

PEPPE

"Tomorrow is another day..."



*The unusual life of Peppe, taken from the story by:
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The closed level crossing would have almost made sure that the reporter would have lost the opportunity to meet that interesting and amiable person. It was only thanks to the patience and acumen of his companion that today we can share his background with you.

The two were in the original and best restaurant of Letojanni. In the shady garden there he was, a muscular and suntanned man with a thick dark beard, “Peppe” (that’s what his friends called him, and not only in Sicily), holding a gigantic bowl full of steaming spaghetti. Peppe the untiring cook in his restaurant and small boarding house, Peppe the polyglot and man of the world, Peppe the idol of women with his eternal charm, even today at an age that is more than ripe.

An Aida not from Egypt, but from north-eastern Europe, has learned Italian out of her love for him and writes: your hands... your kisses, your smiles, the words and particularly your eyes full of love, interest, wonder, tenderness. I want to give you all of myself because you have given me so much joy, happiness.

The bay of Mazzarò and the beach of Spisone were the places where Peppe approached the beautiful foreigners more than ever. Equal to a Greek god, tall, suntanned, with a thick beard, he captured a new tourist with every sunset.

Born in 1935 in Letojanni, a fishing village, Peppe

inherited the intelligence and generosity of his father Carmelo, a tailor, and the prowess and industry of his mother Santina, gifts that helped him to be a leading hotelier of the town, initially renting a few rooms to tourists, but within a short time successful in building a restaurant and boarding house with 50 modern rooms.

As always, tourists arrive from every corner of Europe not only to stay at the hotel and visit the place, but above all for the unparalleled atmosphere that Peppe is able to create.

Gertrud and Evan called themselves the two girls from Salzburg who were recommended Peppe's boarding house by the parish priest of the town, Peppe's cousin. They were the first in the mid-Fifties to check in at the house, and when they returned two years later, inevitably in love with Peppe, there were already two rooms at their disposal. It was a paradise of sensuality, said Rita after having passed here holidays at Peppe's. And she added: Like a miracle, he slept with me, he loved me and breathed the magic inside of me nose to nose, lips on lips, body on body, trust with trust. At times reality surpasses the dream. Well, as always happens, says Peppe, without any sadness or regret. He transmitted the magic of the Mediterranean lifestyle to Steffi from Berlin, who likes just as many other "Aurora Borealis" and summed her up in a long letter: Germans are stubborn and tedious. People live with us to work. In Italy, instead, people work to live.

In 1957, Peppe, at the time clean-shaven, met the tourist his same age Christa from Koblenz. It was a turbulent relationship from the very beginning and still is today. They gave birth to their first child, Tomas, in 1963. That day, like always in Peppe's life, was unusual. The aspiring father was fishing on a small motorboat. A dozen cut-up tunas had turned the small boat the shade of red. He was told ashore that Christa was already in hospital and was giving birth. In a flash, Peppe jumped onto his moped to reach her, heedless of his clothes and body still soaking in the pungent blood of the tunas. His son Tomas was born, and one day he would have managed the hotel and restaurant.

Peppe married Christa, but the young mother did not want to live in Sicily, and a short time later decided to return to Germany, taking young Tomas with her. Peppe followed her and worked several trades in order to make money between Munich, Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen.

Attracted by art and artistic works since early childhood, he attended a sculpture course held by Prof. Jacob Wilhelm Fehrle at the Schwäbisch-Gmünd. Fehrle was considered a "master of sensitive spirituality" by his contemporaries.

He was influenced by the sculptures of Aristide Maillol and Wilhelm Lehmbruck, authors of Gothic and Indian sculptures. Almost without exception Fehrle painting the female body as a single figure in a uniform model and created slender, mobile, elongated figures;

and as a bad omen, Peppe's first work depicting Christa's head exploded in the oven. In fact, they were already talking about divorce when two years later their second child, Natascha, was born. This time Christa decided to stay in Sicily and Peppe, against his wishes, decided to continue the marriage although only on paper, in reciprocal respect and love for his children.

Peppe felt as free as a bee flying from one flower to the next. He was not a cynical Don Giovanni type of seducer, but rather a tender lover with a huge hearth, without any Leporello at his service, but where the loved women left traces of their passing by writing about love in the diary kept in the studio of his home on Letojanni's promenade.

The first journey outside of Europe. In the mid-Seventies, during the winter months when the boarding house and restaurant were closed, Peppe started to crave the discovery of faraway lands. Sri Lanka and India were his first destinations, fascinated as he was by the landscapes, the people, the kitchen full of fragrant and hot spices. He studied art and the secrets of the local dishes. Africa, Asia, the Caribbean were his destinations, and at times dangerous journeys, like in 1986 in Haiti during the people's uprising against the dictator Francois Duvalier, called Baby Doc, where it was precisely the art of his cuisine that saved him. A beautiful Haitian introduced him to one of Duvalier's secretaries for whom Peppe created his culinary works,

a momentous passport that allowed him to board the last plane leaving for Florida.

In 1987, Peppe became ill with a serious case of malaria in the Seychelles and once again it was a woman, the beautiful Finn Annabella, wife of the consul in Nairobi, who had him transported to the American Hospital of the Kenyan capital, where Peppe fought for his life while in a coma for three days.

It is unbelievable that just a few weeks later Peppe was already at the opening of the exhibit of many of his watercolour paintings in a branch of the Vienna bank and was able to greet his many friends who arrived, including the alderman Franz Mrkvicka, who instead of lauding the artist only talked about the unforgettable holidays spent in Letojanni and Peppe's great hospitality...

The event was even reported in the city's most important newspapers: "Krone Zeitung", "Kurier", "Die Presse", "Bunte", by his journalist friends, such as: Willy Haunold, Fritz Graupe and Eva Gründel. The exhibit was a success, and during the event almost all 60 paintings found an admiring buyer.

Peppe shot photographs and painted oil paintings, watercolour paintings, and sketched drawings of the beauties of his travels, with which he decorated not only his home and the hotel, but also flats of many tourists.

Other exhibits of Peppe were held in Naples, Rome, Berlin and Laibach and by then he was considered a genuine natural talent... even if not an autodidact.

His friend Angelo Mazzullo had transmitted the basic concepts to him. He attending the art academy in Naples and in Germany, and studied with eminent artists, and not only did he learn the painting technique from Prof. Jakob Fehrles, but also sculpture at the Schwäbisch-Gmünd, and it was there that he learned that sculpture is more than a craft.

That is why artists from all over Europe find themselves at ease with Peppe, like the famous painter Rudolf Hausner, who represents the school of fantastic realism in Vienna, and who like many of his peers was forced to pay the bill at the restaurant with some of his exquisite sketches at the beginning of his career.

Also, the grand maître of pots and pans, the legendary Karl Eschlböck who is the first three hoods chef in Austria, enjoyed the unique atmosphere of Peppe's boarding house on his holidays for many years. Unlike his refined creations, he dearly loves simple cuisine, those no less valid dishes served to him in the atmospheric courtyard in Letojanni.

Invited by the international chef Reinhard Gerer to a competition in the kitchen of the renowned restaurant Corso of Hotel Bristol in Vienna, Peppe obtained fantastic critiques with his week dedicated to Sicilian cuisine, and in Viennese society the Southern Italian menus had become the topic of the day. Many talked about them ecstatically when they returned from their holidays spent in Letojanni, and other already began to

schedule their next trip to Sicily.

Salvatore Citrano, who was Peppe's assistant chef for years, wore a uniform specially designed for the event and was always at the side of his chef, contributing to his success.

Undisturbed by photographers and journalists, the political prominence also pleasantly lodged at Peppe's small boarding house, such as the deputy mayor and finance advisor Hans Mayr or the Slovenian President Milan Kučan.

Everyone feels at home at Peppe's, free and unconventional. His guests enjoy his culinary delicacies.

The hotel decorated with countless paintings, sculptures, plants and flowers takes on the appearance of a villa, but stands out from the others nearby, a status that Peppe personally attends to, and this is also known to the children and future heirs Tomas, married to Cinzia, and Natascha, who have made his life happy with three wonderful grandchildren: Giuseppe, Giulia and the beautiful Christina. That grandfather's heart of his has already ensured solid foundations for their future.

The colours of Peppe's life are in Oriental Persian style, just like those of Donna Santa, the sailboat with which Peppe has been travelling along the coast since 1991, always made happy by the presence of women he invites.

The boat is one of a kind, one everyone always easily singles out, and is outstanding advertising for the hotel

and restaurant. Peppe is a marketing strategist and goes well beyond the Italian border. In fact, it is not unusual to come across taxis bearing advertising stickers of his hotel on the streets of Berlin. One of these is of his friend Heico, who always goes back to Peppe's boarding house to spend his holidays.

As an old saying goes, love passes through the stomach, and Peppe's ladle is the magic wand that helps him to win over a great many hearts, and many of these have accompanied his path and are still important for continuing this marvellous journey called LIFE. And if in the beginning they were German or Austrian women, the desire to cross new borders was not long awaited... the Caribbean, Brazil, Japan, and even Siberia, "led by his hormones", as Peppe says, and it was not important if the beloved was married or not. They were drawn into his industrious spider web first by his culinary art and then by his amatory art. He was always careful to always keep his amorous adventures a secret.

Susanna, married, wrote to him that she would have been quite happy to have him as a guest at her home, but as a friend and not a lover. Even if she carried him in her heart, she would not have tolerated the idea of making love with him so close to her family. When travelling in Japan in the past, he was the guest of the beautiful Japanese woman who inevitably, like a ripe fruit, fell into his arms... just like her daughter, who had just turned 18, fell in love with the hot-blooded Sicilian. It

was embarrassing, also because the thin walls in Japan concealed nothing. Nevertheless, Peppe learned one thing in Japan, the incomparable way to prepare seafood dishes. This was highly important because even when a guest at the homes of friends, he first wooed in the kitchen and then... in the bedroom. In remembering his amorous adventures, Peppe can do nothing other than consider himself a lucky man for never having been beaten up or even killed... and that almost happened in Brazil, when letting himself be seduced by the fiery samba teacher during Carnival celebrations he ran the risk of being lynched by her husband along with his friends. A certain Cornelia wrote to him: "My husband wants to spend the next holidays in Sicily again, but in Taormina and no longer at your place in Letojanni.

I am so sad and disheartened. I wanted so much to be able to be close to you for a couple of weeks, but instead he has even prohibited me from coming to see you..."

Julia had talked about Peppe with her partner in Turkey, in this way turning into a peaceful separation, in order to be able to reach and go live with her beloved Peppe, but the sequel to the story slowly thinned out like the fog...

The malaria that he had contracted in 1987 in the Seychelles and that caused him to lose over 10 kilos made Peppe's health very frail, so much so that on one of his many trips to the Dominican Republic he suffered from a serious attack of gout that forced him to being

hospitalised, but the daredevil Peppe, indifferent of the doctor's prescription of absolute rest, immediately went to a pool party after being discharged, easing his extreme pain with lobsters and rum...

While taking a course on watercolours in Vienna, he had the chance to meet a group of environmental activists - rare at the time - supported by the Nobel prize-winner and ethologist/zoologist Konrad Lorenz.

He met the sweet Andrea, who had arrived from a town in Lower Austria to spend her summer holidays in Letojanni at Peppe's place. The mutual attraction was inevitable. For Andrea, it was the most beautiful period of her life as she discovered love and a new world... Donna Santa cradled them from the Lipari islands and down the entire coastline, and Peppe's watercolours immortalised Andrea's happiness with every new experience. Certainly, now she must be married, has had children, grandchildren... like always... like all of them, Peppe thinks with a pinch of nostalgia.

But Peppe is unable to remain faithful. In fact, he often accompanied his latest love to the airport and there would welcome the arrival of his next flirt...

Once the summer holiday ended, so many phone calls, letters filled with passion, "Dear Peppe, I miss your kisses, your caresses so much. You are in my thoughts. I dream of still being there with you..." However, the distance gradually erased the passion and one becomes lost without even realising it. But maybe that's the way

it should be, when there is no possibility to stay together. It is useless to prolong the agony, it meant only hurting oneself. However, not always was it to be taken for granted.

Not always was it so simple as to be able to leave that pinch of nostalgia that makes us feel human, perhaps thinking that it was love... love... a word that Peppe has always found difficult to pronounce. "Love begins when the head stops being master of our feelings". But feelings do not bind what distance separates. As a matter of fact, it was just the opposite.

Petra, the young girl from Berlin, seemed to have brought a fresh breeze to Peppe's hotel and restaurant. She was a rare case of woman with clear ideas, almost so much as to make him capitulate on the concept of love. Despite her good intentions, "I'll learn Italian", she as well wrote on the postcard, "Nothing is as beautiful as the sun of Sicily and like you, I miss you so much Peppe, my love", when she returned to Berlin. Once again, the boredom returned after a few exchanges of correspondence... the lack of interest due to the lack of physical contact.

And so then came Annabella, the Finnish tour guide he had met in Kenya; Jenni, the farmgirl from Montana on holiday in Letojanni; Irmgard, a young woman from Düsseldorf from whom he learned a bit of German; Rita, a pharmacist from Berlin who took care of him after undergoing a stomach operation; Marialuise from

Heilbronne; Heidi and Judith from Stuttgart; Martina and Sabine from Vienna; Renate from Linz; the Polish girl Kascha; and also the Sicilian Carmen... all married women with husbands evidently oblivious to their wives' infidelity... Only the husband of Isabella from Rostock asked for a divorce because he didn't accept his wife spending a few nights in Peppe's flat...

The journalist Holga Arnd, Peppe's friend for years, was always well informed by mail of his countless conquests and said, "It's not his fault, it's his nature. It's stronger than him to not give it a try", even if I have to honestly say that in the great majority of the cases the initiative started from the women.

He never accepted financial aid from the women. On the contrary, true of a gentleman, he was the one who covered them with gifts, who took them travelling and who pampered them with his good cuisine.

There were no barriers wherever he went owing to his charm and his aptitude for foreign languages. In fact, no problems arose for Peppe at the age of almost 80 with Aida, the Lithuanian teacher with whom he had an intense relationship consisting of meetings, very long emails, Skype messages and WhatsApp messages, a rich and documented correspondence of their unusual liason between 2014 and 2015. A master of the Italian language, Aida told him "I thought about you a few times" when looking at him, to then correct herself and say "not a few times, all the time", "I feel lucky to be able to experience

this great love. I'm happy together with you".

Of Australia, South Africa, North and South America, Peppe appreciated not only the beauties of the lands quite well, but also of the female beauties. He travelled between 2012 and 2015 in Eastern Europe, through the Baltic States, White Russia and the Ukraine, and also in Siberia going to Nižnevartovsk, an autonomous region of Chanty-Mansi, an important centre for extracting and processing oil and natural gas, where Peppe taught at an art school, had the chance to meet with an engineer he had met in Egypt and who had invited him to his home. Peppe cooked for him and his family, but as everyone knows the Siberian women are yes, very gracious, but also very cool and standoffish. This was not a defeat for Peppe a priori. His motto is "What can't be today will be tomorrow", nothing is impossible, you need to be patient, tenacious and passionate in following a dream, just like the great Neapolitan pioneer Umberto Nobile, without ever giving up, not even when faced with the possibility of a potential disappointment. Peppe had organised himself for the icy Siberian cold with a long, heavy coat in wolf pelts, like those worn by the Nordic hunters, and he would lie in wait in warmth to be able to capture his prey.

He learned the basic words in Russian at courses held at Sankt Petersburg and Moscow. This was useful in his activity with the countless Russian and Polish guests who had elected Letojanni as their favourite destination

for their holidays.

Peppe's continuous movements from Berlin to the distant (almost 200 km) Stargard, a small town in Szczecinski, were due to the friendship that tied him to the owners of a restaurant, Anna and Tomas, exquisite people who he had accommodated in his hotel and, like many others, with whom he was on the same wavelength. Since then, one of Peppe's speciality dishes, "spaghetti à la Peppe", was introduced in Anna and Tomas' restaurant in his honour. In Stargard, Peppe felt right at home and allowed himself to be coddled by the local pharmacist Katerina between one feeble pain and the next. Peppe was happy to hold a painting course for children at one of Stargard's schools, and when invited by the local radio station, he didn't miss the chance to laud the merits of his Sicily and of its Mediterranean flair. Since then, many tourists coming from Eastern Europe have arrived at his hotel in Letojanni, owing to the huge promotion carried out by his various journalist friends, also through the local broadcasters. Peppe was also a pioneer himself as early as the 1950s of a different tourism, within everybody's reach, one that abhors social distances and that brings people together with precious food. In a nutshell, we have told the story of the 80-year-old Peppe, an almost romantic character, and of his fantastic travels between hearts and bellies. What more does he have to reveal about himself?

We'll wait. Tomorrow is another day...

Hotel da ★★★

PEPPE



Peppe, l'originale albergatore, cuoco, artista nel suo atelier come in cucina - che imprime il suo marchio inconfondibile in ogni dettaglio. Essere ospiti del suo Albergo è godere di camere dotate di ogni comfort, camere diverse l'una dall'altra, quasi personalizzate, realizzate da Peppe come in attesa di nuovi amici da accogliere...

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dal racconto di Heinz Tomek

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...domani è un altro giorno



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