

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARIKA

As I wrote in my *Food For Thought* column in November 2014, in the article "Hostaria Nerone: A Family-Run Oasis Above the Colosseum," in post-World War II Rome, right up until the turn of the 21st century, most of Rome's *trattorie* were owned and run by *abruzzesi* families, who'd abandoned the countryside for the big city. Members of most of those families are now in their 80s and their children have been well-educated and moved into other professions, so times have changed with *pizzaioli* (pizza-makers) from Egypt, not Naples, and cooks from countries like Bangladesh...

*La Buona Forchetta* is an Italian phrase meaning "a hearty eater" (its literal meaning is "the good fork") and it is often an affectionate nickname for a family member or friend who is a good-natured plump gourmet. A restaurant by the same name, "La Buona Forchetta," is located at Via della Cava Aurelia 21/23 (tel. 0698180959), next door to the comfortable three-star, no-frills Hotel Gravina San Pietro, less than a 10-minute walk or two bus-stops to St. Peter's. Old-time readers of *ITV* may remember that Friar Tuck recommended it several years ago when

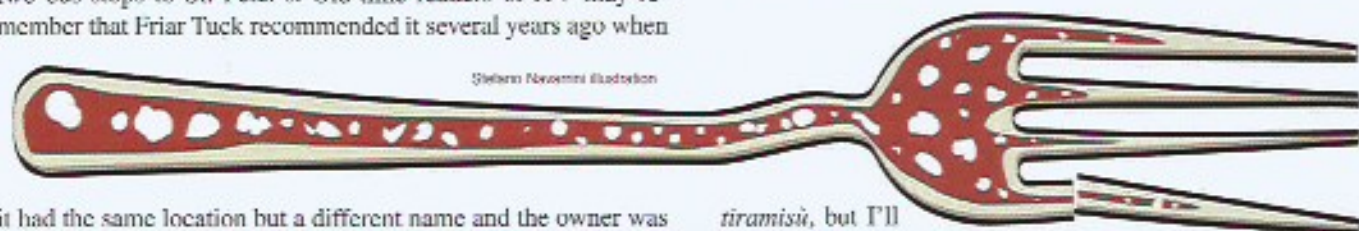
### LA BUONA FORCHETTA: GOOD FOOD AT FAIR PRICES

sliced mushrooms, black olives, and a hard-boiled egg. I even have hanging in my living room a watercolor of one of these pizzas done by Joseph Draeger, a former fellow in painting at The American Academy Rome, where I was associate editor too long ago.

Besides pizza, whet your appetite with the *antipasti di mare* ("appetizers from the sea"). You should taste the marinated anchovies and sauté of mussels.

I also recommend the pasta dishes, especially the typically Roman rigatoni *cacio e pepe* (cheese and ground black pepper), spaghetti *alla carbonara* (with bacon and eggs), and *bucatini all'amatriciana* (with tomato and bacon). Not to snub the typically Roman main dishes: tripe, *ossobuco* (braised veal shin), and *saltimbocca* (slices of veal topped with *prosciutto* and sage), but there's an exceptionally generous choice of very fresh fish, the house specialty. I've never seen so many variations of scallop dishes on a restaurant menu in Rome.

Leave room for dessert. You may think you'd prefer the



Stefano Nevenin Illustration

it had the same location but a different name and the owner was still *abruzzese*. Since then it has changed owners.

Nonetheless, today *La Buona Forchetta* is still a solid neighborhood *trattoria* with a wood-burning pizza oven, tables with red-and-white checkered tablecloths, and a friendly atmosphere. However, now not only is the *pizzaiolo* Mahmoud from Alexandria, Egypt, but, since last year, the owner is Mustafa from Cairo. He has lived in Rome for 20 years, moving up from dishwasher, to waiter, to *maitre* in Rome's restaurants. He speaks English and French as well as fluent Italian and Arabic.

When it comes to pizza, I'm a *buona forchetta* and entitled to my opinion, having been an official judge three times to choose Italy's best pizza, with contestants representing each of the country's 20 regions. Mahmoud's specialty is *pizza primavera* (spring) with buffalo mozzarella, *pachino* (cherry tomatoes) from the most southern tip of Sicily, arugula, and grated Parmesan, but his menu offers a vast choice of toppings. My favorite is *pizza capricciosa* with pickled artichokes, *prosciutto*, thinly-

*tiramisù*, but I'll bet that, after you've tasted the cheesecake here, you'll be hooked and will no longer consider it a specialty limited to New York and Philadelphia. You probably did not know that its original recipes date to ancient Greece and Rome. The earliest attested mention of a cheesecake is by the Greek physician Aegimus (500 years before Christ), who wrote a book on making cheesecakes. The earliest extant recipes are found in Cato the Elder's *De Agri Cultura*...

Mustafa is a gracious, attentive host, going from table to table making sure that everything is OK. I frequently hear him say, "Nice to see you again" or "Good, see you tomorrow" to tourists and neighborhood families. When he brings the check, he also brings a tray of almond paste cookies and *limoncello* for each guest. He's open seven days a week for lunch and supper.

My husband is a good cook and likes to eat at home. Yet even he makes an exception thanks to Mustafa's hospitality and the good food at his *La Buona Forchetta*. ☺

