

EXPATCH

SWISS LIST: LEARNING TO LOVE RACLETTE, CONQUER AVALANCHE PARANOIA, AND STOP SMILING SO MUCH IN THE CONFOEDERATIO HELVETICA.

10 DECEMBER 2013

Hometown Mussolini

The charming, beleaguered mayor of Predappio, Giorgio Frassinetti, says he receives emails every day, not only from his town's constituents, but from people far and wide around Italy and the world. And every email, every email, he insists, is negative.

People with political leanings to the far right tell him he's not doing enough to promote tourism in Predappio.

People who lean to the left say he's doing too much.

His unenviable task: "to work to recognize Predappio's place in history -- not to glorify, but not to forget."

Frassinetti couldn't forget even if he wanted to that this is where Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was born. It's also Mayor Frassinetti's hometown. Both his mother and Mussolini's were teachers here.



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He smiles and shrugs at these similarities between his life and the infamous dictator whose ghost follows him everywhere. "If I didn't have a sardonic point of view, I couldn't do this," says the mayor, who was a geology professor before taking office.

Signore Frassinetti is fielding questions from our small group of international travel bloggers whom he has invited to walk the town with him. Soon we come to Mussolini's boyhood home, now a museum.



It's here I learn of Mussolini's Swiss connection: He emigrated to Switzerland to avoid military service, worked as a stonemason in Geneva, Fribourg and Bern, was eventually deported twice for socialist activism and falsifying his papers, later returning to study at the Université de Lausanne. (After coming to power, he would lay claim to Ticino as part of his imagined empire.)

If Mayor Frassinetti could simply speak of Mussolini as history, he wouldn't be receiving all those nasty emails. Alas, this is not the case, as we see at the all-things-Il-Duce souvenir shop on Predappio's main street. Before a few of us enter, the mayor, who says he's powerless to close the shop, quietly leaves our group.

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ABOUT ME



 BILL HARBY

Bonjour, grüezi, hi, aloha.

I'm Bill Harby, owner of Imagery Ink and Kipuka Cottage. I'm a writer, editor, photographer and publishing consultant who has left my long-time home in Hawai'i to join my bride in Switzerland. Just a teensy bit excited.

So I want to document some of my new life in words and pictures. This is ExpatCH.

I've written articles for and contributed photos to numerous Hawai'i and national magazines, newspapers and websites. I also serve clients with public relations materials, web consulting, film scripts and other communications projects. You can see samples at www.billharby.com.

My Swiss Missus and I are also the proprietors of Kipuka Cottage on Hawai'i Island ("the Big Island"). It's a charming forest nest (if we do say so ourselves)



The son of the owner of this shop says some customers are merely tourists, but many are true believers like himself.

And yes, to the mayor's chagrin, those true believers flock to his town. For them, Predappio is "like the Bethlehem of Italy," he says. "Macho fascism is still an open wound for this country."

We soon see that all too clearly. Rejoining our group, the mayor hosts us to lunch at a superb little *enoteca* (wine restaurant), *La Vècia Cantèna d'la Prè*. After a tour of the historic wine cellars, we gather around a long table, joined by the Mayor's wife and son. It's good the table is long, because the bruschetta that begins our meal is more than a meter long -- and twice as delicious.

In the restaurant's large dining room next to us, a large boisterous group is having lunch. A few times they erupt into chants of "*Duce! Duce! Duce, mi luce! (The leader, my light!)*" Clearly, they are true believers, obviously in Predappio on a pilgrimage.

just outside of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. Visit us at www.kipukacottage.com.

I always love hearing from readers, so don't be shy if you have comments or questions about Switzerland or Hawai'i or the expat life.

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Fascists at the table. Most are proud to salute Il Duce, though a few, like the boy at far left, prefer anonymity.

Why is there this continued admiration for Mussolini? "Because Italian politics is a mess," says Frassinetti. "Young people ask, 'Why do politicians steal? Why am I jobless? Why can't I get a mortgage? Why doesn't this country have any dignity anymore?' " He says "the young people ask the right questions, but don't necessarily see the best answers. Now they see that time [Mussolini's era] as a Golden Age."

Asked if he could say one thing to Mussolini, what would it be, the mayor responds quickly, and with his well-practiced sardonic smile. He'd tell Il Duce that he "was a fool, a madman, a megalomaniac."

Finally, after a day during which he doesn't once mention Silvio Berlusconi by name, Mayor Frassinetti says that, "If you want to understand Italy you must understand Predappio." Adding only, "I love Predappio. I was born in Predappio. Predappio *es mon amore*."

AT 2:21 PM

REACTIONS: funny (0) interesting (2) cool (0)



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