



The Road to San Donato: Fathers, Sons, and Cycling Across Italy

Robert Cocuzzo

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Robert Cocuzzo's satisfying travel story *The Road to San Donato* is about honoring family connections and self-discovery in the context of history.

Cocuzzo and his father, Stephen, set out to return to the Italian mountain village of their family's origin, something their ailing patriarch had dreamed of doing. They undertook the pilgrimage on bicycles, pedaling 425 miles of steep, windy hills in Tuscany and Lazio. The experience pushed them to their limits. They endured logistical challenges, arguments, breakdowns, and torturous pain.

The straightforward premise is enriched in its telling. Cocuzzo employs action verbs, scents, sounds, colors, and astute observations to bring the experience to life. Scenes are peppered with vivid personalities who defy stereotypes and assumptions. Tension comes from multiple fronts: from the physical and emotional challenges of the trip itself, to the dynamics between the father and son, Cocuzzo's grandfather's failing health, and questions about the family's role in World War II—were they Nazi sympathizers who turned in Jews during the war? And how would such a discovery affect the relationship of Cocuzzo, a Catholic boy with a Jewish fiancée?

A powerful meditation on the complexities of war, refugee and immigrant experiences, and the meaning of personal sacrifice, the text also muses on the fleeting nature of time and the natural role reversal that occurs between a parent and a child in the course of aging. There's a bonus glimpse of bicycle racing history: the men meet a legendary Italian cycling champion by coincidence just as he is passing his baton to the next generation.

The Road to San Donato is a moving multigenerational American immigrant story about returning home in search of history and making peace with the past to forge a new future.

WENDY HINMAN (September / October 2019)

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