

A Charming Intellectual and His Political Passion

Stephanie Longo (July 07, 2008)



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The terremoto, the grande sisma brought us together. I never met [Rocco Caporale](#) [2], who died this past week, in person but our e-mail exchanges while I was completing my Master's thesis at the University of Scranton will always remain precious to me.

Our conversations started simply enough; a mutual friend told me that I had to get in touch with Prof. Caporale since he was the authority on the 1980 Irpinia-Basilicata Earthquake. I had already heard of Prof. Caporale and looked forward to being able to discuss my family's homeland with him.



When I saw Prof. Caporale's reply in my inbox, before opening it I immediately pictured a stereotypical academic—cold, stuffy, distant. I remember taking a deep breath, hoping that he wouldn't be too annoyed that some grad student from Pennsylvania was bothering him about his research.

The Prof. Caporale I came to know through our e-mail exchanges was warm, friendly, always willing to answer my questions... the complete opposite of what I had pictured. We remained in contact every so often even after my graduation; always remembering our common link, our beautiful Irpinia.

Although Prof. Caporale was not born in Irpinia, to me, that is just as much a part of his bloodstream as it is mine. I could tell in our e-mails just how much he loved all of the Province of Avellino, how he was willing to do anything in his power to see our Irpinia fulfill its destiny and truly recover from the damage wrought that fateful November day in 1980. In fact, in one of his e-mails he wrote, "Irpinia is an acquired taste... a second home."

The Caporale Archives, part of the [Disaster Research Center of the University of Delaware](#) [3] will, of course, forever be testament to a man who devoted almost 30 years to the study of the most tragic event ever to befall the Province of Avellino.

What Prof. Caporale probably did not know was that his love for Irpinia was returned to him by its residents. No matter when I would visit the province, when I would discuss my research people would always mention his name with a smile. They knew how much he loved them. And, perhaps, that is an even stronger memorial to him.

Grazie, Professore. Che Dio La benedica.

Below is an e-mail that professor Caporale wrote to Stephanie Longo in 2005, when she was writing her dissertation on post-earthquake Irpinia. In it, the noted sociologist recalls the political impact that his research had in Italy at the time. We publish it here as a testimony of the civil and political passion of this prominent intellectual.

The Editors

Dear Stephanie,

Thanks for contacting me. Paolo has given you the right indication, since, for better or for worse, I did spend ten years monitoring the reconstruction from the Irpinia/Basilicata Earthquake of 1980, first under two grants from the NSF and then under a grant from the Italian government and from the Basilicata regional government.

I believe ours (I had 40 research assistants working for me) was the largest and best study of a natural disaster ever. Of course, it got us into big trouble since we discovered and made public the embezzlement of tens of billions of dollars by unscrupulous politicians and mafia people...This led to my testifying in front of the parliamentary commission on the reconstruction, and because of this public audition I made big enemies among some of the Italian politicians of the time, one of whom the Hon. (nothing honorable about him.....) De Mita had to resign from his position as Prime Minister of Italy....

It is a long and complex story and it would take weeks to narrate. Indicate to me from what viewpoint you are approaching the issue and what is the hypothesis you intend to demonstrate and I will be glad to help you with your assignment.

You may want to know that all the material relating to the study I conducted, I donated to the University of Delaware, Disasters Research Center, in Newark, Delaware, and now constitutes the



Caporale Archives on the Irpinia earthquake. It consists of nearly 30 boxes of material and is accessible to you as a researcher if you are interested.

Best regards to Paolo and best wishes with your dissertation.

Prof. Rocco Caporale

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[2] <http://www.americoggi.info/2008/07/03/6082-si-spento-rocco-caporale-il-sociologo-era-professore-emerito-alla-st-johns-universit>

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