

Piccola Italia



Italian Cultural Center of San Diego Newsletter

SPECIAL MEMORIAL EDITION

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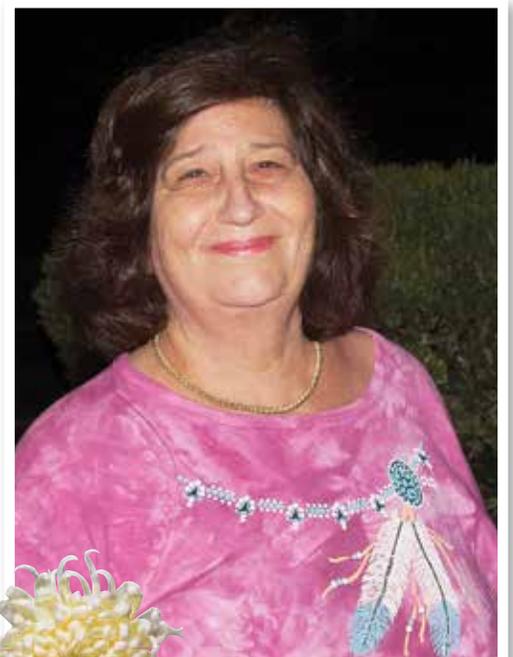
CIAO GRAZIELLA!

A sad goodbye to our co-founder, Graziella Spinelli

On November 26 2014, ICC sadly lost one of its founder members, Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg.

Graziella's love of the Italian language, along with her outstanding teaching skills, and her lovable personality has made her an iconic teacher in San Diego.

We thought to give the opportunity, for the people who knew her and the ones who did not have a chance to meet her personally, to know a little more about her by dedicating to our founder, board member, teacher and dear friend a special edition of the ICC Newsletter.





GRAZIELLA'S LIFE

Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg was born and lived until her adolescence in Asmara, Eritrea, where her father worked as a representative of "Banco di Roma". She moved to San Diego toward the end of the sixties. With her laurea (Master) in Lingue e Letterature Straniere from the University of Bologna she started her career by teaching Italian language in what is called today San Diego Continuing Education. She often recalled that period by saying how it all started as a gamble. When she proposed to teach Italian language the director of the Midway area Adult Education Center, he was very reluctant and said that she could try, but without any expectation. With much surprise from everyone Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg ended her first classes with around 60 students and her program of Italian grew in numbers and classes year after year. Within few years she was teaching Italian language in all the centers of Adult Education in San Diego.

Soon after her career as an Italian Professor took off. Here is a list of the institutions where she worked, help to build or started the Italian program, but most importantly where she inspired and stimulated the intellectual curiosity to know more about Italy and Italian culture to a countless number of students, many of whom, thanks also to her accessible and welcoming personality, became her life-long friends.

While continuing to work for the Adult Education Centers Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg was hired at San Diego State University to work with Professor Luisa Vergani and Professor Gian Angelo Vergani to help to strengthen the Italian program. She was the first who started the Italian program at Southwestern College and Mira Costa College, and among the first instructors at Grossmont College, Mesa College and University of California, San Diego Extension. Professor Helene Laperoussaz, who started successfully at the University of San Diego the Italian Program toward the end of the seventies, at the beginning of the eighties called Graziella to teach Italian classes and help with the program. The program at the University of San Diego went so well that in 1989 Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg was hired full time to teach Italian. Also she started to offer Italian classes abroad during the summer.

If for some of us teaching Italian language and culture in so many Universities and Colleges might be already a great achievement and task, both in energy and time, for Graziella seemed not to be enough. She was so passionate and deeply connected with all the aspects of Italian culture that she felt she had to offer something more to the community of San Diego.

In 1981, together with her friend and colleague Dolores Torik and her ex-student and friend, Teresa de Santis, Graziella founded ICC, initially standing for Italian Community Center. As Dolores Torik remembers, the idea was to offer a place where people could meet and practice Italian beyond the classroom. Graziella, Dolores and Teresa went to talk to father Marconi, from Our Lady of the Rosary, proposing the idea and asking permission to use the premises. Father Marconi enthusiastically accepted and helped to spread the voice by contacting the Italian-American people and associations of San Diego and Little Italy. By the end of the first year the ICC board (what we call today board of directors) included 21 people!

It all started with an idea, a lot of enthusiasm and passion for Italian culture and language, and moreover a lot, a lot of volunteer work spent to organize classes and events. The first classes met on Tuesdays and Thursdays evenings and were called "Qui si parla italiano" with Graziella, Dolores and Teresa as teachers. They were based on donation and the members scrupulously saved and used that income to organize events during the year. "La festa di Natale" and "La festa della Repubblica" are two of the events ICC still celebrates since those times.

ICC is honored and proud to have had Graziella Spinelli-Kehrenberg as one of the founders and will make sure to continue to have her same enthusiasm and energy.

What a better way to have a sense who Graziella was and what she accomplished in her lifelong career than hearing directly from those who worked with her and had her as a teacher. Below are few testimonies from some colleagues and ex-students.

Below: three versions of the ICC newsletter



Graziella gave direction to what is today my life in San Diego

Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan (ICC Board Member and Instructor, PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at UCSD, Adjunct Faculty at USD)

It was after September 2011, I moved from Rome to San Diego in 2000 and I had just lost my job as a travel agent the day after the NY tragedy. I was working temporarily in the cafeteria of Mesa College and after few weeks, I finally said to myself, “what am I doing at a cash register when I have a laurea (Master) from Italy in Lettere and Filosofia (Literature and Philosophy)?” So I grabbed a Mesa College catalogue during my lunch break, checked if there were Italian classes and went at the door of the class that would fit my lunch break. This is how I met for the first time Graziella. She was in a hurry, as she always was, did not know me, but before starting class she got my phone number and said, “I will call you”.

This is how it started. Meeting her was the beginning of my career as an Italian instructor in San Diego and of a beautiful and deep friendship, the kind of friendships you can count on one hand. I started teaching at the Italian Community Center (this is how it was called back then) and soon after I started to teach at UCSD Extension.

For me Graziella was like a mother. Her care, love and affection were like the one of a mother. With a tender and good heart and her contagious laughter she was always thinking and finding ways on how to help people and the community, without never asking anything in return. That is how she operated when she was a teacher with her students and when she founded and was the president at ICC.

She knew how to get the best out of people and people would simply try to return to her in any way they could. That is why she was always surrounded by friends, Italians, colleagues and many ex-students.

When I left San Diego in 2005 with my husband to be in India for few years, Graziella welcomed



Graziella and Ilaria Tabusso

us back with open arms in her house helping us to get back on our feet until we get settled again and I started my PhD program at UCSD.

She was family, we were family. This is how it was with Graziella once you were part of her life. She created that sense of community that as Italians we often miss when we leave our country and that attracts many of the people who choose to study Italian or go to Italy. Who she was made a difference, the kind of difference that cannot be replaced and will be sorely missed.



Here are a few testimonials from friends, colleagues and students that knew Graziella Spinelli Kehrenberg and that were touched by her kind and powerful personality. They all remember Graziella with great gratitude but also with much sadness for her loss.

Silvia Metzger (Colleague at USD, friend and ICC board member with Graziella)

I first met Graziella Spinelli Kehrenberg at ICC in the eighties, where she was organizing free Italian classes at the new “Italian Community Center” in Little Italy. The Center had been founded by Graziella and a few other very enthusiastic Italian teachers, and with the help of the pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Church. Father Marconi, being Italian himself, was more than happy and proud to offer a free space for the Italian classes in the building adjacent to the Italian Church. The “Center” was born as an institution made by voluntary people to promote the Italian language and the Italian culture in San Diego.

After a few years of “free classes”, the center became very popular and the number of students increased to the point that it was necessary to “hire” some teachers and the escalation of the center continued in the following years until it became the great institution that it is today.

In the nineties, when I started working at USD, Graziella was already teaching at USD and was an extremely popular Italian Professor among her students. The Italian program was thriving. I always knew in which classroom Graziella was teaching: one could hear her voice full of energy even outside, in the patio...!



Many times I heard comments like these from her students: “....she is the best teacher I ever had,.... I love her!.. she is great!....”

As for me, Graziella was a very helpful colleague and a loyal, dear friend. Working with her was a pleasure. In the spring of 2010, because of her illness, she suddenly had to leave USD and the other institutions where she had been teaching. It was shocking news for all of us: our Italian Department was no longer the same without Graziella.... The special spark from her teaching had suddenly gone. We were all very saddened and aware of the fact that Graziella would have been irreplaceable and that she would be greatly missed.

Fortunately, while she had to leave the University because of her failing health, she never left ICC and was active as vice-president of the Board of Directors until the very end. Always with a beautiful smile in her face, she was always ready to organize something fun and exciting for the classes of Italian!

I will always remember her with her contagious laughing...

I feel that her legacy is still with us. Graziella will continue to live at ICC and in the hearts of all the students and friends that she touched during her life and during her successful career as a teacher.

David Vergani (close family friend)

We knew Graziella since childhood. Her mother was our piano teacher...

Over the years Graziella became a great family friend, like an aunt to me and my brother George. If there is anything that the early passing of our mother, and now Graziella, all two due to cancer, has taught us, is to value family and friends while they are still with us....

There is a very meaningful country song by Tim McGraw entitled "Live like you were dying", and also another song by Lee Ann Womak entitled "I hope you dance". Their lyrics are metaphors for not sitting around, but rather to experience and live life fully. I saw that Graziella put that philosophy into practice the last couple of years. She decided to go to Italy in spite of her ongoing illness.

She decided to go to Mexico with me and George, and then to go back to Mexico a second time with Olga and Joseph. It was a wonderful trip and a cherished memory. I remember her comment to me that she did not want to wait another year to go, to put things off. She clearly made the most of her time with family and friends.



Graziella in her home with Luisa Vergani, Davide Vergani, and friends



Graziella with George and Davide Vergani (with a tie) and friends

Helene Laperrousaz (Colleague of Graziella at USD and dear personal friend)

I was teaching in the Department of French at the University of San Diego in the seventies when I went to a meeting of the Italian Department at San Diego State University. It was then when I met Graziella for the first time. I was impressed by her determination to expanding the Italian classes in San Diego. She was aware that there were too many students of Italian origin that wanted to study Italian...

So, after talking to the Dean, we decided to open our first section of Italian 1 at USD. It was a success, with an enrollment of 59 students... This number increased during the next few semesters at the point that we needed to hire another teacher. Graziella came to mind, and she gladly accepted to teach and stayed at USD until her retirement in 2010.

Graziella had the ability to make the students proud of their Italian origin, of the Italian traditions, and to inspire love and respect for Italy. The Italian classes were held in the classrooms, but Graziella's home was always open to students for parties during the weekends, or for conversation in Italian or simply for singing Italian songs and have fun.

Sometimes Graziella's mother would go to USD to play the piano, and Graziella and her students would join in and sing.

Students loved her and it was not a surprise if very often the parents of students would go to the Dean's office to praise the marvelous job that Professor Spinelli was doing in her Italian course....

Graziella was an extremely generous person. At the end of the semester she would always prepare a special "festa" for the students. She wanted the students to remember the Italian classes as very special and very different from any other class in other departments.

Graziella held summer classes also in Florence and in Perugia, and her students would come back from Italy enthusiastic for all the many places that Graziella had shown them during their stay in Italy.

I could go on and on in recalling the enthusiasm of her students, but let me tell you one important thing: Graziella gave all her life to her students...

I worked with her as a colleague, but we were in fact really good friends. It was a very regarding time that which I spent at USD with Graziella. It is hard to find a more generous person...I will always remember her with great affection and gratitude.

ICC Board in 2005 (Laura Bianconcini was president)



UN TRIBUTO A GRAZIELLA

by Beatrice Hepp (Adjunct faculty at Mesa College and at the University of San Diego)



Graziella with Beatrice Hepp and her life-long girlfriends

I met Graziella in the earlier seventies, when I had just moved to San Diego, at Grossmont College to meet an elderly professor about teaching possibilities, but it was Graziella who greeted me. She was in a hurry, literally running and holding some exams, and we exchanged only few sentences, but I still remember the feelings of energy, friendliness and warmth. We didn't become friends then, and I lived a few quiet years, trying to adjust to my new life.

We met again few years later at San Diego State, where I started teaching

a class, and an unforgettable friendship began. We worked together and shared our thoughts about our profession, our students, and eventually our lives. Thanks to Graziella I went on to teach more, at Southwestern and Mesa College, and finally USD .

Graziella also introduced me to her Italian friends, who are now, and have been for many years, my friends, and opened her house to countless happy occasions. She enriched my life.

One summer I joined her for a few days in Perugia, where she was teach-

ing a Summer Course for USD, and I was able to see her at her best and happiest: teaching and guiding her students through the intricacies of Italian life, loving and having fun with them. So many of them, and some became her friends for life, declared that Perugia was one of their best experiences, and not only due to Italy's charm, but Graziella's charm, and her vitality and enthusiasm. I remember that later one night, at the convent-hotel where we were staying, she became angry at group of vocal and noisy Choir members from Germany. "Basta, andate a dormire!" she shouted, convinced that Italian could be, as it should, understood by everyone. And with her, it was!

She was the best, the most enthusiastic, convincing and warm hearted ambassador for Italy and the Italian language and culture. Her students understood it, we know it, and we'll always gratefully remember her.

*Brett and Britta Hershman
(former USD students):*

Graziella, we look back on our time with you with hearts full of thankfulness and gratitude today....but our hearts are so broken as we mourn your loss.

Thank you for teaching us so much more than a language, for your love for your work and your students, for your boundless energy, larger than life personality, and for contagious laughter. You will be dearly missed.



In Italy with students from USD during the Summer Session of Study abroad

Helene Laperrousaz (Colleague of Graziella at USD and dear personal friend)

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Barbara Withers (Ph.D. Professor of Project Management School of Business Administration, USD and dear personal friend)

“It was back in 1992 when I arrived in San Diego to start my job at the University of San Diego as a faculty member in the School of Business. The first thing I did was contact the language department at USD to see if it would be possible for me to sit in on some Italian classes. The department put me in touch with Graziella, who agreed to let me sit in on her Italian 1 classes. This was the beginning of a 22 year friendship that has meant so much to me. Besides becoming a very close friend, Graziella made my transition to living in San Diego so much easier than it might have been. She immediately included me in the numerous social events/ dinners at her house, introduced me to lots of people, got

me a scholarship to study Italian in Florence one summer, took me to see Italian films. I continued to travel to Italy in the summers and Graziella kept saying that she wanted to take a trip with me, and finally, about five years ago we took that trip: three months wandering through Italy, visiting her aunt and cousins and her friend Lidia in Milano, visiting the language school in Montepulciano, wandering around southern Italy (where she had not been before), and finally meeting up with Andrea and Lori Zarattini in Roseto degli Abruzzi. It was a wonderful summer and one I’ll never forget, just like I’ll never forget Lella.

Graziella

by Dolores Torik (ICC Founder, retired Adjunct Faculty at University of San Diego and dear personal friend)

I met Graziella in 1970 at the Columbus Day dinner dance of the Italian American Association. We were eating dinner at the same table. She had been in San Diego for about a year and we quickly became friends. Her mother and my father were both from Milano and we had something in common. I introduced her to all of my friends in San Diego. Our friendship lasted ever since.

We traveled together several times and had a lot of fun. We traveled to Italy and other parts of the U.S. In Alaska, we joined my daughter who was running a marathon. In Tennessee, my son-in-law's family has a big ranch. We visited many of the local and historical sites. We also traveled to San Francisco several times to visit my daughters. There we went to see Tom Jones with whom we were both in love with at the time. She was the best traveling companion. Even my daughters had the best fun with her. There was a lot of laughter.

She knew how to make light and fun out of any situation, no matter how dreary.

She always helped me in my career. She inspired me to go back to college and get credentials so I could teach Italian. She felt I should share my knowledge of this beautiful language. Together with Teresa DeSantis and Father Paul Marconi, along with other local Italian-American business leaders, we started the Italian Community Center.

Graziella was the best hostess. Her parties were loved by everyone. She welcomed and made everyone feel good and at ease in her home. She was famous for her good Italian cooking. Because of Graziella, I met a lot of Italian girlfriends which to this day I remain close to.

I miss Graziella tremendously. She was the sister I never had.





Graziella con Mark Remy a Borrego Springs

GRAZIELLA REMEMBERED

by Mark Remy (ex student at USD and dear friend of Graziella)

As part of the course work, I was required to study a second Romance Language. My options were French and Italian. I had studied French in High School and had not done well, so I saw Italian a fresh start. I still remember that first semester at USD and taking Italian 1 with Graziella. From the first minutes, of the first class, until the end of the semester, Graziella poured heart and soul into sharing the Italian language and culture with all of us. What we learned about Italy was never confined to her class. She took us to see the movie, "Cinema Paradiso." She invited us to the Italian Community Center in Little Italy to attend "Parlo Italiano." She brought her mother to USD and she would play piano and Italian songs in the French Salon room. We went to her house and ate amazing food, spoke Italian and just had a good time with lots of laughs. Her energy, warmth, strong rapport with the class and love of teaching made a lasting impression on me. In the span of one semester, I was hooked on Italian. Graziella even connected me with the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Los Angeles. Between her good name and strong recommendations, I received three grants (borse di studio) to study Italian in Italy during various summers: Siena 1991, Reggio Calabria 1992 and Padova 1998. I still remember coming back from Siena after two months of intense, full-immersion studying and getting together with Graziella. My Italian was at a level of fluency where, I could finally

chatter away with her. I remember thanking her for having given me the gift of another language. As the years passed, I remained in contact with Graziella and our friendship grew. Many holidays were passed at her house with great food and good friends. For a while, I lived in Italy. Whenever, she was in Italy, she always made a point to let me know and we would connect. One of the best days I ever spent in Italy was a day that Graziella and I went to Venezia. It was January 2004, just two days after her 60th birthday. We spent the day walking around, talking Italian, having cappuccino and just leisurely enjoying the sites. She was a dear friend and being around her just always made you feel loved. About a week before she passed, I was at her house. We sat on the couch together and I read her a piece that someone had written about her back in the mid-1990s. It was a short biography about Graziella's life and accomplishments. The part that rang so true for me were the last few lines. "Her love of the Italian language, along with her outstanding teaching skills, and her lovable personality has made her an iconic teacher in San Diego. Not surprisingly, many of her students have become her life-long friends." This was my story with Graziella! She gave so much to all of us and made our lives deeper, richer and more Italian. I miss her, think about her often and will never forget her.

GRAZIELLA'S FAVORITE

RISOTTO ALLA MILANESE



Tra le amiche più intime di Graziella, si era creata l'usanza di pranzare insieme il venerdì. Un'usanza andata avanti per anni, fino a quasi gli ultimi giorni della sua vita. Quando era in salute, i pranzi del venerdì si facevano sempre a casa di Graziella. Lei amava avere amici a casa sua. I pranzi consistevano in un piccolo potluck e ogni amica portava qualcosa da mangiare, qualcosa che si sapeva sarebbe piaciuto a tutte. Spesso Graziella chiedeva a Beatrice di cucinare il risotto alla milanese, uno dei suoi piatti preferiti. Essendo un piatto che va mangiato caldo appena fatto, Beatrice portava gli ingredienti e cucinava il risotto direttamente da Graziella, in compagnia delle amiche e mentre si chiacchierava.

Insomma, i pranzi del venerdì erano un piccolo rituale creato da Graziella che riportava tutte le amiche un po' a casa, ravvivando quel senso di comunità in cui si era cresciute in Italia.

Ecco la ricetta del risotto alla milanese per Graziella secondo la ricetta di Beatrice Hepp

Ingredienti (4 persone)

- Burro: 125 g
- Olio d'oliva: 3 cucchiari
- Brodo 1 litro
- Cipolle: 1
- Zafferano: 1 pizzico di pistilli
- Zafferano: 1 bustina
- Riso arborio o vialone: 350 gr
- Vino bianco: 1/2 bicchiere
- Brodo: 1 litro

Preparazione: 5 min

Cottura: 30 min

Difficolta': media

Ricetta:

Tritate e fate soffriggere una cipolla media in un po' d'olio d'oliva e burro. Rosolate la cipolla fino a quando sia leggermente "bionda".

Aggiungete il riso, vialone o arborio. Mescolate finché sia bene incorporato con il soffritto di cipolla, a fiamma viva.

Aggiungete mezzo bicchiere di vino bianco e mescolate.

Quando il vino è evaporato aggiungete lo zafferano, poi abbassate la fiamma e aggiungete il brodo di carne salato, o più semplicemente uno o due dadi di carne sciolti in acqua bollente con sale, in quantità da coprire bene il riso. Il brodo va aggiunto un poco alla volta, sempre mescolando.

Continuate ad aggiungere acqua, o brodo, per circa 20 min.

Quando il riso è cotto, e non deve essere asciutto, spegnete la fiamma, aggiungete un poco di burro e lasciatelo riposare per circa 5 minuti prima di servire.



1669 Columbia Street
San Diego,
CA 92101 – 2584
www.icc-sd.org
phone (619) 237-0601
e-mail: info@icc-sd.org



**CI MANCHI
GRAZIELLA!**



*2 Luglio 1968 - Graziella Spinelli mentre ascolta
il Rettore Magnifico e i Docenti dell'Università di
Bologna per l'assegnazione della laurea in ling. str.*