

Antonio Bucca

Focus on a bona fide

Renaissance Man

Once upon a time a camera-toting Ballston Spa High School senior inscribed a message in a classmate's yearbook pledging to reunite after both had landed in diverse parts of Europe.

Penned in letter-perfect cursive by Antonio Bucca, the passage inside my BSHS Class of 1971 yearbook proclaimed his dream following graduation was to ride the rails of Europe en route to and from his ancestral home in Italy. I, on the other hand, would soon be bound for Denmark, birthplace of master fairy tale weaver Hans Christian Andersen, where I was to spend a year as a Rotary International exchange student.

Since Tony would be passing through Denmark at some point during his quest to sample life in as many countries as possible while in possession of a two-month EurailPass, he promised he'd look me up when in the neighborhood, so to speak. Although touched by Tony's gesture, I placed the odds of seeing him abroad between nil and zip. As in a story with a Happily NEVER After ending.

As it happened, my first two months in Scandinavia were a whirlwind of adventures that included tours of medieval castles and cathedrals, capped with celebrations during which I was introduced to many fascinating customs and traditions – some dating back to the times of legendary Viking Regnar Luftbrog.

But as my third month was dawning, I was – despite the warm hospitality of my Danish-speaking host family — beginning to experience bouts of homesickness. Totally immersed in a foreign culture in an era when trans-Atlantic telephone costs were prohibitive, I found myself longing to converse in English – or should I say, American.

Remember: This was BC: Before Cell Phones, Before Computers; Before Cyber Space. That meant no emails, no live-streams, no YouTubes. You-Name-It. If it was high tech, it was light years beyond the stuff of which my wildest dreams were made.

Then, as if a magic wand had been waved, the old-fashioned telephone beneath the thatched roof of my host family's centuries-old abode in the hamlet of Hjarup rang. I was told (paa dansk!) that the call was for me.



“Hi, Ann!” the caller began. There was no need for an introduction. I immediately recognized the cheery voice on the other end of the line as belonging to Antonio Bucca, whom I’d first met when we were 15-year-olds in 1968.

Explaining he was calling from a phone booth inside the train station near Koldinghus, Denmark’s last Renaissance castle, Tony wondered if I might join him there before he continued on his way to Sweden and Norway. He was to ultimately visit 11 of the 12 countries on his Wish List. (Only Austria was missed in 1971, but Tony hopes to get there before our 50th high school reunion in 2021.)

I am forever indebted to my first Rotary host parents, Jenny and Jorgen Vistoft, for dropping whatever they were doing to drive me the several kilometers from Hjarup to Kolding so I might enjoy a brief rendezvous with Tony.

While at the train station, Tony pulled out a tripod and took the color photo of us that appears on this page. We also ducked into a nearby photo booth (as per the vintage *Velkommen til Kolding Kommune* display ad) where the black and white print that accompanies this chapter was taken.

In the nearly half a century that has passed since Tony and I first crossed paths, I've learned that when he gives his word, he keeps it. Indeed, Tony epitomizes what it is to be a friend in need – and in deed.

He has stood by me through the best and worst of times – among the best being when as he helped me lay the groundwork for *Saratoga Living* after becoming the magazine's Chief Photographer in the late 1990s; among the worst being when my high school yearbook and other irreplaceable “buried treasures” were destroyed in a basement flood early in the new millennium.

After I sold *Saratoga Living* in 2004, Tony and I co-authored a local history book with now late Ballston Spa History Consultant Maurice “Christopher” Morley. Titled *Ballston Spa: Legacies Unlimited*, the limited edition 300-page volume showcases colorful portraits of some of faces behind village places as well as captivating panoramic scenes crafted by Tony's digital camera.

Tony's portfolio also includes images those linked to his 16 years as a DJ at The Metro in Saratoga Springs and portraits of glamorous guests attending galas hosted by Marlou Whitney and John Henrickson. But that's another story!

The term Renaissance Man has become almost cliché, but in the case of Tony -- who was born in a hospital in Pistoia, Italy that was built in the 1100s -- it fits like a well-tailored suit of armor.

While Tony modestly describes himself as “a tinkerer” the fact is that he is equally proficient with a rake and hoe and a hammer and nails as he is with and all things automotive and electronic. A skilled carpenter, electrician, plumber and mechanic, as well as a fervent ferroequinologist — a studier of The Iron Horse.

Early home improvements on an estate he renovated in Greenfield Center included adding a two-story backyard treehouse where Tony still enjoys sleeping on warm nights. The flowers, fruits and vegetables he cultivates on the grounds are nourished using water from a pond Tony hand dug on the property.

He also found time to construct an elaborate model railroad system inside of his residence, to edit FORM 19, a newsletter serving a regional model railroad group and to write a monthly column for the Delaware & Hudson Historical Society as well as playing a lead role in the restoration of a vintage caboose.

As per the colorful images on subsequent pages, Tony is an avid motorcyclist who has long loved exploring this continent's back roads as well as those on distant shores. (It helps that Tony is fluent in American, French, Italian and Spanish and is learning Romanian.) The former Street & Competition employee plans to continue riding like the wind on motorized two wheelers long into his golden years.

While he claims to be officially retired, Tony continues to put in many hours helping The DiDonna Family at the beautiful South Shore Marina on Saratoga Lake. He's also keen on the idea of developing a web site (www.photonynikon.com) for the purpose of sharing images of our nation's people, places – and trains – with a global audience. Best of all, visitors will get to hop aboard Tony's site for free rides because he doesn't believe in charging for such services.

Tony has also been pondering the possibility of preparing a panoramic exhibit of The City of Health, History and Horses as a way of commemorating and celebrating its sesquicentennial milestone long into the future.



FAMIGLIA BUCCA – One can almost feel the love that existed between the Bucca family members whose images were captured for posterity in the above informal portrait that was taken in the late 1980s. Flanking mother Thais, who was named after an opera by Jules Massenet, and Giuseppe (Joe), who worked as a barber for 65 years, were Riccardo (Ricky), Patrizio (Patrick) and Antonio (Tony). The portrait below was taken of Tony with me and Village of Ballston Spa History Consultant Maurice “Christopher” Morley using a digital camera mounted atop a tripod. It’s a cherished memento of the book we co-authored during 2008. Additional stories about Tony will be featured in a 2016 literary labor of love titled *Mornings with Morley*.



“I want to make a Time Capsule with real prints of Saratoga Springs because who knows what technology will exist 100 years from now? I don’t want the person who opens it to look at a DVD and wonder: *What is this?*” muses Tony.

Once the Time Capsule and belated Austrian adventure are crossed off his Bucket list, Tony has but one desire: To keep living life to the fullest!

His parting gift -- hopefully far into the future -- will be to bequeath his lifetime of photographic images to a preservation foundation or historical society so the pictures may be enjoyed by all for generations to come.

Tony’s ancestors would surely be proud he’s stayed on track while simultaneously using his talents to preserve the past and present for future generations. And I’m certain Hans Christian Andersen would agree that if anyone has earned a Happily EVER After ending, it is Antonio Bucca!

Please turn page to see more photos.



FREE SPIRIT – A teenaged Antonio Bucca motorcycling deep in the wilds of Tuscany in 1972. Being fluent in French, Italian and Spanish proved to be an asset to Tony during his youthful European adventures. Of course as Danish entertainer Victor Borg observed: “A smile is the shortest distance between two people.” Tony’s has certainly opened many doors over the decades, including rubbing elbows with celebrated actress Susan Lucci in Saratoga Springs -- as per the photo essay on the facing page. Tony’s also been known to light up a room like a Christmas tree in less glamorous, but equally captivating settings, such as the Saratoga County Historical Society at Brookside Museum. With us in the December 2009 photo taken by Mary Hauprich Reilly are Maurice “Christopher” Morley and children’s book illustrator Jody Wheeler.



Nice work . . . if you can get it!

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Tony was but a teen when he first realized that a having camera around his neck opened doors. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the assignments to which he most looks forward each August is the Whitney Gala hosted by Marylou Whitney at the Canfield Casino in Saratoga Springs. Over the years, Tony has had the opportunity to rub elbows with a number of celebrities including Susan Lucci (above). Escape for Tony often involves exploring curvy Adirondack backroads on his motorcycles. He now has three in what he calls his stable -- just a stone's throw from his two-story treehouse and hand-dug pond. Tony's home turf also includes bountiful vegetable and flower gardens.





A year of seasons outside of Antonio Bucca's bedroom window

Saratoga County photographer Antonio Bucca -- who created the captivating composite image above -- has long been a man for all seasons. One of Tony's most heavenly creations is a time-lapsed YouTube video that documents the unfolding of four glorious seasons outside his Greenfield Center bedroom window.