

A Traveler's Library

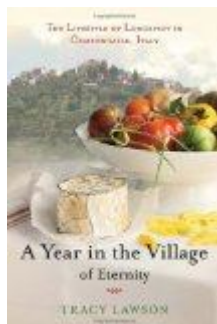
Books, Movies, and other Travel Inspirations

Discovering the Key to Healthy Eating in Italy

🕒 April 5, 2013 📖 Books, Cookbook, Destinations, Food, Italy, Travel 💎 Brette Sember, cook book review, food travel, guest post, Italy, recipe 👤 Brette Sember

Tasty Travels

By Brette Sember



Destination: Italy

Book: *A Year in the Village of Eternity: The Lifestyle of Longevity in Campodimele, Italy* by Tracey Lawson (2011)

I've tried to read *A Year in the Village of Eternity* by Tracey Lawson twice. And both times I've been unable to really get into the book or finish it without skimming, I'm sorry to admit. The concept is intriguing though, and this is why I keep coming back to it. The author spends a year in Campodimele, Italy, where 16% of the population is over 75 and the average life expectancy of both men and women is 95. The residents have low blood pressure and enjoy active healthy living. The author's goal is to find out what they're eating that keeps them so incredibly healthy. She immerses herself in their kitchens and seemingly peppers the villagers with many questions to get to their secrets.

I was drawn to the book, *A Year in the Village of Eternity*, like a moth to the flame. I loved Italy and found Italian food to be shockingly wonderful. To think a small village might hold the key to longevity is a siren song that's hard to resist. The secret is much as you would imagine however: organic fresh fruits and vegetables, small amounts of meat and fish and no processed or packaged foods. The food of Campodimele (**another food town in Lazio**) is about simplicity – allowing the ingredients to speak for themselves.



The book is framed as one year in the village, but the author says in the introduction that it's actually based on a combination of years. There is no narrative story or arc to this book and perhaps the fact that the book isn't really about one year but is written as if it were creates this disjointed feeling. Each month is a separate description and includes its own recipes that correspond to what the author experienced in that month.

I couldn't keep track of who all these villagers were. While it's interesting to read about how the villagers forage for greens or make their own sausages, I didn't find any of that to be something I could pick up and apply in my own life. I do like the book because it includes recipes for real Italian food, which is something that you don't find very often. The recipes tend to be simple, but if you've been to Italy, you know that some of the simplest food is the best food there. Recipes include Green Frittata, Fresh Egg Pasta Ribbons with Meat Sauce, Ring-Shaped Easter Cake, Broad Bean Stew, Zucchini [sic] Flower Soup, Spaghetti with Ricotta Sauce, Stuffed Chili Peppers, and Lamb with Rosemary, Garlic and White Wine over Charcoal.



A rural scene in another part of Italy–Umbria, Photo by Vera Marie Badertscher

The book does completely and utterly set you down feet first in Campodimele and in a year's time you come to see (and smell) the sights of this area – mountains, fields, roads, olive trees, churches, homes, goats, kitchens, the village square. If you want to understand the heart of the Italian people, this is a book that will show it to you, as you read the conversations and 'see' how the people of the village cook, think about, and treat food. It is a glimpse into the real Italy and because of that, it's a book you will want to pick up, even if you only read the introduction and skim through the rest of the book.

There are two sections of photos in the center and the village is indeed breathtaking, perched on a mountain, seemingly hovering in the clouds. The photos include real villagers and the most shocking thing is that although these people have a life expectancy of 95, not a single one of the women is thin. That's certainly something to chew on. I really loved these photos, which made the author's over the top descriptions come down to earth. The photos make this place seem not like something out of a fairy tale, but a real place where people cook in real kitchens.

A recipe I'm going to be trying is for Potato Gnocchi, something I have never made as successfully as I have wanted to. Maybe the magic of Campodimele will find its way into my kitchen.



Italian gnocchi with tomato sauce. Note: illustration not from book, but same food. Photo by Stuart Hamilton, Flickr.

Gnocchi di patate con sugo di pomodoro

(Potato gnocchi with home-made tomato sauce)

- 500g (1 lb 2 Oz) potatoes suitable for boiling
- Fine sea salt

- 450g (1 lb) '00' Doppio Zero or plain flour, sieved
- 500ml (1 pint) conserved tomato sauce
- Fresh basil to garnish if desired
- 100g (3 ½ oz) freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, if desired

Scrub the potatoes clean, and leaving the skins on, place them in a pan of cold water and bring to a boil. Boil until tender then drain.

Place a large, wide pan of salted water on the stove – this is to cook the gnocchi once they are formed, and the wider the surface area, the more cooking space the dumplings will have.

When the potatoes are cool enough to handle – but still hot – tear away the skins and discard them.

Sieve about 400g (14 oz) of the flour onto a large, clean work surface, and quickly run the potatoes through a potato ricer and straight onto the flour. Work the flour into the potatoes until you have a soft, smooth dough that is just slightly sticky. If it feels very sticky, gradually work in more of the remaining 50g (2 oz) of flour until the consistency feels smooth and pliable, but not sticky.

Flour your work surface then divide the dough into four parts. Roll each piece of dough into a long sausage shape just over 2cm (1in) thick. Slice each sausage into small pieces around 2cm (1 in) to create the gnocchi. Now you need to shape the gnocchi into small curls and create grooves on their surfaces to help them hold the sauce. To do this, hold each gnocchi against the inner curve of a fork with one finger then gently roll it down the tines. Now put the tomato sauce on to heat so it is ready to serve when the gnocchi are cooked. Drop the gnocchi into the pan – they will sink, but when they return to the surface, allow them to cook around fifteen seconds more then remove them with a slotted spoon and place in warm bowls. Spoon the tomato sauce over them, and scatter the basil and grated Parmesan on top, if using. Serves four.

Just a reminder: when you would like to print a recipe—or anything else you see on our pages, for your own personal use, you can use the printer icon button below the post. It enables you to cut out what you do not want to print.

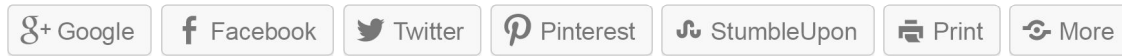
Please note that the publisher did not provide pictures from the book. A Traveler's Library reveals affiliate links. Links to Amazon allow you to shop easily on line, and will provide a few cents for Brette Sember even though it costs you no more. Photographs are credited above.



Brette writes often about travel, food, and home arts and is the author of more than 40 books about food, law, health, family issues, business, finance and textbooks. She blogs at [Putting It All on the Table](#) and her personal web site is [Brette Sember](#).

[Brette Sember](#) – who has written 27 posts on [A Traveler's Library](#).



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2 thoughts on “Discovering the Key to Healthy Eating in Italy”



April 5, 2013 at 2:04 pm

pen4hire

I agree that the attraction of Italian food is the basic simplicity. I found that in other Mediterranean areas as well—emphasis on the local produce, a few ingredients, and don't gussy them up too much, seems to be the secret. I think I would enjoy seeing how they live in this village, even though—or maybe because—it is so different than my life.



April 5, 2013 at 10:20 am

wandering
educators

that recipe looks delicious!!! i think i might wander through that book, myself.

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