

## COMMUNITY

# Humbling moments while in Italy



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Florence, Italy, was asleep as my husband and I crossed the Ponte Vecchio (old bridge) on an early Sunday morning. A few rowers were paddling the river greeting the sun.

Excitedly, we headed toward the train station destined for Rome with hopes to see and hear the new Pope Francis. The train sped peacefully past farms and small ancient villages. The colors of the day were brilliant. The homes were rustic pastels and the fields glittered with wild poppies that caressed the tracks.

Once in Rome, we joined the pilgrimage, by metro, heading to the Vatican. The metro was packed. We were crammed, having to stand while holding

the overhead rail. Although uncomfortable, it was pleasurable listening to the hum of multiple languages. I was mesmerized by the many different cultures. The journey was brief and upon exiting everyone was parading to St. Peter's Basilica.

My husband stood, waiting for me to catch up. His demeanor had changed from excited to quite serious. He said, "I have been pickpocketed." I stared back in stunned disbelief while numerous thoughts rapidly raced through my mind. How could this be?

I was disappointed. I knew in that moment the day had just changed and we would not be going to St. Peter's Basilica. Instead, I knew we had to deal with this crisis and search for the police.

Except for the crowd heading to the Basilica, the rest of Rome was barely awake. We

found two police outside the police museum. When questioned, they directed us to a nearby station. Unfortunately, it was closed until Monday. We saddled back to the officers again and this time they directed us to a second station. This station was a police dormitory and closed. This was true for the third station as well. We were completely frustrated.

I approached a middle-aged couple getting out of their car and asked if they could help us. They kindly walked with us for approximately a mile to a station they believed was open. They were correct. Before entering the station, we hugged them "goodbye." They were strangers who went out of their way to befriend us and we were extremely grateful to them.

Inside, two police officers appeared. A report was completed identifying a stolen

wallet, credit cards and a significant amount of money. We left with an official stamped document. Behind us was another couple with the same issue. Gypsies had stolen from them as well.

We felt invaded. Yes, we had been forewarned that gypsies were heavy in the cities. Yes, we were cautious. And, yes, they were better at this game than us.

The problem with gypsies has been pervasive in Europe. Back on April 21, 2013, Barbara Walters did a documentary for ABC on gypsies in Europe, especially Spain and Italy. The documentary exposed the many clever ways gypsies steal and some trends. First, gypsies prefer larger cities to congregate. They thrive in extremely busy spots, like the metro or crowded buses. Second, gypsies prefer Americans to people from other countries,

since Americans often carry more money. The guide in this documentary also pointed out ways that tourist could protect their assets. He suggests wearing a money belt or having clothing with hidden pockets. Another suggestion is to carry as little money as possible and leave what you can in a hotel safe.

However, if the gypsies have outsmarted you and stolen your money, what's next? You have little choice but to regroup, learn from the experience and make sure that this one day doesn't darken the trip. Once the practical, financial details are ironed out, it is the latter that needs the focus.

Being a victim is a powerless experience and regaining a semblance of control is imperative. Talking with others can be helpful. Learning that you are not alone and many have experienced this same ordeal,

helps normalize your feelings/experience. Expressing emotions is important. Of course you are angry and embarrassed about being victimized. Who likes someone stealing from them? It is invasive. Anger can be constructive if mobilized in a healthy way. In this situation, for example, it can be the undercurrent to keeping you safe from other thieves.

Learn to let go. Begin to take in new experiences and lessen the focus on the one "bad day." Allow yourself the opportunity to enjoy the rest of the trip. After all, Europe is beautiful and there is much to see and learn.

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