

Memories and Dreams of ISODARCO

By Carol Flake Chapman

ISODARCO was so much a part of Gary's life that we began to think of Italy as our second home. My first experience of attending ISODARCO with Gary came in 1998, when the summer course was held in Candriai, and the focus was on "Technology Transfer." We wound our way in our small rented car up Monte Bondone, and almost before we were unpacked, we found ourselves searching for porcini mushrooms with one of the Italian scientists attending the course. He taught us exactly where to look for the elusive porcini, only under a certain kind of tree, and when I found one, it was like discovering gold. And then, of course, we had our first experience with the "mushroom police," who looked over our treasures, and one of my discoveries had to be discarded. The culmination of our adventure came when our mushrooms were cooked for dinner, and we savored one of the best dishes we had ever enjoyed.

It was then that I began to associate ISODARCO not only with achieving world peace, but with the "good life," or "il buon vivere," that Gary had always told me was Italy's great gift to the world. What I learned from ISODARCO that year was that along with technology, the ideas of slow food and conviviality should also be transferred around the world. For Gary, technology was always a means toward bringing the good life to everyone.

The summer course in 1999, held in Rovereto, brought even more lessons about the importance of making strong human connections across borders and about what happens when those connections fail. The subject that summer was "Computers, Networks and the Prospects for European and World Security."

One afternoon Gary and I visited the "Zona Sacra," atop one of the nearby mountain peaks, which commemorates the tragic loss of life there during World War I. We were very moved by the beautiful Maria Dolens, the "Bell of the Fallen," made from the bronze of melted cannons from the Great War. It tolls 100 times every evening at sundown to honor the dead of that terrible conflict and to ring forth a message of peace. We visited the Sanctuary of Castel Dante, an ossuary dome housing the remains of more than 20,000 Italian, Czech, Austrian and Hungarian soldiers who died nearby in battle between 1915 and 1918, and then we followed the "peace trail" that winds south to the battlefields and trenches on mountain slopes where so much bloody fighting took place. We were astonished at how close the trenches dug by the two sides were to each other. Soldiers on one side could hear those on the other side talking, singing or coughing away their lives with the deadly influenza that took almost as many lives as did the bullets.

I think the great highlight for Gary of ISODARCO came in 2002, when

the summer course was held in Trento. The subject was "Cyberwar, Netwar and the Revolution in Military Affairs: Real Threats and Virtual Myths," and as usual, there were scientists and military experts there from around the world. That year was Gary's 50th birthday, and the organizers held a wonderful birthday celebration for Gary at Masso Sasso, located on a mountainside overlooking the Adige Valley. Here we enjoyed "slow food" at its best, with a hundred guests from around the world toasting Gary's birthday. I believe that was truly one of the happiest times in Gary's life.

I remember that we were seated next to a Russian general, who pointed to a spot in the Adige Valley where still another old battle had taken place. This one was from the Napoleonic wars. It was here in this valley south of Rovereto, said the general, that the French had defeated the Austrians and their Russian allies, securing the Adige valley for both offensive and defensive purposes. That battle, he said, was commemorated on the Arc de Triomphe, with the name of the victorious French General Vaubois engraved at the base. The French casualties were light, whereas the Austrians lost 6,000 men there.

It was difficult to imagine such carnage and bloodshed as we toasted each other and enjoyed good food and conversation. The air was full of conviviality, of different languages and accents and points of view all converging in this beautiful place. The possibility of peace hovered over us like a dove.

I am often reminded of that scene that demonstrated so well how we might all begin to enjoy the good life together. This is what Gary wrote a few years ago about his own hopes for a convivial world in the future, nourished by groups like ISODARCO and those willing to think in original ways about how to make a better life:

"Nor will we see complete harmony and a convergence of ideas and goals among people who deliberately oppose the status quo. So many degrees of difference among such people may persist that they will continue to look like a chaotic, cacophonous mob rather than a historic force of change. It may only be over the course of many years that we come to recognize an emergent, new way of thinking, which is likely to take different but related forms all over the world. The common thread that may unite many disparate but like-minded efforts, from food activists to digital rights activists, is thinking about technology as malleable, as capable of serving human-determined ends, and as an essential component of "il buon vivere," the good life. It is only by working with that premise that the idea of shaping the network society makes sense."