



Wine-Blog

JUICY TALES BY JO DIAZ

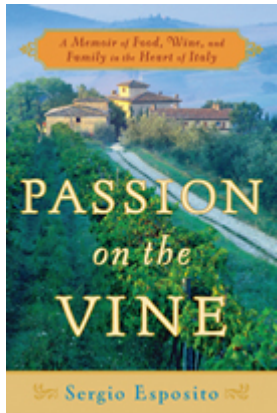
June 20, 2008

Passion on the Vine: A Memoir of Food, Wine, and Family in the Heart of Italy ~ Sergio Esposito

While I just finished this new book, I feel like I've just started a new friendship. (It's a one-way street when the author lives in New York and I live in Sonoma County, but the book gets one in that dreamy state.)

Few books—like this one—have you feeling great loss, when the thought occurs to you, "I've only got 30 pages to go! Oh, no!"

A sense of dread came over me, but I had to read on and prepare for leaving what I've come to embrace as a lovely new experience... "**Passion on the Vine.**"



In the book, Sergio managed to bring each wine region of Italy to life... Its culture, its foods, and its wines, all the while with deep, intimate details.

Here I now sit, the book's complete sitting right here in front of me on my desk. And, now I'm waiting to get to heaven so I, too, can taste a wine from the genius winemaker Prince Alberico Boncompagni Ludovisi, Prince of Venosa... a Malvasia di Candia— from any of the years that it exists

('77, '79, '80, '82, '83, or '85)... Or perhaps a Sémillon from '71, '73, '77, '80, '81, or '83... I'm not fussy, I'm just dreaming and waiting for heaven... but not hurrying it. I still have a lot to do myself.

This book was a really interesting read for me, because it was a true parallel universe experience.

* **Sergio Esposito** of **Italian Wine Merchants** in New York, grew up in an inspiring Italian Mediterranean climate, and moved to what appeared to be a lobotomized Albany, New York. [He's got a daughter Lily, the flower of resurrection.]

* I grew up in what appeared to be the dull, drab, lobotomized Lewiston, Maine... What was humming with bland foods in my pre-teens, became abandoned factories as work was moving to other places in the world for cheap labor and away from labor unions' tight grip, restrictive policies, and environmental demands that these manufacturers just didn't "give a hoot" about. In my drab teen years, I was just too energized and enthusiastic in this post industrialized revolutionary town, where I just didn't fit, and my friends were always happy to remind me—"Round peg in a square hole, Clarke." [I have a daughter Lyla, the flower of resurrection.]

Meanwhile, Sergio moved from Naples, Italy to Albany, New York, only to experience the culture shock that I was born into. It was fascinating to get his take on it.

I, on the other hand, moved to California in 1992 to find only what Sergio's family had left behind in Italy... The Mediterranean climate, food and wine in abundance, the land of equivocal language, and superlative weather.



Even though Sergio enjoyed music, art, and literature while growing up, they weren't his true passion. He found his true passion to be food, wine, great family bonds, and ever present friends. Meanwhile, in my parallel universe, I had found the opposite (Mozart, Monet, and Elizabeth Barret Browning)—perhaps because I didn't have the foods,

wines, and abundant friends that he so effusively remembers and describes with such passion from his childhood throughout the book.

You'd better carry a napkin around with you while you're reading this one. Even if you're not a foodie, you're going to find yourself drooling...

* *Ravioli di caciotta al pomodorino e basilico* (pasta made with flour and olive oil—not with flour and eggs—with the pockets filled with caciotta, a sheep's milk ricotta that's seasoned with wild marjoram and topped with little tomatoes)

* *Arrosto di piccione con passato di ceci* (roasted squab with a caramelized oter layer, chick pea puree seasoned with cinnamon)

* *Pasticcio di melanzane con cioccolato* (squares of sponge cake topped with sweetened ricotta and studded with candied fruit and chocolate pieces)

As I neared the end of the book, I had become part of a culture that drew me in. I had become entwined with Sergio's life, his Italy, his Mediterranean lifestyle, and this was going to be difficult to just let go of; to move on and get on with my own stories. I'm already ready for his next book, whatever it may be.

Sergio Esposito is a gifted story teller. His book *Passion on the Vine* is an Italian national treasure - for what life was like when kids safely played in the streets of Naples, ate dinner with a family that always served about 17 people and counting, and had a lot more passion than just what was on the vine.

But... what was on the vine certainly helped to define what Sergio would become... an avid adventurer who would be bequeathed a legacy from a legend and a great story to tell!

