

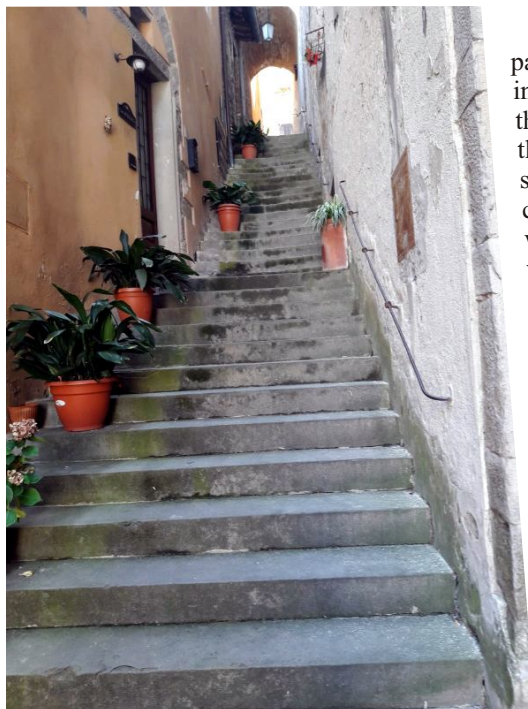
# Altri Tempi, Anni Fa....

## Teresa & the Long-Lived Women of Italy

October 1st is now called the 'Day of Older Persons', and of the 27 million people over 80 living in the EU two thirds are women. The number of centenarians has tripled in the past 15 years and 83 percent of these are women. In the tiny village of Acciaroli (Salerno Province) in south-western Italy one in ten of their population of 700 live to be over 100 years old. So what's it all about?

Emma Morano who died in 2017 at the ripe old age of 117. said remaining single and raw eggs were her secrets. Yet others say the diet of rosemary for brain function (see *Grapevine* September 2017 page 21) home-grown vegetables, locally-caught game, olive oil and fresh vegetables (see *Grapevine* October 2014 page 19) are the answer, plus the *gioia de vivere* that comes from breathing good air and maintaining a good appetite for sex, among other things. So take your pick. All good, as the young say!

At the beginning of July 2018 an item caught my eye in the local paper: Giuseppina Progetto (photo below from Wikipedia), born in 1902, died in Florence when she had reached the grand old age of 116 years and 37 days – strange how we even count the days at the beginning and end of lives, never in the middle. Love and family were her secrets for successfully living life well, right to the end.



Our very own centenarian Teresa (in the painting by the author, below) was also born in 1902. She died in 2002, a few weeks after the 100th birthday celebrations organised by the Commune of Barga, to her great satisfaction. Little is recorded about her childhood, but as one of the first young workers at the *Metallurgica* factory she walked to work from Barga to Fornaci each day, as did all the other Barghigiani. Some steep hike! She became a firm friend of ours in her old age, and we watched her stomp up and down the now sadly overgrown path outside the walls to feed her chickens. What a contrasting picture she was, dressed in her traditional flowery workday coveralls, with her large feet firmly laced up in huge modern trainers. Right up to the last few months of her life, you could see her ploughing her way up and down the steep hills of old Barga, with her bags full of shopping, a smile on her face and a wry comment for everyone she met. Sharp mind, high spirits...what an example to us all.

She had, it must be said, scant regard for the 'cultural' events of old Barga. I well recall her and her daughter Giovanna, (pictured above with Andrew, my husband), both of whom had piercingly loud voices, walking through the Piazza and up the steep and long stone steps to the Duomo, chattering away, while we '*signori*' sat in stunned silence between the movements of some musical offering I can't now recall.... Giovanna was a town character, always loud, glamorous and with a cigarette in her mouth, and the funeral bell tolled for her, solemn and long, on August 18, 2018. From peasant stock and proud of it, Teresa's grand-daughter married into a much grander family that lived on the hill outside the town, but gladly came to visit her grandmother in her declining years in her tumbledown stone house near the church. 'Declining years' – well, she didn't really decline much – or so I recall. On quiet days now I fancy I can still hear her cackling laugh coming from the piazza as she enjoys *chiacchierata* with the other old women much younger than her, opposite our house. If she had been able to join the conversations about *Altri Tempi Anni Fa* – and how good that would have been – we would have been reaching way back in the 19th century, bringing back to life some of the old ways of eating and being. What a loss it still seems, but she enriched our own lives by living hers to the fullest, and she made Barga a more sparkling and vivid place.

– by Judith Edwards

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