

September 4, 2012

Olbia Centrale

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Pouring, rain is pouring heavily, a wall of water is outside the window and a torrent flows down the center of the cobbled street. Across the alley from Hotel Cavour, a two foot chunk of concrete fell to the cobbles. Occasionally, the volume increases, one hears the rainfall before the torrent appears in the window.

“Ever’body travellin’ today”, my bus driver announced as I boarded the J-30 in front of my local coffee shop. Not many riders aboard, I stayed close to the front and made small talk, as we motored through the capitol byways. My driver had the happy countenance of a securely employed citizen, as she relayed her life story between accelerations of the diesel.

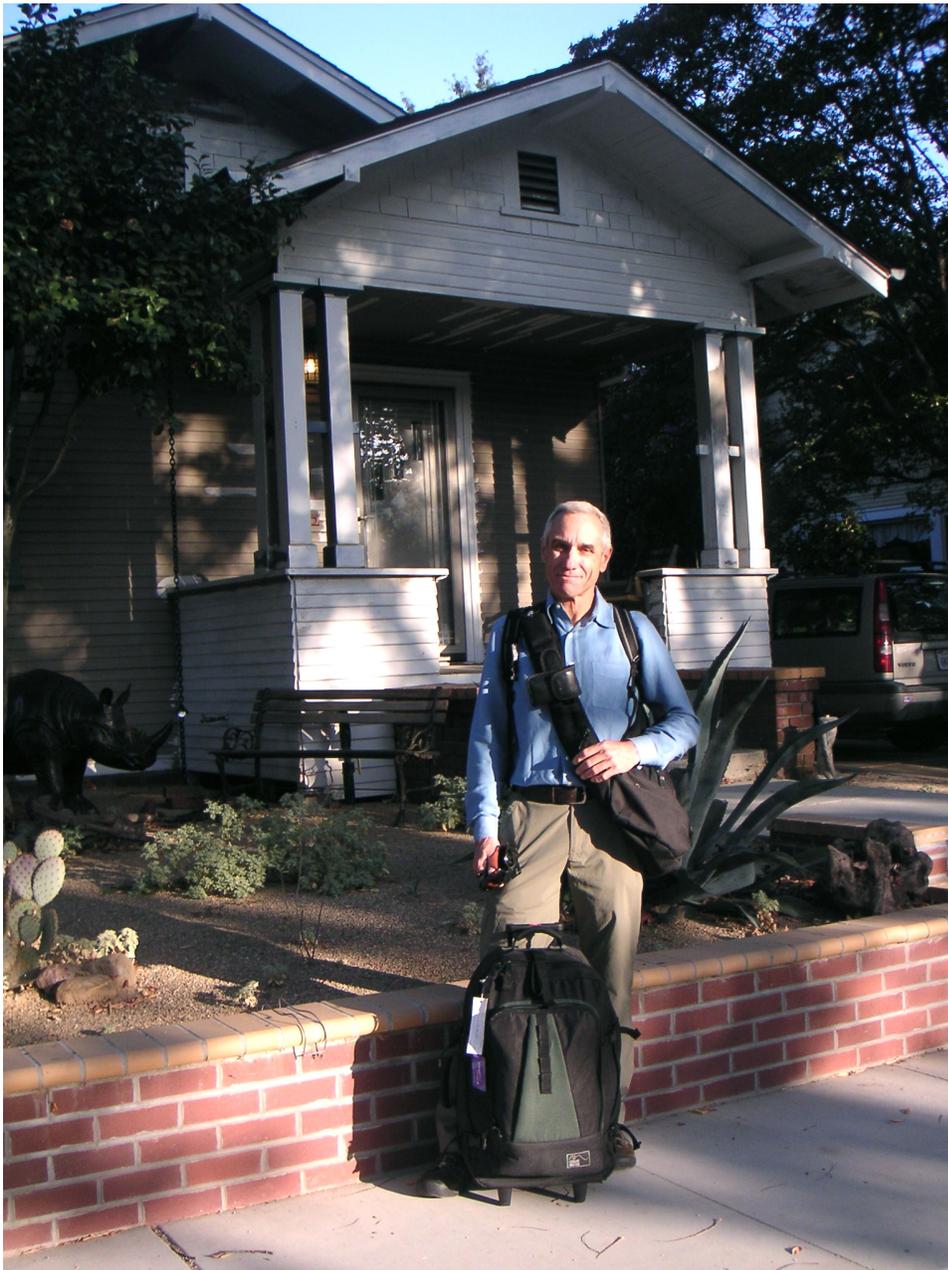
Sacramento train station is an attractive structure with original art and furnishings. The mural and formerly heated wood benches atop large tile squares testify to the hay-day of trains in rail-town Sacramento. The monster Amtrak electric diesel thundered up with bells ringing, ready to gather up the Saturday morning crowd of families and Cal football people headed to the Bay Area.



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Starting a journey with a front door “walk away” was a plan hatched in the past few weeks. I have not commenced a trip by walking since high-school, when I walked away from my parents home to hitch-hike to the High Sierra in 1971. My neighbor joined me upon exiting my home, walking the block with me to the coffee shop. My “coffee friends” were excited to see me in full travel dress, buying me a go-away cup and cheering me in my journey.

As my train rumbled over the Sacramento river “I” Street bridge the locomotive blasted his horn, immediately sending me into the “travel mode”. I was not leaving for travel, the horn signaling travel was underway, having started with the front-door, seconded by the bus driver and confirmed with the horn.



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Air travel was long and grueling, yet over in 27 hours elapsed time. Delays, missed flight, itinerary change and luggage separation. No biggee. First day in Sardinia and I am hoping my bag arrives today at the airport. It still amazes me that one can travel this far in a day. Hotel Cavour, arranged via Internet, is quite comfortable.

Spectacular rainfall volume drops as a strong cell passes over. Downspouts gush from upper levels with force, projecting three feet or more from the building, pounding on the parked cars below. The plaza, usually filled with tourists lounging over coffee and socializing, has couples clutched tightly under umbrellas or boxed under awnings. Some look a bit silly, walking about in flip-flops, running from one cafe to another in some effort to avoid the balloon size drops or walking around wearing a plastic bag. Immigrants are busy hawking umbrellas on street corners. As the cell passes the world seems to come to life, the music volume is raised strollers emerge from hiding.



Only one hour on the streets and two blocks of walking reveals the maritime culture and nautical lifestyle of this rocky island more coastline than California. The airport banners and pictures proclaimed big racing the next two weeks for European bragging rights among mega-millionaires. The sailing shop off the plaza displays high end products and accessories, a stack of windsurfer boards and rigging sets atop a wagon, while historic photos of old Sardinian ports and quays adorn the hotels and eateries.

The cultural change upon entry to Italy is distinct and perhaps unique among western destinations. Perhaps the lilt in the language that causes an upbeat tone, or the enduring nature of a culture that is based in such aesthetics and good living. Even the women are smiling and welcoming to a stranger, an obvious American. The men looked

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me over with long stares last night at the airport, at this fast walking, solo American dressed in slacks and linen shirt. They nod in recognition, then warm with a smile after I give up a seat to an infirm or family.

