



Mother Knows Best

BY LIZA B. ZIMMERMAN

I am the child of a stubborn woman, and like mother, like daughter. We're both hardheaded, but she has nevertheless managed to pass down some wisdom over the years. A few of her lessons didn't turn out so well: snail eating (I never liked them) and body surfing (I almost drowned). But the most enduring lesson my mother, Barbara, taught me increases in value as the years go by.

Although I fancied myself a rather sophisticated kid—I grew up on Manhattan's Upper West Side and celebrated my 10th birthday at The Four Seasons—I never learned to like red wine. My tenacious mother considered me a work-in-progress and kept sliding glasses of red wine under my twitching nose. I didn't think I could ever bring myself to drink that earthy-smelling, purple stuff. For me, it had all the allure of the grimy soil in Central Park after a storm.

My mother and I had been taking trips together since I was little, and whether it was a day in Boston or a week in London it was always a great adventure. She would try to get me to eat or drink something new every stop along the way. Red wine was always on the list and became a priority when we started planning a mother-daughter trip to Italy. I was 18 at the time, and for weeks prior to our departure, my mother's growing determination to make me a red wine drinker periodically emerged in odes to the great Italian reds. Bolstered by visions of the

tantalizing vintages ahead, we merrily set off for the Italian peninsula.

Disembarking in Venice, my mother and I cruised the breezy waters of the Grand Canal on a *vaporetto* and celebrated our arrival by popping open a bottle of Prosecco. Nighttime dining along a small canal brought plates of octopus curlicues and a frosty bottle of Pinot Grigio for me, while my mother sipped her Amarone. She proffered the glass of silky, translucent brown liquid by swirling it under my nose. The odor of prunes filled my nostrils as I pushed the glass away. I was not ready.

We packed our bags and headed south to the amber-hued, Vespa-riddled ball of chaos that is modern-day Rome. We wandered the crooked old streets, taking in the cries of the butchers and vegetable sellers in the Campo dei Fiori and landed exhausted at an *osteria* in the midst of ruins in the city's ancient Jewish ghetto. Cutting into crispy pan-fried artichokes, I gulped down an easy half-liter of the local Frascati. Mom had moved on to our next destination with her wine choice and was savoring a bottle of Chianti. Although its color was lighter and its aroma more easygoing than the Amarone's had been, I just couldn't drink it.

The next day we headed off to Florence, arriving just as the sun was setting into a glorious pink horizon. The evening sky was melting into a sparkling night as we began our trek up to Piazzale

Michelangelo, the expansive square on the hill overlooking the city. Settling into the white-columned ristorante at the top of the piazza, I realized we were nearing the end of the trip as I heard my mother ordering a Frescobaldi Chianti and two glasses. Her stern look told me she was ready to give me up for a well-behaved, red wine drinking Florentine child if I didn't come through this time. Learning to love red wine was no longer a discussion but a command performance. As the ruby swirls flowed into my glass, I heard her fighting words: "Shut up and drink it. You'll thank me later."

I took a deep breath and a serious sip. The flavor of blackberries cut with black pepper filled my mouth, and the aromas of spicy dark cherries tickled my nose. It was an epiphany. I finally understood the remarkable range of sensations that a glass of red wine could offer. These perspectives had always been a part of my mother's life, and she was finally able to share them with me through this first, symbolic glass.

I subsequently lived in Italy for four years, and have since enjoyed 12 happy years of Chianti drinking, Amarone quaffing, Barolo savoring and Côtes du Rhône sipping. My mother's lesson still binds me to her, and the rest of the wine-loving world, as I share the patchwork of my tastes, experiences and visions by raising a glass of good red wine.

Liza B. Zimmerman, senior editor at Market Watch, can frequently be found drinking red wine in various locales with her mother.