

Anthony Fasano is living the dream! He returned to bella Italia and unearthed his glorious roots in four ancestral villages. His journey will inspire and delight you. Every Italian American and every American of immigrant descent (is that all of us?) will find much to savor here. Bravo Antonio!

- ADRIANA TRIGIANI - *Bestselling author of The Shoemaker's Wife*

FORTY DAYS IN ITALY

CON LA 
MIA FAMIGLIA

*How to Research Your
Italian Roots & Travel to
Italy on Your Own Terms*



ANTHONY FASANO

Praise for

Forty Days in Italy Con La Mia Famiglia: How to Research Your Italian Roots & Travel to Italy on Your Own Terms

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— **Adriana Trigiani, Bestselling Author of
*The Shoemaker’s Wife***

“Anthony is one of those rare people who lets passion and curiosity spur

him forward. As he began to learn more about his Italian-American heritage, it was inevitable the path would lead back to where it all began, and he would let none of the easy excuses — lack of time, money, language skills — stop him.

“Through fortitude and a deep, genuine desire to reconnect with his Italian roots, Anthony did what most people only dream of: he found his Italian relatives and traveled to Italy to meet them! In doing so, he’s reunited the American and Italian sides of his family for future generations as no one before him was able to. And now he’s giving you a guide to do the same for you and your family.”

— **Dolores Alfieri, Co-Host of The Italian American Podcast**

“In his eminently practical and deeply passionate guide to visiting

Italy and discovering his extended family, The Italian-American Podcast co-host Anthony Fasano details step-by-step how to research and retrace your ancestral roots. The fruits of his efforts affirm that we never truly leave the past behind, but rather our past shapes and informs the person we become.”

— **Maria Laurino, Author of *The Italian Americans: A History***

“My own dream of Italy was fulfilled when I visited my ancestral hometown in southern Italy in the summer of 1995 by just showing up with some names of ancestors and a few pages copied out of a local phone book which I found at the Italian Tourism Board in New York City.

“I wish there had been something like Anthony's book to guide me at the time. This is both a practical

guide and a love letter to Italy and Italian-American culture. It makes the process less daunting. If you are even thinking about finding your Italian roots, get Anthony's book and make the trip — your life will be changed forever!”

— **Kathy McCabe Host, Dream of Italy
on PBS**

Forty Days in Italy Con La Mia Famiglia

***How to Research Your
Italian Roots & Travel to
Italy on Your Own Terms***

Anthony Fasano

**Foreword by Cassandra Santoro, CEO +
Founder of Travel Italian Style**

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Dedication

To Grandpa Sal, who died back home in the States while we were on this forty-day journey through Italy; we know you were there with us, especially in Sortino, where we visited the house your mother grew up in.

Thanks for the inspiration in writing this book and for being there always.

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Foreword

Growing up in a Sicilian-American family, my father frequently played the 1993 ESPN speech by the legendary Italian American basketball coach Jimmy Valvano. The part of the speech that always stood out the most to me was Jimmy's advice for success:

“To think about what's important in life, to me, are these three things: where you started, where you are, and where you're going to be.”

This idea stayed with me from my late teens on, especially after the loss of my father.

About three years after my father's passing, I embarked on a journey to Italy to discover my roots and to learn where my family really started. I began slowly, traveling throughout Italy and Sicily. I began doing genealogical research and applying for dual citizenship. I knew I wanted to hold on to my beautiful Italian memories as long as possible. I wanted to know about my grandparents, their parents, and all that

shaped us as Italian Americans. I knew this journey was the only way I could discover who I was and where I wanted to be.

It took almost a decade of living back and forth between Italy and New York, conducting hours of personal research, hiring dozens of genealogy professionals, and staring at my bank accounts thousands of dollars later, until I proudly held my Italian passport as a dual citizen and could claim with confidence that I knew the history of my family.

Shortly after completing this journey, I launched a company specializing in Italian travel. It wasn't long until I introduced the concept of family history travel through custom Italian Heritage Trips. In collaboration with expert genealogists, local historians, and Italian archeologists, my company researches the family history of our clients and creates a tour of the region where the family originated. We walk them through churches where their parents married, bakeries their grandparents worked in, or simply spend time explaining the local

culture and history in depth while strolling the streets of their family town.

When I met Anthony and he told me about his family history adventure and documentation of his process, I could be nothing but inspired and awed! Anthony's journey gives you the tools to discover the past. You will be able to open the door to the lives that shaped you and embark on an unforgettable personal journey, one that you can share with generations to come.

We are all excited to see where your own family research may lead you — perhaps one step of your journey will include a family heritage trip to Italy. No matter what, don't forget where you started, where you are, or where you're going to be.

As Anthony and I discovered, beautiful things can emerge from remembering where you come from!

Con i migliori auguri

— *Cassandra Santoro, CEO + Founder of
Travel Italian Style*

A Note for You...

This book has two distinct parts. Part I contains specific instructions as to how you can locate your living Italian relatives or simply learn more about your Italian ancestors. Part II is an account of my own 40-day trip to Italy with my family of five, where I met my living Italian relatives for the first time and started to build beautiful relationships.

It is my hope that you use this book to get the most out of your Italian American experience; believe me — it can be an amazingly rich one.

Additional photos and information from my trip, as well as information on how you can take your own trip, can be accessed through my website for this book, FortyDaysInItaly.com. There is also a special travel planning document that you can use to plan your trip on the book website.

Introduction

I was running as fast as I could, pulling two wheeled suitcases, constantly looking back to make sure the rest of my family was close behind. My 10-year-old daughter Brianna was right behind me, running swiftly with two bags. My seven-year-old son AJ was close behind her, a look of terror on his face, and my wife Jill was last in line, pushing the stroller carrying our four-year-old, Penelope and running as fast as she could.

We were in the midst of the first leg of a long trip from our humble abode in New Jersey to the home of our ancestors (and some new-found living relatives) in Italy.

The first stop of what would be an unforgettable 40-day journey was set to be Lerici in northwestern Italy, close to Le Cinque Terre, but it was a long and complicated 24 hours of travel to get there. Especially with a family of five.

We were in the Florence train station, and had arrived at Track 18, from where we thought our 1 p.m. train was about to leave, only to realize at 12:57 that we had misread the board — our train was on Track 1A. I immediately started sprinting and the rest of the family followed.

My poor son AJ, who has anxiety, was crying throughout the entire sprint, but there was no time to stop and console him. As I ran, I was asking everyone I passed where this mysterious Track 1A was.

We found it, but just as we arrived at the train, before we could get on, the doors closed.

I stopped, my mind invaded by terrible thoughts of sitting in the station for hours with three young, upset, and tired children. Suddenly, a woman standing on the platform who had seen us running, walked up to the train and pushed a button.

The doors opened, and my wife and I looked at each other with a look that screamed, “We

made it.” We all smiled, thanked the woman, and climbed aboard. As we unloaded our luggage and found seats, the dryness in my throat and tightness in my calves became more apparent. I sat down and tried to gather myself.

Little did I realize that the emotional roller coaster we had experienced over the last 15 minutes was only a small sampling of what the next 40 days would hold.

From the planning stages — which included connecting with living relatives through research and learning the Italian language — to our very early flight from Napoli Airport back to New Jersey on day 40, the whole trip was truly an amazing experience.

I am excited to bring you along on our journey through the pages of this book, and in doing so, provide you with a blueprint (and hopefully some inspiration) for taking your own once-in-a-lifetime trip.

Andiamo (We go)...

— *Anthony Fasano*

Part I:

***Dreaming, Research, Travel
Planning, and Learning
Italian***

Chapter 1

Learning about Your Origins from Your Relatives

I can't type fast enough as my 86-year-old grandmother rattles off our entire family history, sentence after sentence. As my fingers fly across the keys, I'm trying to correctly spell the names of the people and places without missing other critical pieces of information.

She gives me her parents and grandparents' names, along with their dates of birth and death. She tells me the villages they were from in Italy and the stories of how and why they came to the United States.

It is all fascinating information, and the entire time I am asking

myself two questions internally. Firstly, why haven't I asked her for this information before? Secondly, what if I had never asked her for it?

I leave Nonna's that day with more information than I could have imagined and an excitement about my heritage that I haven't felt before, all because I asked.

***Grandma Jo's kitchen table —
Nanuet, NY***

Fall 2014

The Desire to Know Where I Came From

It wasn't until my mid-30s that I really started thinking about where I came from. I don't mean where I grew up; I mean where my family came from, generations earlier.

I had known I was 100 percent Italian for my entire life. The loud Sunday dinners with over 40 people gave it away, along with a hundred other traditions.

I grew up with my parents and two brothers in the small town of Suffern, in Rockland County, New York — the suburbs of New York City. We were a typical Italian-American family: hard-working parents, close-knit family traditions, and regular large family gatherings.

As much as my father used to talk about his grandfather, Antonio Fasano, who was a hard-working immigrant barber, I never thought much of it.

Then one day it hit me. I was 35 years old,

thinking about my past and my family, and I decided it would be nice to really understand where in Italy my family was from. Actually, it would be nice to learn anything about the immigrants in my family, who came to the United States and gave me the life I have today.

Soon after, I had another realization, but this one was much scarier. The four people who held the key to my past were getting older, and the window for accessing this invaluable information was closing quickly. As lucky as I was to be 35 years old and still have four grandparents alive, they were getting older and not as sharp as they used to be.

So one day I called my Grandma Josephine, known within the family as Grandma Jo. She was the only one of my grandparents who I distinctly remember speaking Italian when I was younger. I asked her if I could come over for lunch and ask her some questions about our family history. Anyone who knows Italian grandmothers will know what her answer was.

Grandma's Kitchen Table

As I walked up the stairs to her apartment, laptop under my arm, I felt like I was about to uncover a treasure that I should have started looking for years ago.

She had warm eggplant parmigiana and a loaf of Italian bread on the table — the perfect way to start the afternoon. We enjoyed the lunch with my Grandpa Serafino (Sal), and then he retired to the television to watch his game shows, and my grandmother and I began to delve into our past.

I opened my laptop and used a note-taking program called Evernote to capture the information that Grandma Jo began to share. She focused on her parents and my Grandpa Sal's parents, one at a time, going through what she knew of all four of them.

She didn't just give me the hard, factual information that I would need to dig deeper. She also told me stories about my ancestors and stories about growing up in an immigrant

neighborhood, which was really powerful. I started to understand the odds that my great-grandparents were up against when they traveled on a boat from Italy to a country they knew nothing about.

They had no money. They couldn't speak the language. They didn't even know if they would survive the trip overseas. However, they all had a common goal. They wanted a better life for their families.

With every story she told, I became more and more thankful for the life I had, realizing that success hadn't just been handed to my family. It was the product of hard work, day after day, putting family above all else. This is the Italian American philosophy — *Prima la Famiglia* (Family First).

This feeling was worth more than all of the facts that I gained while sitting at Grandma's kitchen table that day. My Great-Grandpa Giuseppe had collected junk and sold it to feed his children, and my Great-Grandma Rosa had done seamstress work whenever she could to

bring in money. These were the invaluable, almost-lost stories that I could now pass down to my children.

As I will share with you later in the book, it was only the beginning. With this information, I was able to find much more on my own, which culminated in visits to my great-grandparents' original villages in Italy. You can make this journey into your own heritage, too.

A Glimpse into What I Learned from that Conversation

This was just the first learning session with my Grandma, but I would go on to have many more over the next few years, and still do to this day. I want to share with you some of my notes from those visits in this section, to give you some insight into the type of information that you might search for. At the end of this chapter, I will give you some specific questions you might consider asking.

*Giuseppe Baselice, WWI Veteran
(fought for U.S.)*

Born: February 7, 18XX

Died: 3/28/1984

*Born in Sarno, Italy, province of
Salerno (Salerno is near Naples)*

Mom: Vittoria Balestrino

Father: Aniello Baselice

*He had two sisters: Rose Baselice,
Michelena Baselice*

Notes: Both of his parents were killed in 1943, in the Battle of Salerno in World War II. Grandma Jo remembers when the letter was delivered, a white envelope with black border; he immediately knew there was a death in the family. He was a salvage dealer (junk man). He used to go into apartments and get old newspapers from the superintendents. He used to lie and tell them he only had a certain amount of money. He gave them that much and kept the rest. He had a horse and wagon and used it to transport the papers. He met a prosperous Italian man named Pasquala Giordano, who said to Giuseppe , "If I buy you a truck, you trade only for me." And that's what he did. They were very poor. After World War I he couldn't get a

job. Fiorello LaGuardia gave him a job. An English-speaking friend of Giuseppe wrote Mayor LaGuardia a letter, and told him that a friend of his (Giuseppe) was a World War I veteran with five kids, had no job, and his kids were hungry. On Thanksgiving Eve, the Mayor sent his staff to their apartment to give them baskets of food and offer a job to Giuseppe. They never forgot that day.

Recording Memories for Future Generations

After that initial lunch with my grandmother in the fall of 2014, I sat down with her a few more times. Then, of course, life got in the way. It was now July 2015, I had experienced some success in my career creating, hosting, and building podcasts, and I was at a conference in Texas called Podcast Movement.

If you are not familiar with podcasts, a podcast is a digital audio file, published on the Internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player. It is typically available as a series, and new installments can be accessed by subscribers automatically. Essentially, a podcast is an on-demand radio show.

My podcasts at the time were all focused on engineering and science. I was sitting in the audience, listening to one of the conference keynote speakers, an Italian-American named Lou Mongello. He was talking about how important it is to be yourself as the host of a

podcast, as this will allow you to really connect with your audience, and letting your passion for the topic shine through, episode after episode.

Now even though I had slowed down a bit on my family research, the passion to dig deeper was still there. I wanted to do more than just learn about my family history, I wanted to preserve it for future generations. These thoughts of my Italian heritage and preserving it were constantly popping up in my mind when I first had the idea: ***The Italian-American Podcast***. What a perfect way to record and preserve my family history.

At the next break, I ran up to my hotel room and purchased ItalianAmericanPodcast.com, which has since been changed to ItalianAmericanExperience.com. Later that evening, I sketched out the initial plan for the show. The initial plan was built around the idea that I would visit my grandparents more often, record their stories, and include these stories as episodes so that years from now, my children and their children could listen to them.

As planning for the podcast progressed, I was fortunate to convince a long-time family friend, Dolores Alfieri, to co-host with me. In fact, there was no convincing needed, just one simple phone call. Dolores is a first-generation Italian-American — both of her parents immigrated to the United States.

I know Dolores well because she is related to my sister-in-law and grew up in the same small town that I did. I also knew that she had dedicated a few years of her life to writing a memoir about growing up Italian-American.

I felt like things were starting to come together with my family research. I now had many hard facts from my grandmother, as well as some stories on audio, and the podcast offered a tangible way to record it.

Before we move on to my next step which focuses on the commitment required for this journey, I want to leave you with some questions that you can use when having these critical conversations with your relatives about your family history. You will find sections like

this at the end of most chapters, designed to help you take action on planning your own amazing family journey.

Action Items for You: *Questions to Ask Your Relatives*

While I am passionate about writing, writing doesn't mean as much to me if my readers don't take measurable action in their own lives. I've added these sections at the end of most chapters to provide either action items to help in your own endeavors, or lessons that I learned during my journey. This should help you to ensure that you don't make the same mistakes.

I want to inspire you to dig deeper into your family history, starting with talking with any living relatives that may be able to help you. The questions below are phrased in a manner so you can literally read them off, one-by-one, at the table.

1. What was the last name of all of my great-grandparents or my relatives that

immigrated to the U.S. from Italy?

You can start with your grandparents and work backwards. I was lucky to easily find seven out of eight of my great-grandparents' surnames.

2. What village in Italy did our family originate from?

This is a critically important question. If you know this or can obtain this answer, then at a minimum you can visit the village and start to understand where you really came from. You might even find living relatives, or at least people who know your family, by mentioning the last names.

3. What are the birth years of my great-grandparents or my relatives that immigrated to the U.S. from Italy?

This is another critically important piece of information. If you have both the village of origin and birth year of one of your relatives, you can most likely obtain or

view their birth certificate by visiting the village. More on this in Chapter 2.

4. What are the death years of my great-grandparents or other relatives that never immigrated to the US?

If you know of a relative who was born and died in Italy, and have both the village of origin and death year of that person, you can likely obtain or view their death certificate by visiting the village, which has a lot of detailed information. More on this in Chapter 2.

5. What year did our family members immigrate to the U.S.?

If you can figure this out, you can attempt to find the manifest of the ship that they came to the U.S. aboard by searching online.

These questions will get you started with your research and help to you find some of the most critical information for finding the records of your family. You can download these

questions, and find other helpful resources, at FortyDaysInItaly.com.

These hands-on tools and guidelines can all be very helpful in your research, but next I made a decision that would supercharge the research into my family history and heritage, way beyond the choice of the physical tools that I used.

About the Author

Anthony Fasano is a proud Italian American whose family comes from both the regions of Campania and Sicilia. Anthony's professional background is in engineering. He started his career in civil engineering, but has since transitioned into coaching and training for engineers.

He has created several successful content brands and podcasts including "The Engineering Career Coach Podcast," which has been downloaded over one million times. He has also created "The Civil Engineering Podcast," and of course most recently, his favorite, "The Italian American Podcast."

Fasano has authored several books including a self-published book for engineers entitled *Engineer Your Own Success*, which was picked up by Wiley Press, as well as a series of children's books which he co-authored with his now 10-year-old daughter, titled

Purpee the Purple Dragon. They have delivered hundreds of copies of the books to pediatric cancer centers around the United States.

You can find Fasano's latest Italian American related projects, including all episodes of The Italian American Podcast, at ItalianAmericanExperience.com.

Learn More at

FortyDaysInItaly.com