

## Trouble with Truffles

*By Sharon Buchan*

We were stationed in Belgium. We were serving with NATO. I had read the book, *The Ugly American*. We wanted to be very sensitive to European customs, folkways, etc. We tried very hard to have good manners and learn a few words in each language. We bought a Volks Wagon camper which came in very handy for transporting others with us from country to country.

I remember what a disappointment we were to our Italian friend, Pino. We discovered that Holland had the most wonderful markets. Selling wonderful cheese, lunch meats and homemade loaves of bread, hot out of the oven. After loading the camper with these tasty goodies we drove out into the country to make up our sandwiches. When we popped the top up on the camper Pino became quite upset. Asking why we did not stay in the city and go to a restaurant. One must have a few glasses of vino first. You have a few courses and then an after-dinner wine. Lunch could take up to two or more hours. We tried to explain we did not have this kind of time, but to no avail. He let us know that we did not know how to enjoy life and live it to the fullest. Pino did some pacing, ranting and raving outside of the camper. He even gestured to the heavens a few times and I thought I heard him say something about Dumb Americans.

Little did I know that I would later embarrass myself like never before. We ventured on to Orvieto, my favorite place in Italy. We drove our camper up the one-lane, winding dirt road. All the while praying no one would be driving down that same road. There I ordered a pasta dish with truffles. I later found out that truffles can cost 350 dollars for two pound and now they run into the thousands. Our waiter removed the bowl of fresh, grated parmesan cheese. When I asked for the cheese to be returned, he became quite cantankerous and almost threw the bowl at me. When I asked him what was wrong he also gestured to the sky saying, "Truffles with parmesan." This time I was sure I heard DUMB AMERICAN. The room was full of other NATO friends who asked, "What did you do?" I told them about asking our waiter to return the parmesan so that I could sprinkle it on my pasta with truffles. They all said, "We would have done the same." It could have been my imagination but I thought our friends avoided sitting with us for the remainder of the trip.