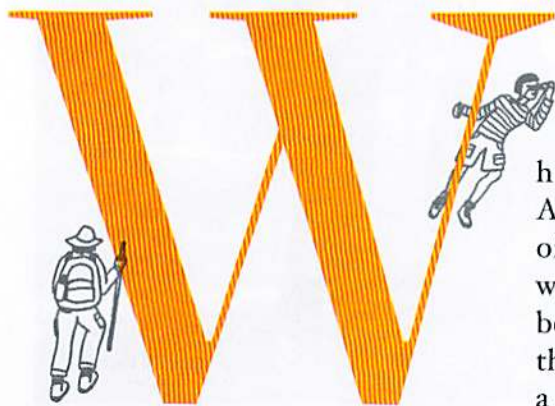


"If you want to see Italy, he's your guy," says Oprah, with Angelo at the *Godfather* house.

A photograph of an elderly man, Angelo Amico, and Oprah Winfrey standing on a balcony in Rome. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. Angelo is wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, while Oprah is wearing a light blue top, white pants, and a large white sun hat. The balcony has a dark metal railing and is decorated with green plants and a yellow flower. The background shows a stone wall with blue shutters and a hanging lantern.

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Think you've seen Italy? Until you've hit the road with Angelo Amico—standing in Al Pacino's shoes on the *Godfather* balcony, peeking into the pope's closet—you haven't seen anything. **SARAH LYALL** takes a spin through Rome with Oprah's favorite tour guide.



hen you explore Rome with Angelo Amorico, these are some of the things you will not do: You will not wait in line. You will not become prohibitively hungry or thirsty. You will not tote around a stack of outdated guidebooks.

You will not spend a whole afternoon in an enormous church, hearing someone drone on about obscure artworks that are barely visible to the naked eye because that is what your tour is doing that day and *God forbid* you should depart from the tour.

“When clients leave, I want them to leave with the most beautiful smile,” Angelo is saying as we glide through the streets in one of the black Mercedes vans that his company, Access Italy, uses for its tours.

Angelo, who is 57 and looks like a twinkly, better-fed, benevolent version of Larry David, has just treated me and my 13-year-old daughter, Alice, to a behind-the-scenes tour of Il Campidoglio and Rome’s city hall. We had been walking through the building, arguing about politics, when suddenly Angelo opened a nondescript little door and we stepped outside onto the building’s rooftop. Dizzy from the height, we walked across the roof, gazing at the far hills of Rome and at something equally gratifying: a swarm of tourists far below us, undoubtedly being lectured about the political, social, and economic legacies of the fourth-century emperor Constantine I and worrying about whether they were going to miss the bus to the restaurant.

On the way out, we dropped in on the mayor himself, Gianni Alemanno, a small, courtly figure who ushered us onto his private balcony. “When I was here with Oprah, the mayor wasn’t in,” Angelo said, and I felt a prickle of pride—he was in for us! Angelo met Oprah about 15 years ago and has guided her in Italy three times, enough so that they now consider each other friends. “In the early ’90s, my lawyer said to me, ‘If you’re going to Italy, I know the guy you should meet—he’ll take good care of you,’”

Oprah says. “And that’s an understatement when it comes to Angelo. He seems to know *everybody* in the whole country.” She is one of a number of notable clients, among them Diane Sawyer, Will and Jada Pinkett Smith, and Michael J. Fox. Not that Angelo recognized Fox. “I asked him, ‘What do you do?’ and he told me, ‘I’m an actor,’” Angelo says. “I thought, *He’s a short guy with a backpack and jeans*. I wondered how this college kid had enough money to pay for me.”

Still, the bulk of Angelo’s business comes from regular people—regular being a relative term, since he charges an average of \$500 a day. He has about 50 guides across Italy and matches the tour to the client. If you are an oenophile, you might go to the Badia a Passignano winery, an estate that dates back to the year 395 (and where it is rumored Galileo once taught math). You could study the work of Caravaggio, or visit an olive farm, or sail down the Amalfi coast. Or you could simply waddle from restaurant to restaurant, blissed-out on pasta.

He gets all kinds, Angelo says—from hard-core fact-seekers to rank amateurs who lose heart at Famous Building Number Two and clamor instead for Cup of Coffee Number Three. “After five minutes, I understand what they want to do,” Angelo boasts. Many of his clients (90 percent of whom are American) want to go to un-touristy spots, and Angelo obliges. For example, he knows a man who has the key to a door off the Sistine Chapel. The door looks as if it



1914 Barnstorming adrenaline junkie Georgia “Tiny” Broadwick makes the first-ever free fall from a plane.



1916 In a tenement neighborhood in Brooklyn, Margaret Sanger opens the doors of the country’s first birth control clinic. Outside at least 150 women are waiting.



1916 Movie star Mary Pickford insists on becoming her own producer. America’s Sweetheart is no sucker.



1937 Amelia Earhart disappears on the ultimate adventure—her attempt to fly around the globe. In a note to her husband, she explains: “I want to do it because I want to do it.”



1938 Anna Mary Robertson Moses sells her first paintings, at age 78. Known as “Grandma” Moses, she continues to paint for 23 years, becoming one of the century’s most renowned folk artists.



1941 Protofeminist superhero Wonder Woman first appears in a comic book, fighting off Fascists in star-spangled hot pants.



1946 Super-geekette Dorothy Hodgkin cracks penicillin’s chemical makeup with an X-ray crystallographer. (Eighteen years later she’ll earn the Nobel Prize.)



1953 Jackie Cochran flies an F-86 Sabre jet through the sound barrier. She learned to fly so she could travel around selling cosmetics, but it turns out trashing speed records is a lot more fun.



1959 On the edge of the Serengeti Plain, Mary Leakey digs up and pieces together a 1.7-million-year-old hominid skull, one of the most important finds in the history of archeology.

would lead to an old storage area, but inside is a robing room for pontiffs—where a cardinal changes from his red robe into a fancy new white one after being elected pope. The vestments are waiting there, Angelo says, in three sizes: “one for a fat pope, one for a medium pope, and one for a skinny pope.”

Alas, we don’t get to see it; Angelo’s friend has the flu. But we go to the Vatican anyway. As we enter the massive structure, he correctly reads the family mood. “I don’t want to take you through the whole museum—that would take five hours,” he says. “So we do the shortcut.” This is my kind of tour, especially because of the information Angelo shares, such as how Raphael twotimed his noble girlfriend with the woman he really loved, a baker’s daughter, and how the guy in one of the murals is a dead ringer for Sylvester Stallone in his early days.

Angelo has been in the guide business for 28 years, after first working as a hairdresser. “The women drove me nuts,” he says. “They came in with photographs of Farrah Fawcett, with the frosted hair, saying, ‘That is what I want to look like.’ And I said, ‘I’m a man, not a god.’”

He was living in Boston then, having moved there to learn English. That is where he met his American wife, with whom he has two sons, Simone, 29, and Marco, 27. They work with their father in the business, often providing a wry corrective chorus to his sometimes excessive exuberance. Once, they recall, Angelo was showing around two American women in their 50s. Told they didn’t have husbands, Angelo promised to find them nice Italian boyfriends, only to learn they were already happily paired up—with each other.



Angelo at Rome's Trevi Fountain.

“Some of my most fun times on Earth have been spent with Angelo, trekking through Rome searching for the best tiramisu.” —Oprah

After a spaghetti dinner at Antica Pesa near the Gianicolo (“Sophia Loren’s favorite restaurant,” Angelo says), we fall into bed exhausted, but wake up ready for another day of serendipitous encounters. First we are joined by Max Parini, one of Angelo’s guides, a champion explicator of historical context. Leaving the car in what is clearly not a parking space—“We are Italians! We will park in the middle of the street!” Angelo says—we visit the Sancta Sanctorum, a chapel once used by popes. The door is

locked. Not surprisingly, Angelo knows the guy with the key. We go in, leaving the other tourists to gape wistfully through a grated window. There is some confusion about the provenance of a sacred piece of wood on the wall. The guide says it came from the bench where the disciples sat at the Last Supper, but as we leave, Angelo whispers to me, “Last time, he said it came from the table.” We accept that it is historic and leave it at that.

Then we head [CONTINUED ON PAGE 187]



{Big Experience #4}
**LANDING A
 TEN-SEAT
 TWIN-ENGINE
 TURBOPROP
 PLANE AFTER
 THE PILOT
 DIES**

“The pilot’s head fell back, and I saw the whites of his eyes. We were on autopilot climbing

2,000 feet per minute north of Ft. Myers, Florida, and the sky was filled with numerous other planes. If we continued on our course, in about eight minutes we’d be at the aircraft’s altitude limit, causing the plane to stall and spin out of the sky. I had piloted a small single-engine plane before, but never one this powerful—and I knew nothing about autopilot. Thankfully, a Miami air traffic controller who was also an experienced pilot came to my aid. She convinced me that I had to turn off the autopilot and fly and land the plane by hand. There were dozens of unfamiliar controls

in front of me. One of our daughters was vomiting, and the other one was crying. I told my family to pray and pray hard. I was operating on pure adrenaline—a focused fear. When we flew over the Gulf of Mexico, the sky was a light blue that perfectly matched the light blue ocean. When the plane dipped below the clouds, suddenly I couldn’t distinguish sky from sea or up from down. It was like driving a race car in the Indy 500 in pitch darkness.”

—**Doug White, who in 2009 safely landed a King Air 200 in Ft. Myers, Florida, with his wife and two teenage daughters onboard**

fisherman in the water. They pulled him onboard—his face was gray, his body shaking, his suit full of water. “He’s freezing to death,” Gwen said. She watched three Japanese crew members prop him upright to keep him awake, amazed they managed to stay balanced on the waterbed-like floor as the raft rolled in the two-story waves.

When Gwen heard the first buzz of a helicopter overhead, after 5 A.M., she knew the rescuers would look first for any men still in the water and could only hope the chopper crew would spot her raft as well. She thought about seeing her kids. The last time she’d spoken to them, phoning from the dock two days before, it had been for only an instant—just enough time to say, “I love you.” Over and over, she repeated to herself: *I am not going to die. I am going home.*

Suddenly, the group heard an unfamiliar noise outside the raft. A crew member opened the tent door, and Gwen saw that they had banged right up against the metal hull of another fishing boat, the *Alaska Warrior*. “We were actually on the hull before I knew the *Warrior* was anywhere around,” Gwen recalls. “I mean, that mother’s loud, but the waves were breaking so hard and the wind was howling so much, we didn’t even hear it inside the life raft.”

She watched as two guys from her raft flung themselves at lines hanging from the ship and started to scramble up. Gwen knew she didn’t have the strength to do the same thing, but she was afraid to stay much longer in the raft. “The water was slamming us into the side of the *Warrior*. I thought, *Oh my God, I’ve lived through all this and now the Warrior’s gonna crush us.*”

Then the Japanese man who’d helped Gwen motioned for her to come toward him. The rescue ship lowered a ring-shaped lifesaving sling; the man slipped it around Gwen’s chest. A crane hoisted her up into the night air and placed her gently onto the *Warrior’s* ice-coated deck, where she collapsed. “I didn’t even care if I got up at that point. I was like, *This deck feels good!*” Gwen recalls. One of the *Warrior’s* crew members carried her into the galley. “I heard people screaming my name. It was the observers on the *Warrior* and Jay, my co-observer. As soon as I saw him, I just started crying.”

NEARLY TWO YEARS LATER, BACK HOME with her kids, Gwen flips through a box of photos and clippings, and pulls out a picture of herself from her first year in Alaska. She’s on the deck of a small boat next to an enormous bin of just-caught fish, dressed in orange rain gear, and smiling broadly as she grasps a two-foot halibut in her hands. She

looks content remembering the moment, but tears up when talk turns to the *Alaska Ranger* and David Silveira.

The *Alaska Warrior* rescued 22 people from two life rafts, most with only minor scrapes and traumas, and delivered them less than a day later to Dutch Harbor. Twenty-one more survivors were individually airlifted from the freezing waves by two coast guard helicopters, which delivered them to the *Munro*, a coast guard cutter that had been sprinting toward the disaster site since the *Ranger’s* first Mayday call. Silveira, who was also pulled from the water by the coast guard, was one of five crew members who didn’t make it. When they hauled up his body, his survival suit was full of water, perhaps because it was ripped or damaged. Most likely, he suffered from hypothermia, passed out, and drowned. Gwen was on the *Warrior* when the news came that he’d died, and she was distraught. “The other fishermen kept coming up to me, going, ‘It’s okay, you’re okay, you’re not hurt.’ And I was like, ‘I am hurt. I’m hurt because my friend died. I’m not okay.’”

Soon after her rescue, Gwen called her family from the ship to let them know she was all right, but she had to remain in Alaska for ten days to provide information for the coast guard investigation. Six months later, Gwen was at home when a friend e-mailed her a story about another Alaskan fishing boat that sank; among the seven dead were two men Gwen had worked with up north. By then, Gwen already knew she was not going back. “I had a hard time of it after I came home. I had panic attacks. I became a worrywart—supervigilant about everything.” She saw a counselor for 18 months, but ultimately, she says, it was prayer that got her through the grief.

Was it worth it—risking everything for a dream? “That job fulfilled me more than anything,” she says. “I can still close my eyes and take myself back to some of my favorite moments out there. The first time I saw a pod of whales, I stood on deck with tears running down my face. Some people live their whole lives and never experience anything they enjoy so much.”

Gwen pauses—convinced, it seems, of the inevitability of her choice. “Being an observer wasn’t just a job,” she says. “It was the first thing I ever did that was almost just for me.” Happily, her next pursuit is only slightly less watery: She hopes to get a master’s degree in ichthyology—the study of fish—and eventually teach marine biology. Despite her harrowing experience, the determination that first brought Gwen to Alaska has survived. **Q**

OH, THE PLACES YOU’LL GO!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 150

to Giolitti, whose 40-plus gelatos—from hazelnut to papaya—are reputed to be favorite treats of the Italian parliament when the task of legislating becomes too arduous. Angelo knows one of the owners, Nazzareno Giolitti, a lion of a man exuding Italian machismo, who hands Alice and me aprons and leads us through the main steps of gelato-making—mushing the fruit, stirring in cream, sugar, and milk, and then tossing the whole mixture into giant churning machines. He calls ice cream “the most important, most complete food in the world,” and he is not kidding. The secret, he says, is passion. Also simple, fresh ingredients in the perfect proportion. “It’s like women,” he says, clearly a connoisseur. “If a woman puts on too much makeup, she ruins everything. Better to be natural.”

What is there left to do? We are too tired to see anything else and expect we might never eat again, either. As we say goodbye to Angelo, he reminds us that we have promised to come back with the rest of the family. He will take us to Positano, on the coast, and we will swim and eat seafood and see nothing we don’t want to see. “We’ll keep in touch,” he says. “Leave it to me. I’ll tell you where to go.” **Q**

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