had no clue why people stared at us and smiled.

It was nice being brought up in a family with artistic talents because Mom and Dad always pointed out things, like the town center's statues, and how wonderfully the artist had captured the true essence of exactly who that person was; or how many years of labor it took to paint or sculpt the art in various European castles and cathedrals. I had my "enough is enough" child moments; but apparently everything my parents taught me stayed within me and emerged as I became a young adult. I not only have a passion for appliqué and quilting, but a never ending need to travel and learn about other cultures and their arts. What a wonderful way to combine all my loves and teach abroad.

Last summer, I was fortunate to befriend a fellow Italian quilter, Chiara Cingano, from Italy. Chiara is the International Translator for Quilt Italia. It was quite nice to converse back and forth with her by email. We had so much in common and became fast friends. Quilt Italia was holding their Quilt Festival in December 2002, and invited me to represent America by teaching at their exhibit. I graciously accepted and was thrilled.

The festival was being held in Modena (check your balsamic vinegars in the grocery stores, because Modena is home to balsamic vinegar...yum!) which is quite close to

Venice, Valdagno, and Castel Umberto where my mom's family lives. It was a perfect time to combine a bit of business with pleasure. Chiara was excited to learn that my family was close by. Naturally, Mom and friend, Helen Umstead, accompanied me to Italy.

December 5<sup>th</sup> we arrived at the Venice airport to ecstatic greetings of smiling and waving from both Chiara and friend Cornelia. After collecting our baggage, we stopped at a coffee-bar for a cappuccino... a very Italian thing to do. Now, I had pre-warned the girls of my entire amount of luggage. Remember I am teaching a few classes, and had kits and quilts aside from my clothing. Cornelia's Land Rover Discovery was quite big and we managed to squeeze everything in. Not one window with a view, legs were piled over smaller luggage pieces, there was a lot of giggling and happy chatter...and lots of



**Linda and Marta at the Quilt Italia booth**

adrenalin.

We arrive at the convention center and find the bag with the quilts. The Italian portion of the show is hung. All that was needed were my quilts to be there. Busy as bees, we hung the quilts from *Turkish Delights to Appliqué* and two *Sunshine and Stained Glass* quilts. I managed to have a sneak peek at the show before Chiara and Cornelia said we needed to have a little food...and how right they were.

We sat at a circular table in a nice little restaurant and had Chiara do the ordering for us. The foods that arrived were the foods my grandmother and mom cooked all my life. The polenta, cheeses, and lentil soup were so comforting after the long plane ride and hanging all the quilts. After our meal we were scooted to our hotel for a good nights sleep because we would be getting up bright and early for the opening of the exhibit.

It was so nice to meet the ladies of Quilt Italia the next morning. My mom fit in as "one of the girls"...talking away in Italian. As I looked at her, I could see that she too felt very much at home. I saw so much in common between American quilters and these wonderful Italian quilters. Their pride and love of the quilting arts beamed with each and every smile and twinkle in their eyes. They gather together, like us, and admire with excitement the ribbon winners and their love of different techniques. The theme of the exhibit was "*Emotions of Winter.*" What an outstanding and innovative gallery of quilts I was lucky to view.

As Americans, we can easily acquire fabrics in

choices of colors and textures. What I was most impressed with was the beautiful applications of antique laces, soft velvets, vintage tablecloths and clothing all used in exquisite taste and precise appliqué. The challenge of translating the emotions of winter were different for each of the quilters. Tiny little villages appliquéd into hilltops, the warm glow of yellows and oranges in the tiny windows... overlaid with crème tulle to signify the winter snows, were one woman's portrayal; while another would show the forest floor with all the animals huddled together to keep warmth amongst themselves. Cornelia designed her own quilt with crazy quilt log cabins made into



**Cornelia's quilt "Family Meeting"**

white snow owls and appliquéd lace and tablecloth edging from her family's lineage. Cornelia's quilt is titled "*Family Meeting*"... a waiting atmosphere. The rhythms of life would slow down, and people devoted themselves to family, or to a particular winter activity. Her grandmother and her friends and relatives used to prepare the Eider down quilts for the girls who were getting married. Cornelia reflected that times are changing and we do not stop anymore... we have even globalized the seasons. "Tomatoes and strawberries in the winter?" She writes... "We run and never stop to think; but my snow owls have stopped; they are waiting... and this is my winter emotion". The themes among the girls varied, but I felt in an enchanted winter wonderland in a room devoted to this wonderful, though provoking, challenge.

Cornelia is a native German born woman, who is married to an Italian physician. We were so fortunate to stay with Cornelia on our last days in Italy. We gathered one evening with a few quilting ladies for authentic pizza. I had pizza with arugula, and it was customary to drizzle olive oil on your pie... once again it was delicious. Cornelia's personality was so endearing, she has a true desire to give each of her quilts her heart and soul and a meaning to remember. Pizza night was full of fun and laughing... and show and tell. It was the night I divided my scrap stash among the girls and listened to stories and folklore. Cornelia's two teenage daughter joined us, and they were typical teens.

Chiara was also there that night, and I learned she had been quilting for 7 years, since 1995. She was expecting

her daughter soon; and since this was a much longed for baby, she wanted to do something special for her. That summer she traveled to England on holiday and found her first quilting books. She bought a rotary cutter and a board... but no ruler! After her daughter was born, and by then she knew this book by heart, she made her first quilt with the Chinese coin pattern, and then made two more. In 1996 she found a quilting and patchwork class in Mestre, the Venice suburb on land, and drove 60 Km every week for ten weeks, to finish the class.

Chiara made a sampler like all beginner quilters; and from then on, as told to me, she walked on her own two feet with the help of a few magazines and all the books she could find. Books are especially hard to find, but thanks to visits in England, Germany and Switzerland, and all the exhibitions in Italy, she managed to pull together a decent library.

Chiara loves all techniques, hand and machine, piecing and appliqué, and adores to experiment. This ambitious quilter is an English teacher in a technical school, her students are between 14 to 19. She joined the Italian quilting guild "Quilt Italia" in 1997 and in January was elected in the Board of the Guild to be the International Representative.

I asked Chiara what inspired her to create the large quilt she brought to Modena. As explained to me, the pieced



**Chiara's quilt with close up of corner motif.**

part is taken from a picture that hangs in the museum in Perugia, in central Italy, an Annunciation, painted around 1472. Chiara explains that it is remarkable to interpret this into a quilt. The Holy Virgin is sitting high in a chair decorated with a geometric pattern that she tried to reproduce in the central blocks (the one with the nine patches). She then added alternative simplified blocks to make a larger 9 patch, set it on point and added a few borders. Since the corners were empty, she filled them with an original motif. The fabrics used were of Italian origin and Chiara feels they harmonize perfectly with the dignity and serenity of the painting and masterpiece. The feeling is of a reserved mood which we find in the towns, villages and mountains of central Italy; and is in high contrast of the atmosphere of Venice and northern Italy.

I have felt so honored and privileged to have taught my appliqué techniques to these wonderful Italian ladies who eagerly embraced new and challenging adventures in appliqué. Italy is a never ending inspiration. You can find design elements in the most simple of balcony designs to the most elaborate geometric patchwork designs in the Venice cathedrals. Teaching in Italy, twice, has been a treasure to hold, and my heart will find me there again....and soon!



***Floor tile in the floor of the St. Marco Basilica in Venice, Italy***

*Editor's Note: Linda is the author of "Turkish Delights to Appliqué" and "Bended Bias Appliqué". If you have any questions or comments for Linda, please visit her web site at <http://www.lindampoole.com>*

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