

Italy loves tradition

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the church. The church service was almost identical to mass. Of course, when the couple left the church, we all had a handful of rice ready.

After a picture-taking session which included family and friends, we drove to the restaurant. I then discovered that people receive invitations to come to the restaurant and attending the church service is only secondary. I think that normally 200-300 people come to eat, although more can come.

And when they go to the restaurant to eat, they eat!

Beverages included both red and white wine, mineral water, gassosa, which is gingerale, orange soda and beer. After each course, we were given clean plates and so it only took us about four hours to eat.

If you ask me to think of three words to describe Italy, I would reply food, grapes, and love.

I have discovered that the Italians love to eat. I think that the average woman spends about four hours a day in the kitchen. Normally we have a cooked meal for both lunch and dinner. Instant foods are used very, very little if at all.

I would also guess that each person spends about two hours a day eating. And when we go visiting friends and family, almost the first question is "Can we get you something to eat or drink?" After attending a wedding reception and seeing the menu, I was certain that food is an important part of Italian life.

Grapes have many uses. The most important use is to make wine. Grapes are also used to make aceto, which is vinegar and grappa, which is a strong alcoholic beverage. The Italians also eat grapes, but very little. I was allowed to stay in the province of Teramo for an extra week just so I could help with the grape harvest. Since wine is the most important use for grapes, grape harvesting time is also wine making time.

As I mention wine making, I am sure that you have visions of me stomping grapes. But since my family produces wine for their own use as well as to sell, they use a machine to smash the grapes. The only people who still stomp grapes are those who produce wine only for themselves. But do not be too disappointed because the aunt and uncle of my family still make wine in the traditional way and so I spent an afternoon at their house stomping grapes in my bare feet. I also think that you are dying to know if I washed my feet before stomping the grapes. The answer is no!

Last but not least is love. Of course, everyone knows that Italy is famous for the Latin lovers. But I have discovered another kind of love for which Italy should be famous - the love between the family and also the warmth that they show to strangers.

It is very common for two families to live in the same house - normally two brothers and their families. Twice I have lived in houses with two families. Since they are farmers, everyone helps to farm and when they need money

they take it. Many important decisions are reached through family discussions. No one worries about how much work the others have done or how much money the others have received. And in all the other families with whom I lived or met, I have noticed a genuine closeness.

I can speak very well of the warmth that the Italians show to strangers. My host families have taken me in as one of their own. For me the most difficult part of the IFYE program is meeting wonderful people, having to leave them and not being sure when you will ever see them again.

I will close with two examples. I

had called my family in Rovigo and talked with my sweet host mother. After politely asking me how I was, her next question was "When are you coming back?" My

host sister in Ferrara wrote me and told me that everytime the telephone rings her father says, "Deb." Unfortunately when I called Ferrara my host father was not at home.



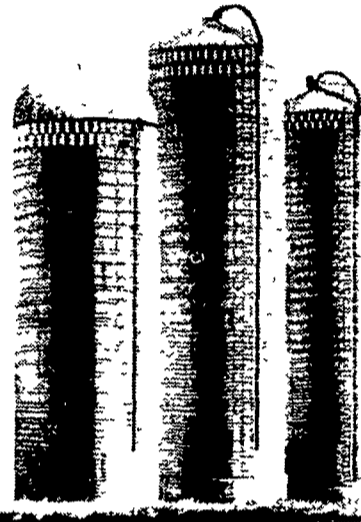
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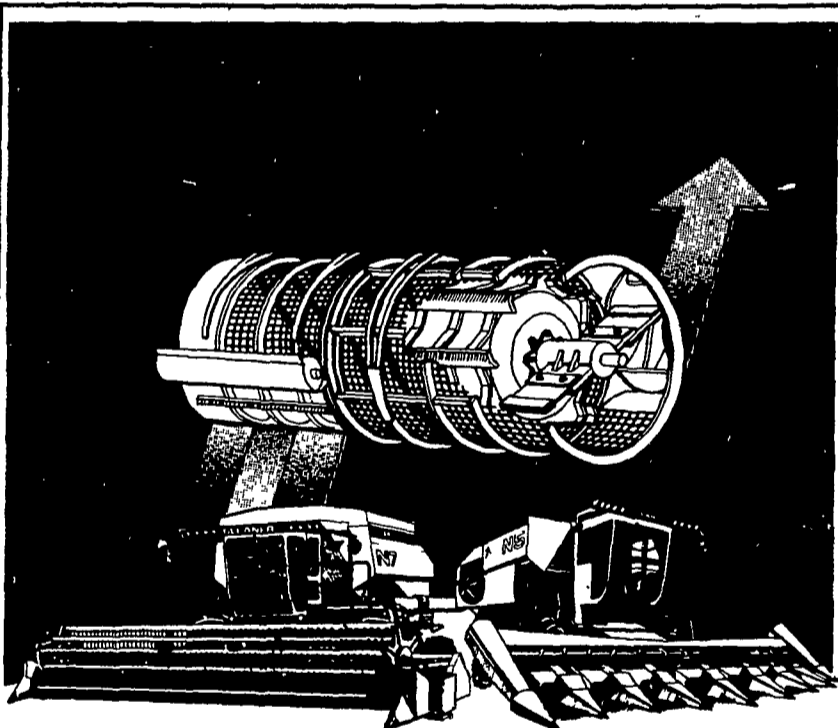
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