

Killer Cheater
by Michael Amato

Lorenzo is a very close family friend. He, along with many other family friends, met my dad when they were working at the airport almost forty years ago. Everyone compares Lorenzo to Roberto Benigni because he's always scheming and making friends laugh. For years he lived with my parents until I was adopted and I, as he puts it, "stole his room". He's now retired and living in Italy and visits us three or four times a year. Even though I stole his room, he held no grudge and always spent lots of time with me every time he would visit for over twenty years. On one of our adventures, we rented a houseboat for a week. When mosquitoes attacked me, he told me rubbing alcohol would help the itching. I wasn't expecting the burn, and I gave him the nickname "Killer" although it did help with the bites. Whenever he visited, we would also play sports or wrestle, and he'd always do something ridiculous to make me laugh. We were playing soccer one time when he took a hockey stick and shot the soccer ball towards me. I jokingly called him a cheater. After all these years he still calls himself the "Killer Cheater", even signing a book with his nickname that he got me for my birthday. He still makes sure to include me in his plans when he visits. Most of these plans involve getting together with old friends and helping him slave away in the kitchen all day making dough and cooking pizzas for anywhere from twenty to seventy people, but sometimes these plans turn out to be adventures.

To understand some of Lorenzo's actions, you have to realize that in Italy, people aren't very trusting of strangers. Most of them can be considered "opportunists". For example, I recall visiting him with my parents when I was eight years old. We were taking the train to another city and my dad asked how much the tickets were. Lorenzo assured us not to worry because they don't check for tickets. He said, "It's based on the honour system, but no one honours it."

So, like most Italians, Lorenzo is an opportunist. His eyes become wide when he sees something he can get away with. He's somewhat of a legend with the airline friends and they always have stories of his shenanigans as a flight attendant. He would pawn the work off on the other flight attendants while he made pizza in the ovens on board for the staff. Then there's "The Fig Story". Lorenzo was working a flight from Rome to Toronto; he was walking down the aisle when he saw a little old lady with a giant bag of figs on the floor between her legs. He told her he could take the bag of figs to the back of the plane if she was uncomfortable. The lady was very grateful since it was such a long flight. Little did she know, Lorenzo had called all of the flight crew to the back and they ate half the bag! The pilot then announced that they would be landing in a short while. The crew started to panic but Lorenzo calmed them down and told them he'd take care of it. He removed all of the figs from the bottom of the bag, filled half of it with paper, and then put the remaining figs on the top to make it appear full. He gave the bag back to the lady at the end of the flight. She thanked him and commented that she thought it felt lighter. He then told her that in Canada, the atmosphere was thinner than Italy and everything felt half as light. She was convinced and got off the plane. I can't imagine what she would have said when she saw what was left of her depleted bag of figs.

We visited him in Italy again when I was twelve. He was still up to no good, but this time he made me an accomplice. I think he figured that no one would blame an innocent twelve year

old. He woke me up at 5:30 in the morning to tell me he went for a walk and found some abandoned land with beautiful peach trees and he needed my help picking them for breakfast. After a short drive, I saw that the land wasn't as abandoned as he made it seem. I could see the silhouette of a man having coffee through the window of the house that was on the property surrounded by these peach trees. Lorenzo said to me, "Michael, if you see police coming, just drive and come back in ten minutes or so". I was the twelve year old getaway driver. Luckily for us, everything went smoothly. When we got back, my dad was outside having a cigarette and asked where we had been. Lorenzo couldn't think of anything to say so I said that we just went for a walk. Since then, Lorenzo knew he had picked the perfect partner in crime, and as a bonus the peaches were magnificent.

He lives in the city of Pescara, which is atop a mountain near the Adriatic. At the bottom of the mountain is a beautiful beach we visited every day. A couple days after the peach incident, he took me mussel fishing. Mussels live on rocks underwater so he would take his small boat, which he "found" on the beach, get into the water with a snorkel mask, and pick the shells. Mussel harvesting is illegal in Italy unless you have a permit. Of course, Lorenzo didn't have a permit. He heard sirens and saw a police boat coming towards us and told me to tie the bag I had and leave it underwater on the rock. When the police came to ask what we were doing, he said that our engine wasn't working and asked if they could tow us towards the land. The officers were so happy they could help us. A couple hours later we went out to retrieve our treasure and had mussels with our pasta that night.

Not only is Lorenzo an opportunist, but he is a prankster as well. One of our friends, Tony, has a villa near Lorenzo's town. Tony used to wake up in the morning and take a wooden spoon and the lid of a pot and bang them together to scare away the pigeons that would stay around his house. One day, Lorenzo went over for dinner. As they were eating, the doorbell rang. It was the police. They said they were getting complaints from the neighbours about loud noises in the morning. Tony was shocked because he was friends with all of his neighbours and they'd all commented on how they can't stand the pigeons either. The police then asked why he thought pigeons were attracted to Tony's house. Tony mentioned it was because of the stove he had in the backyard. The police then said that the kind of stove he had required a permit and it was a \$3,000 ticket for not having the permit. At this point Tony was panicking. The police then turn to Lorenzo and they all started laughing. The two police officers turned out to be friends of Lorenzo's, who he convinced to help prank Tony. The great part is that Lorenzo recorded Tony's reactions during the whole situation.

Because Lorenzo and my dad both worked for the airlines for years, they get tickets for cheap or no cost. Italy was just a stop on the same trip as the peach tree incident, and my parents and I were going to Thailand afterwards. Lorenzo and his wife tagged along. It was a great trip he provided laughs for all of us but for the first time in my life I saw Lorenzo get angry and to this day, it's still the only time I've seen him angry. We were in Pukhet and got into a cab and asked him to bring us to a hotel. He would call a hotel before we got there to see if there was room available, but all of these hotels were charging us a lot of money. It became obvious that he was calling the hotels for a cut of what we were going to pay. Lorenzo was sitting in the front of the car and yelled, "ENOUGH! STOP THE CAR!" and we all got out and took our bags from the trunk. He then went to the driver's window and angrily told him, "You can't play these

games with Italians! We invented these games and taught them to you! Now go!” The driver sped away with a look of terror on his face. This is one of those stories where it was heated in the moment, but now we look back and laugh about it.

Even though he pranks his friends, bends the law, and yells at cab drivers trying to scam him, Lorenzo is the kind of person that will always help out a friend in need and it truly is always an adventure when we get together. During his most recent visit, an older gentleman down the street was picking up apples off his lawn, as they had all fallen from a tree. Lorenzo was passing by and started to talk to him and found out that the man's wife was in the hospital. He offered to take the apples and make a pie for the man. Later that night when the pie was baked, he took it over and the man was very grateful, and I could tell that it meant a lot to him. I can say that the fun-loving part of Lorenzo has rubbed off on me, as sometimes I find myself saying or doing crazy things with friends just to make them laugh. I tell some friends stories of Lorenzo and none of them believe the things he and I have done. I haven't been to Italy for many years and when he visits he always asks when I'm going to go visit him. I should visit soon, because as well as needing a vacation, I'm running out of stories to tell.