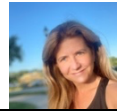

Conversation with a London Server About Turin (Italy) Spring 2020 and the Impact of COVID Restrictions on Restaurants

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During a recent trip to London, my husband and I enjoyed a lengthy meal at a restaurant which included an impromptu COVID-related conversation with a server from the Turin, Italy area. The questions that sparked the dialogue were about his country of origin and whether the restaurant had recovered from 2020.

He was very professional, well-spoken, and keen to share his experiences. We mostly let him speak and did not interject much except to compare what he said about COVID-Era restrictions for restaurants in London with those in Chicago. At no time did I express my

opinions about events in Northern Italy, COVID-19, or the ‘pandemic,’ nor did I say anything about my concerns regarding London’s ~200% death increase during the ‘first lockdown.’

For obvious reasons, the interaction did not lend itself to note-taking or recording. The summary below is reconstructed from what we recall him saying.

Santino* has worked and lived in London for more than six years but is originally from the Turin area in the Piedmont region of Italy. His parents, who are in their 80s, still live there in a small town of 16,000 people.

The businesses, churches, and schools in the town were shut down in spring 2020. Santino’s parents received groceries from a local grocer who was making deliveries but because they have ‘a really nice garden’ were also able to rely on the garden for vegetables.

The town saw some Covid ‘death notifications’ – and some funerals – but Santino described those as occasional and spaced out. Neither he nor his parents knew anyone who died. He contrasted his parents’ experience with that of Bergamo and spoke very seriously and with conviction about how it was ‘really bad’ there because ‘everyone went to the hospital and got sent home and then it spread everywhere.’¹

Santino’s parents were sick with Covid but not until June 2020 and not at the same time. (His father was sick and recovered before his mother became ill.) To inquire as to how they knew it was Covid without asking that question directly, I asked if his parents had Covid tests. He said yes. The illness itself was ‘like the flu’ for them and was not serious.

Santino was in London during both lockdowns and couldn’t believe how quiet it was. He lives on an upper floor of a building close to the Thames and remarked on how clean the river became when people were staying home and not going into work, school, etc.

Both times he ended up going to Italy to be with his parents because there was nothing to do in London and his own restaurant kept having to shut down. Italians treated the spring 2020 restrictions differently than Londoners, he said. Officials in Italy would issue a rule like

the bars/restaurants could only serve alcohol after a certain time and people had to drink it outside and the order would be ignored. Because Italians tend to disregard what government says to do, he said, this was not surprising.

Santino also spoke about how difficult the London lockdowns were for restaurants. His own place of employment was slow (i.e., not many guests) when it re-opened before officials ordered closures again. It was hard for the restaurant to support staff because the rules kept changing. At one point, they were only allowed to have four guests at a time – an untenable situation given the level of service/dining is designed around many courses, seats fewer than 50 people, and relies on high check averages rather than a high number of turns.

Set closing times were another harmful measure imposed by governing authorities. Rushing the close of a multi-course dinner due to an artificial curfew – and doing so with diners who are paying fine dining prices - is predictably detrimental to business.

Santino recalled these and other restrictions vividly and was relieved those days were in the past. He expressed no negative sentiments or ill will toward his employer. The fact that he is still working at the restaurant may be a testament to fair treatment he experienced during a time when government was bullying the restaurant industry.

Based on Santino's experience — and our assessment of the number of guests, number of staff, and the positions/tasks being carried out by respective staff — the restaurant appeared to be again operating at a “normal” level.

**Pseudonym. Estimated age: late 40s*

Readers may find this [February 2020 - March 2021 “journal”](#) of an American expat living in Turin interesting for the archived digital content. I regard the presentation of events as a propaganda narrative and premier example of how “storytelling” was used to sell the world

on the illusion of a sudden-spreading coronavirus - whether the storytellers themselves were fully aware of that or not.

Nextjournal

Explore



David Schmudde / Mar 20 2021 / PUBLISHED

The Corona Virus in Turin, Italy

I'm an American expat currently living in Turin, Italy. The headlines about COVID-19's spread in Italy are pretty scary. I put this notebook together so family, friends, and curious people can get a little insight into what's actually happening.

The first section offers a statistical overview. I'll update this every day. The second section has some of my anecdotal observations and tracks a few headlines. The third section has a little bit more on the importance of evidence-based storytelling.

Footnote

1 - Santino brought up Bergamo on his own; we did not mention or ask about it.