

# Rediscovering your Language Skills

Submitted by Elvia Picco



■ A group of friends gathered to speak Italian and enjoy some food and wine together.

Since moving to Kelowna two years ago, I have had a wonderful opportunity to revitalize my second language of Italian by belonging to a vivacious and informal Italian speaking group.

The last time I seriously studied Italian was over 30 years ago at high school in Welland, Ontario. My Naples-born Italian teacher drilled the class in conjugating verbs, vocabulary, speaking, and writing, plus immersing students completely into the Italian culture and geography. My teacher was very energetic, enthusiastic and made learning the language fun.

My parents immigrated to Canada in 1956 from the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region of north eastern Italy. They always spoke to us in the Friulano dialect, versus "true" Italian, when we were going to school in Niagara Falls. I knew this dialect was not the pure language that I wanted to speak, so when I later worked in Italy for two years in my early 20s, I found myself grappling with the differences.

Years later, in the summer of 2007, I spent afternoons with my father when he was in palliative care in Niagara General Hospital. My father suffered from dementia and cancer and I felt we could communicate on a common level by spending time speaking Italian, reciting vocabulary, verbs and reviewing his maps of Italy. He had always emphasized to us to stay connected with our cultural roots and to be proud of our family's heritage. My special experience with my father prompted me to continue my re-acquaintance with Italian after many years of not speaking it.

My current goal is to become proficient at the language. I recently dug out my old grammar books from high school, bought a set of advanced Italian CDs, and borrowed some

language and travel books from the library. These activities, in combination with the weekly group gatherings, have encouraged me to commit the time and effort required to improve and speak Italian with confidence while having lots of fun in the process.

"It's nice to go back to your heritage and to know where your family is from. When you rediscover your language skills, it makes you feel like you're at home with your family again," said Renata Simonelli, a West Kelowna resident who immigrated to Canada from southern Italy.

I encourage you to probe and discover (or rediscover) second-language skills. There is true enjoyment and fun in speaking another tongue with proficiency. There are many different ways to learn a language and a variety of available resources and techniques to make the experience comfortable for both seasoned and novice learners. There are courses offered through continuing studies at Okanagan College, the University of British Columbia Okanagan and other local cultural clubs and organizations.

Ringrazio per aver letto questa storia e spero possa invogliare presto qualcuno a studiare un'altra lingua. (I thank you for reading this story and perhaps it will encourage you to study another language soon!) Ciao, ciao.



**ELVIA PICCO** enjoys discovering the world of possibilities through learning. She believes that every experience is a learning experience whether in the classroom, in the community, at work or at play. It all counts.