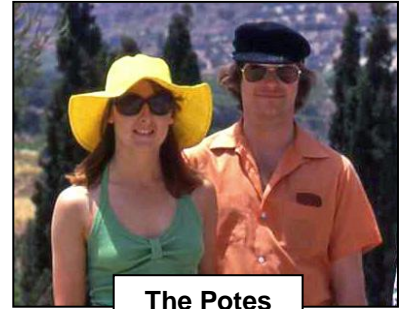


CHAPTER 9: TAKING TIME TO SMELL THE ROSES

Enjoying The Calm Before The Storm

My first four months in the office and on the road were grueling and were reminiscent of the Taiwan startup, but by June things were beginning to come together and we felt comfortable accepting the Pote's invitation to join them for an extended weekend visit to some of the islands. Another personal matter that was on the calendar for June was a trip to Italy. In between our visits to the Greek Islands with Phil and Gill and the arrival of John Inglis in early July we would travel to Milano to take delivery of our new Fiat 127.



The Potes

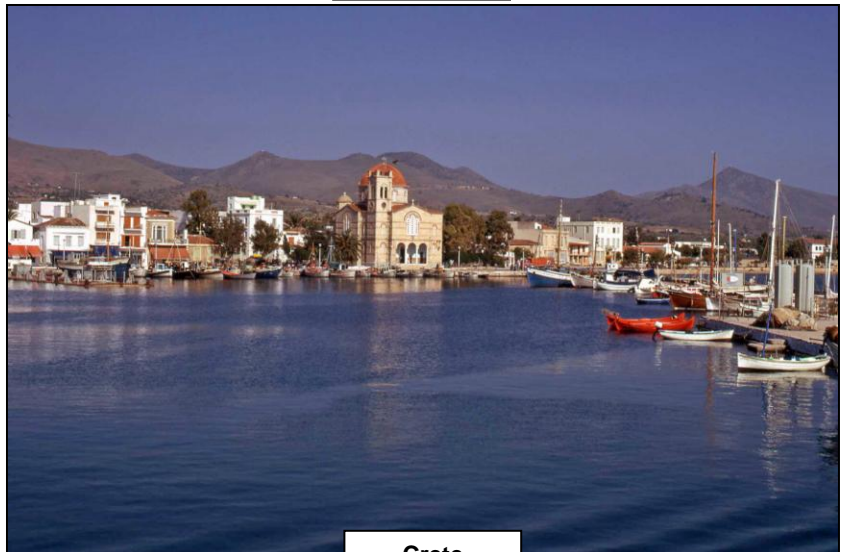
The Islands With The Potes.....A Well Deserved Break

Just after our arrival in Athens we had met the Potes and immediately bonded with them. During one of our frequent get togethers we decided that after devoting ourselves to HP for several months it was time to begin having a personal life again. So, in early June we spent a very enjoyable long weekend ferry-hopping between the islands of Aegina, Poros and Hydra, which are located just off the coast of Athens in the Saronic Gulf. We had so much fun that we spent the next weekend on Crete, the largest of the Greek Islands. On both excursions the weather was perfect and due to all of the saber-rattling going on between Turkey and Greece over the control of Cyprus there wasn't the usual swarm of European tourists to contend with.



Poros

While staying in Agios Nikolaos on Crete we took our rental car on an adventure.....we decided that the best way to see something new and meet the locals was to just go out and get lost. After burning out our gray cells in the office it was nice to do something spontaneous, something that did not require a lot of thinking or advanced



Crete



Crete

planning. To accomplish this no-brainer we chose an unmarked dirt road that led into the mountains (Crete has mountains that are above 5,000 feet) and eventually arrived in a small village that had nothing special to offer and had therefore not been spoiled by an endless stream of tourists. A common characteristic shared by almost all Greeks is their warm and welcoming personalities, and these villagers were no exception. They were the most hospitable people imaginable. We could not speak Greek and they could not speak English, but the attitude of the villagers was “then peirazel”, which is Greek



Getting Lost On Crete

for who cares.....lets eat. The common denominator that day (and every day in Greece) was food. I thought the flow of food and wine would never come to an end. Stuffed to the max, we reluctantly had to leave before the sun went down.....we would have never found our way back to civilization in the dark. It is no wonder that visitors to Greece always plan to return.

Our New Car.....It's Not Much, But It's Paid For

Another item that we had to take care of in June was traveling to Milano to pick up the new Fiat that we had ordered through their Greek sales rep in Athens. We had no sooner finished our weekend get-aways with the Potes than we were on our way to Italy.

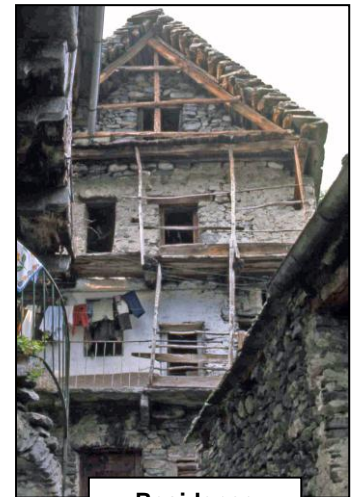
In April we had ordered a new Fiat 127. The \$1800 car (a radio and A/C were not even options) had an 800cc, 50 horsepower engine that would get 35 miles to a gallon.....and with gas at the drachma equivalent of \$3 a gallon it made perfect sense to think small. Before we left Canada, with gasoline still below \$1 a gallon, I was comfortable keeping my 1961 Corvette, but when we decided to make the move to Greece I realized that it would be wise to sell it. I had spent seven years restoring the car and was able to sell it for \$3,500, which was a good price at the time. Now it would be worth \$50,000. Live and learn.

Paiesco.....By-Passed By Civilization



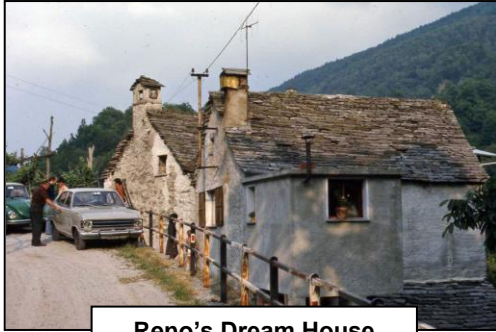
Resident

In mid June we traveled to Geneva so that I could meet with Kurt Aeberli. Afterward we caught the Trans-European Express train (the TEE), which passed through the Simplon Pass tunnel, one of the longest in the world (20 minutes) to Northern Italy. Included in our trip was a stop in Domodossola to visit some of Joella's relatives in the small village of Paiesco, which looked to me like nothing had changed there since the dark ages. Many of the houses in the village were more than a thousand years old and some were still occupied. Several generations back most of Joella's relatives had moved into the nearby modern city of Domodossola, but some reclusive family members had decided to stay behind. The fact that Joella's grandmother and grandfather were first cousins provides a good example of how



Residence

isolated and backward Paiesco was. The only street (path) in Paiesco led up to a spring that was the village's water supply. At the spring there were large hand hewn granite troughs where the few remaining women in the village still did their laundry.



Reno's Dream House

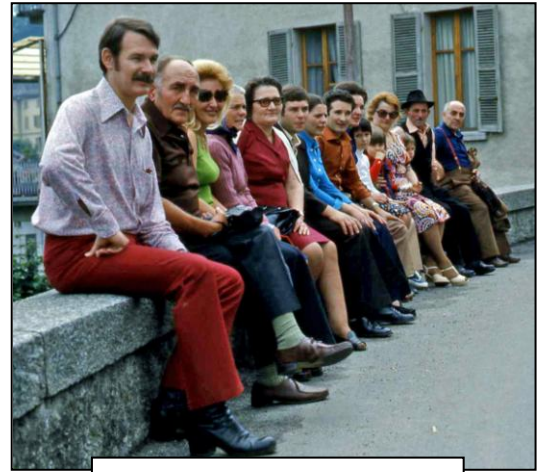
Joella's "cousin", Reno Vachetti, lived in a stone house with a slate roof that was located on the road up to the village. The house, which must have been at least five hundred years old, had just been electrified (the only electrified house in the village) and he was so proud of his new refrigerator that he insisted we see it and have something cold to drink to prove that it was working.



Reno

Reno had

also just added an indoor bathroom to the house that we had to check out. After too much wine and food (again) we spent the night at the Hotel Spignolio in Domodossola and the next morning got back on the train. We would visit Joella's relatives several more times over the next three years. They were lovely people.



Author And Extended Family

Waiting It Out In Milano.....Running On Italian Time

In Italy nothing happens on time. So, after arriving in Milano it was no surprise that we had to wait two days to pick up the car, which we spent having a look at some of the local attractions.....Milan Cathedral, La Scala Opera House, DaVinci's Last Supper, etc.

After several heated arguments with the Fiat people about the late delivery and about the additional money they expected to extort from us, we took delivery of the car and headed south to Florence. After Florence we would drive to Rome and then on to Sorrento (Naples) before crossing Italy to Brindisi on the east coast to catch the ferry back to Greece. I had learned during our previous visit to Italy that there is nothing as eventful as an Italian road trip.....and this trip would be no exception. In preparation for our long drive home, like any good obsessive-compulsive engineer I read the Fiat owner's manual from cover to cover. Although I liked to joke about how far Claude could get into the details, I was not much different.



Our New Fiat 127

The plan for the first day of our trip was to take the freeway (the Autostrada) to Florence, about a two hour drive. Much of the drive was straight and flat as we passed through the lush farm country just south of Milano. About a half an hour into our trip the Italian version of CalTrans had the left lane completely blocked because they were working on the median strip. Just after we entered the construction zone a guy driving a Ferrari came up behind us at a high rate of speed and began to tailgate. He was so close that I couldn't even see the front of his car, just the windshield and him behind it. After spending a minute or two waiting for us to either speed up or get out of his way, he began to honk his horn. I would have liked to oblige, but the left lane was completely blocked and the shoulder of the road was too narrow to pull over and, heeding the warning in the Fiat owner's manual, I wasn't about to exceed a speed of 80km per hour (50 mph) for the first 1000km. So, the guy behind us was just stuck there whether he liked it or not until we got through the construction zone. In his apparent effort to set a new elapsed time record between Milano and Florence

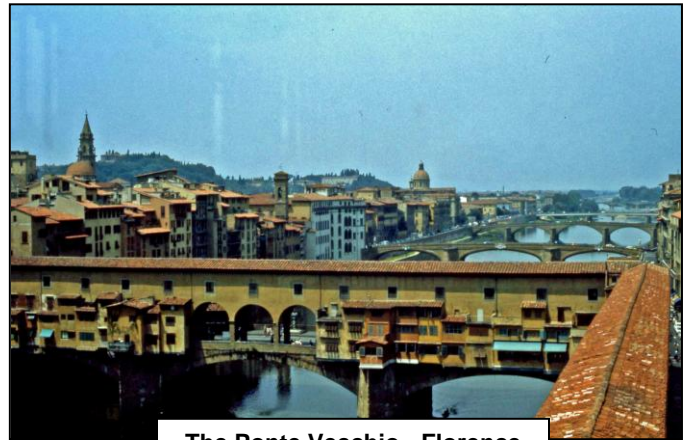
the Ferrari driver didn't seem to care much about anything else, least of all the treatment of our car, which he could see by looking at the EE license plate was new.

There is nothing more obnoxious than an excitable, frustrated and expressive Italian behind the wheel of a car, especially a Ferrari. This asshole spent the next 30 miles expressing his extreme displeasure about the situation by continually honking his horn, swearing, furiously bouncing up and down on his seat and giving us all of the hand gestures for which Italians are famous. We didn't budge. When the road finally widened he pulled up along side and was about to present us with one last insult, but before he was able to manage it we gave him a very special American quadruple flip-off. After that he just sped away. There must have been some American tourists in the car behind him because they were laughing so hard at our maximum use of the one-finger salute that they almost ran off the road.

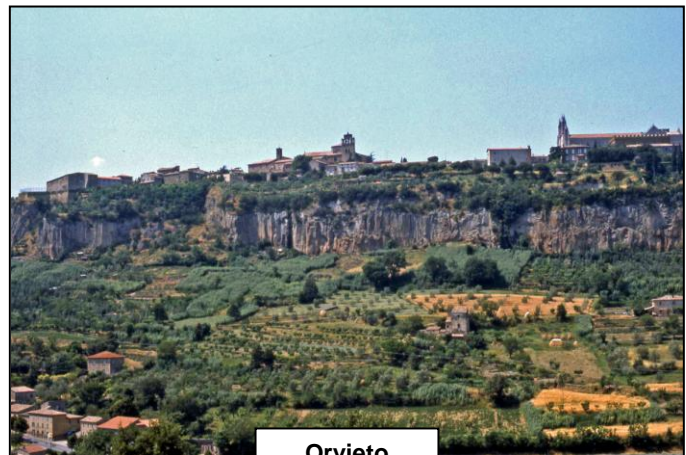
A Close Encounter With The Carabinieri.....The Money For Nothing And The Watch For Free

Following the Ferrari episode we spent a few very nice days in Florence and then headed south with a stop for lunch in Orvieto, a hill town just north of Rome. After driving around Rome for a couple of days, which I had done before on our previous visit and still found to be an exhilarating (insane) experience, we got back onto the Autostrada and set off for Sorrento, just south of Naples.

On our trip down this same route in 1971 I had purchased a counterfeit Omega wristwatch from a shady looking character at one of the roadside convenience stops. Then, as now, selling knock-offs was completely illegal. Of course, the guy tried his best to convince me that the watch was authentic, but quickly agreed to give it to me for \$10 when we started to drive off. The faux Omega watch had been so reliable that I decided to buy another one on this trip.



The Ponte Vecchio - Florence



Orvieto



The Coliseum - Rome

Even though three years had passed I managed to find the same rest stop. The routine was the same. Another not so on-the-up-and-up character, who said his name was Gino, approached the car with the usual sales pitch. Joella, whose maiden name was Delgrosso, spoke a little Italian thanks to her grandmother. So she handled the negotiations. When we asked to see the watch, Gino, who was only the front man, had to excuse himself and go get it from the boss. When he returned with the watch Joella had the money, 20,000 Lira (about \$20), in plain sight so that he could see we were ready to make a deal. Just as Gino began to show us the watch a carabinieri (state police) patrol car roared into the parking lot and when the

officer who was driving locked up the brakes gravel showered all over our new car. Under Normal circumstances that would have been very upsetting to me but at that moment I was more concerned about the police than the gravel. Gino panicked and threw the watch into the car and by the time the officers approached us Joella had the watch and the money stuffed down into her bra. Of course, the first question, actually, the only question, that one of the officers asked was, "Did this man try to sell you a watch"? Gino had a look of terror on his face. If we answered yes he would go to jail. Joella was smart enough to know that if she answered yes we might go to jail as well. So, she said, "no". She was always a very convincing liar. In a frustrated tone of voice the officer just said, "go", "go." As we drove off you could see the expression on poor Gino's face turning from terror to relief and then quickly to despair as we headed off down the highway with both the watch and the money. Gino had to settle up with his boss, but at least nobody went to jail. My second knock-off Omega also worked just fine for several years.

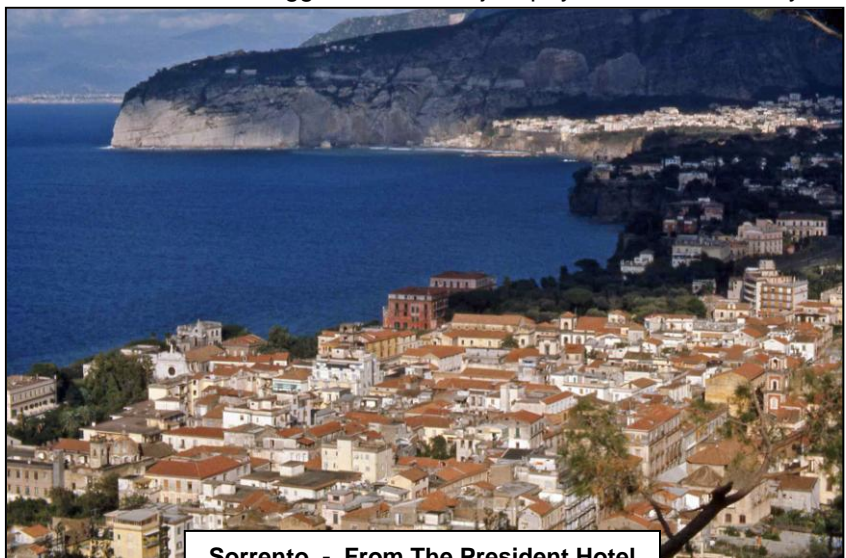
More Extortion.....The Italian's Have Perfected This Into An Art Form

Believe it or not, on the same day that the watch episode took place we had a further run-in with the law as we approached Naples. After passing through the tollbooth as we exited the Autostrada, I began to have second thoughts about whether or not we were on the correct road. The road was only two lanes and did not appear to be the main route into town. After spending a few minutes discussing the possibility that we might be lost, we turned around and headed back to see if we had somehow missed the road into Naples. It wasn't too long before we found ourselves back at the Autostrada toll plaza, this time headed back toward Rome.

When we asked for help one of the officials told us that we had been on the correct road into Naples and there was no way to turn around again without going back to the next Autostrada exit, which was about 50 kms (30 miles) back toward Rome. As the toll takers surely did not drive an extra 100 kms (60 miles) to get home every night I protested and with Joella's help told him that there was no way that we were going to do that. Of course, it wouldn't take a genius to figure out that we were going to make an illegal u-turn across the median strip about a mile up the road..... which is exactly what he expected us to do.

As we headed north again I could see in the rear view mirror that all of the toll takers were leaning out of their booths and the officer that had spoken with us was advising them that we would be back sooner rather than later. Sure enough, they were waiting for us. At the booth we rolled up to the toll taker told us that he would have to charge us a penalty and it would be the same as if we had traveled the entire toll road from Rome to Naples. When I protested again he pointed to the carabinieri patrol car that was parked about 100 meters away and told us that we could either pay the full amount or he would invited the police to join in the discussion. He then smiled and suggested that we just pay and be on our way. He knew and we knew that we had no choice but to pay up. So, we did. I am sure that a lot of tourists make the same mistake and that the toll takers and the carabinieri assigned to the toll plaza supplement their income at the expense of unsuspecting holiday visitors. Hey, it's Italy.

After eventually passing through Naples we made our way to Sorrento where we spent a few days before driving across Italy to Brindisi to catch the overnight ferry back to Greece. Naturally, I got seasick, which after all of the other no-so-good things that happened on this trip, I should have expected.



Sorrento - From The President Hotel

The next morning we arrived at the island of Corfu and I was happy to be on solid ground again. Following a couple of days on Corfu we boarded the next ferry for the day trip to Patras, the Greek port of entry. We were in coastal waters and the ride this day was, thankfully, very smooth. There were not many people on the ferry, which was surprising considering that the tourist season was well underway. When we inquired about it we were told that the Cyprus situation had escalated causing many Europeans to change their vacation plans. After arriving in Patras we drove south along the coast to ancient Olympia, where we spent a day and then continued around the southern end of the Peloponnese Peninsula to Kalamata (home of the famous olives), where we spent the last night of our trip.



The Car Ferry From Italy to Greece



The Island of Corfu

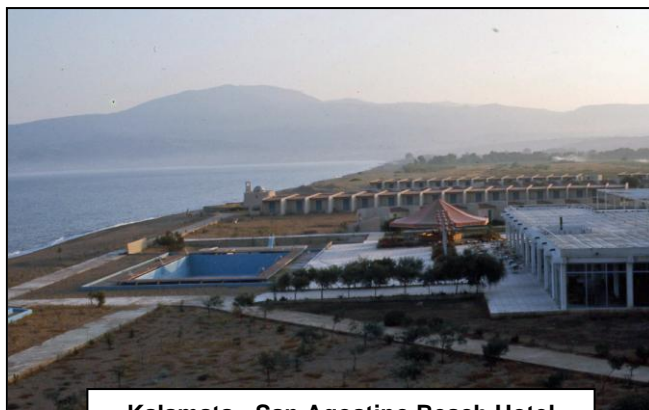
The Fortunes of War.....No Tourists

Tony Ikiadis, who handled all of the travel arrangements for our office, had booked us into the San Agostino Beach Hotel, which he said was very nice. Well, it might have been nice when he stayed there but it definitely was not nice during our stay. It was easy to see that the hotel had a lot of potential. It was on the beach and was set up to handle a large volume of guests. There must have been at least 200 rooms in the hotel and about 50 beach bungalows. But when we arrived, which was in the middle of June, there were no tourists except a German family of three, who did not want to be there.



Original Olympic Stadium With Marble Starting Line

The Germans confirmed what we had already heard on the ferry.....with Greece and Turkey on the verge of war over Cyprus most of the regular European visitors to Greece were going to stay home that summer. They said that they would have stayed home as well if their hotel package had been refundable. Service in the hotel was non-existent. The family that managed the hotel was not going to hire a lot of help to look after 5 guests. The pool was empty, there was no menu in the dining room.....we ate what the manager's family cooked for themselves, there was no air conditioning and no hot water, but plenty of mosquitos.

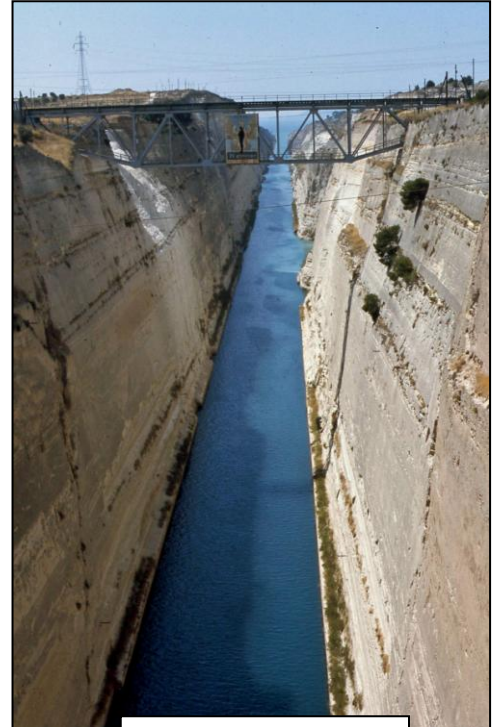


Kalamata - San Agostino Beach Hotel

The temperature must have been close to 100 degrees in the room that night and what made it even more unbearable were the mosquitos.

The hotel had been built adjacent to rice paddies, which were the breeding ground for millions of mosquitoes....and none of the rooms had screens on the balcony doors to keep them out. We did battle with these monsters all night. When we opened the sliding doors to get some relief from the heat the room filled with mosquitoes. After the manager lied to us several times about turning on the A/C we decided to leave the doors open and make a tent out of the bed sheets in an effort to survive the night. That didn't work. The mosquitoes were very aggressive and attacked us right through the material. The next morning when I again complained about the problem the manager pointed to a pond next to the hotel driveway and told me they had put some frogs in the pond to take care of the mosquitoes. Right, a pond full of frogs versus millions of mosquitoes. We were so angry about the treatment we had received that we stuffed all of the bed pillows in our suitcases and took them home with us.

On our final day on the road we covered the entire length of the Peloponnese Peninsula. Traveling through Sparta, Tripolis, Argos and Corinthos, we arrived home in the late evening very tired and covered with mosquito bites from our Kalamata experience, but at least we finally had a car. We had timed our trip perfectly. A few days after we returned home all of the points of entry into the country were closed when the brief war between Greece and Turkey broke out. ■



The Canal At Corinth

