

# Foreigners Love this Town

Italian-American Norma Jean Bishop of *Grapevine*, the English language monthly magazine

**G***rapevine* (ed. note\*: *Tuscany's Grapevine Magazine*), the English language monthly magazine «for those who live in Tuscany or wish they did» as is written on every cover, has reached 25 years of age. This will be celebrated in October, says the editor, Norma Jean Bishop, a woman with dual citizenship, Italian and American, who after travelling the world has settled here in Lucca, fascinated by its beauties. Here among other things she works on publishing *Grapevine*, which has many collaborators, volunteers not only English or American (*we could add a few other nationalities here ...*), but also Italian. On the cover of the last edition is a carnival float from Viareggio. Within, there is an ample discussion of this event, and the magazine is not lacking in articles on art, music, books, history, traditions, excursions, sport, food, home, and gardens. Then there are advertisements, above all for buying and selling homes, but also notices and opinions by experts in various sectors, and meetings of groups for conversation in English and for exchanging news.

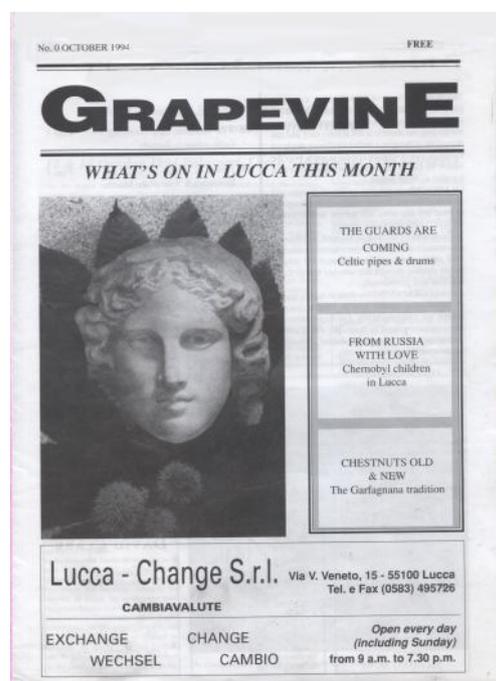
On the cover is also a small logo from the town of Lucca, a patron (*the Italian word is patrocinio, official recognition that does not include financial support*). The readers are not only English and American (*to repeat, we could add a few other nationalities here ...*), but also other foreigners who use English as a second language. *Grapevine*, which is read throughout the world, has its editorial office on the ground floor at Via dell'Angelo Custode 3A, in a room adorned with many beautiful things – paintings, photographs, and other objects. The magazine costs 2.50 euros and is printed in several thousand copies. There is also an online version with a subscription cost of 24 euros per year. It was the property of the Simi-Jarman family from 1994 to 2015 with Susan Jarman. Then it passed to (*technically speaking, the old business closed and a new business began*) Norma Jean Bishop, who is also the editor of books such as the recent one by David Collins, a guide for purchasing and restoring property in Tuscany. Norma is also a translator (*and tutor*).

**Why was this magazine created 25 years ago?** It was to fill a void. The many foreigners in Tuscany, but especially Lucca and its region, needed a magazine that talked about the places where they lived, furnished them with precious information, put them in touch with people who shared common interests, and talked about art, music, and culture. Then too, 25 years ago Facebook did not exist. Over the years we have grown and our magazine is beautiful also thanks to the photographs of Thomas (*S. England, and others*). In periods of crisis we have thought about making just an online magazine, but I like the printed page.

**The title *Grapevine* is somewhat unusual. In English the word means vine, but above all hearsay or news.** This title was chosen in reference also to a famous song from the Sixties by the American singer Marvin Gaye, “I heard it through the grapevine” (the news reached me). The song is like a soundtrack for our magazine.

**How is it that you, Norma, came to our town?** I was born in San Diego, California, to an Italian mother and American father. Of necessity, from the time I was little I travelled a lot. My father

This is the English version of an article by Oriano De Ranieri published in *La Nazione*, one of Lucca's two daily newspapers, on Sunday 17 February 2019.



*the first issue of Grapevine, October 1994*

was in the U. S. Coast Guard and we were often transferred. I lived in Alaska, Hawaii, Colorado, New York, *Washington, D.C.* ... and in Paris and Tuscany. At 19 years of age I was in Florence, where I studied at University. One day I took off by bicycle for Torre del Lago, and I arrived at Lucca (*sleeping at the youth hostel outside the walls before continuing on to the coast the next day*). I was immediately enchanted by the town's beauty, and I told myself that one day I should return to live here. And so I came here to live with my daughter who now is a harpist, and my son, a bartender. In American I earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, but diplomas earned in America can't be used for work here (*unless they are legally converted and recognized, a tedious and time-consuming procedure*). However, I kept busy. In America I had majored in journalism (*later transferring to languages and literature*) at the Newhouse Journalism Program (*of Syracuse University*) in New York State. Years later, I took courses in writing filmscripts (*at UCLA, by correspondence*).

**What attracted you most to Lucca?** Lucca is an ideal city (*in Italian, città virtuosa*). Foreigners remain fascinated by this town because the rhythms of life are still human. One breathes in art (*and music*) at every corner. Then there are the old palaces, and the walls. And the countryside is marvelous. I who have travelled in many parts of the world found here a more human pace, no comparison to New York, which “never sleeps”. The Lucchesi are reserved but also cordial. I have made many friends here.

**If you could make a suggestion to the administration here?** I would suggest paying more attention to the city center, to make it more lively and more accessible with businesses more available to customers, a center that considers the elderly, responding to their needs, but also the needs of young people. (*I also suggested paying more attention to the periphery, just outside the walls.*)

**Regarding young people, your magazine welcomes them willingly, doesn't it?** We have had students from the Liceo Scientifico writing in English. In February we hosted an article by a young Greek girl through the Erasmus program, Maria Tsaousidou. Chiara Calabrese wrote about the difficulties of Amadou Iamarana Sow, coming from Guinea to Lucca.

**Something you are proud of?** A journalism prize from Montecarlo, a stupendous place that is famous for its wine, and a poetry prize from Bagni di Lucca, where I lived for a while.

*\*Comments in italics, which are not the words of the author Oriano De Ranieri, have been added in this English version by Norma. Thank you Oriano, Grapevine is honored!*

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