

Upfront

“Sign me up for continuing.” This was the first response we got to my essay in the previous issue. In the piece, I had referenced the apparent complexity regarding the notion of free speech in modern society. As a result, we would be charging for it (free speech), I declared. The Skinnie would no longer arrive with bi-weekly regularity and our compliments; we would routinely collect a “reasonable” sum for the magazine from you unless you opt out.

Surprisingly – and happily – exactly one (ONLY ONE!) reader wrote us to “cancel.” She said succinctly, “I do not want further issues. Do not try to charge me for any.” Well, I won’t. Given that we have no way of automatically extracting funds from you, our dear readers, it would be logistically difficult to demand payment. Also, given that the essay appeared in our annual April Fool’s issue, the piece was satirical. So...no...you don’t need to check your bank statements for illicit debits.

But the underlying conundrum remains true. It’s tough to make money in print media nowadays. (Try finding a Savannah Morning News in many of the outlets where it was regularly offered in the quaint times...2023.) Our business model relies on the faith advertisers invest in us to connect them in a meaningful way with you (an attractive and engaged audience). Thank you for supporting them.

Continuously weighing the pros and cons of a subscription program, we come back to the same answer again and again: No. By employing direct distribution, completely blanketing your zip code and extending our reach beyond it through various channels and clever tactics, we have more than twice as many readers as our competition, according to gatherable data and rational calculations.

So, for now, we won’t be charging you, despite our tongue-in-cheek claim otherwise for April Fool’s. But we thank the many among you who opted not to opt out.

A couple of issues back, I mentioned that I was writing this column hurriedly, as I was soon due at the airport to begin a trip to Rome. One of my friends who joined us in Italy (our group totaled 23, which sounds unruly but was life-affirmingly magical) asked me how many times I had been there before. I think I’ve lost count, but 15 is a decent approximation.

One thing I do remember perfectly – my first meal on the first day I visited the Eternal City for the first time. My sister was living there then. My mother and I flew over

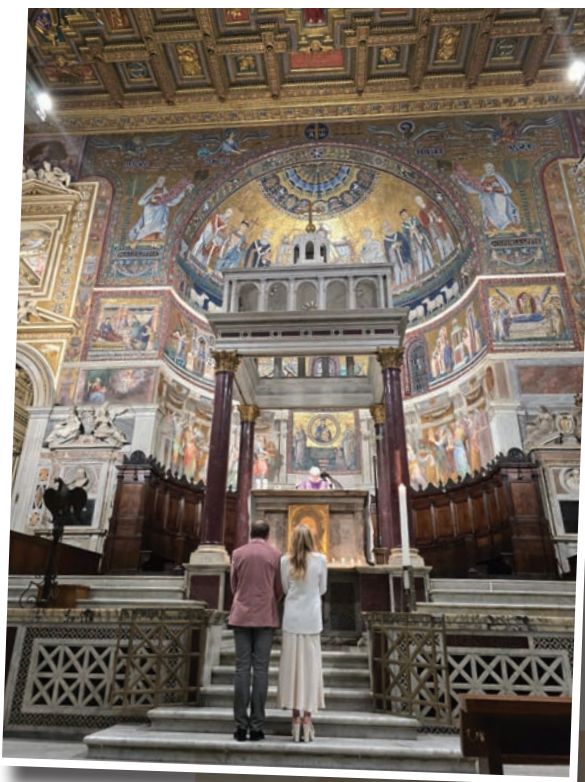
to see her. My sister took us to a place in the Jewish Ghetto called Al Pompiere. It was love at first sight, obsession at first bite. I believe it was December of 1988.

On March 4 of this year, we celebrated Mass that included a matrimonial blessing at the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, which traces its history to the 3rd or 4th Centuries, or the 8th, depending upon how much of the current structure you require to recognize the church’s beginnings. Regardless of its founding date, Santa Maria boasts staggeringly beautiful and vastly famous gold mosaics and an incredibly generous Roman priest and lovely sacramental assistant who graciously welcomed us and shared our union with their parish community.

In the late afternoon’s golden glow, we processed through ancient cobblestone streets from the Campo di Fiori across the Ponte Sisto spanning the Tiber River into the Trastevere neighborhood to the square that features the church. After Mass, we retraced our footsteps back across the river into the Jewish Ghetto to Al Pompiere’s doors, where I ate a crispy fried artichoke – an unchanged bit of elemental perfection and a culinary tribute to the city’s epic story – to which I was first introduced almost 40 years ago. I also ate rigatoni all’Amatriciana, a Roman classic. My recipe for this dish (of which there are many “true” versions) appears in this issue in my regular Smells Like Sunday feature.

The photographs on this page commemorate six incredible days from this late-February and early-March that will remain forever precious to me.

Audrey Lawrence



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