

13 agosto 2025

Busy squirrels overhead somewhere in the dogwood tree, nibbling seeds—can't tell precisely what, but I hear their sharp cracks. Soon I'll be in my gardening attire—green slip-on shoes, green gloves to match, the straw traveling hat my mother-in-law got me—on a sultry summer day, but now, after a run in the 93° heat, 50% humidity, I lie collapsed and sweating in a wrought iron bistro chair, tongue hanging out, cold Pellegrino bottle pressed against my neck.

I'm dreaming of an upcoming trip to Italy. A dawn run of the seven hills of Rome for my birthday.

Every day, I study Italian. Fluency is on my To Do in This Lifetime list. I listen to Italian stories, read Italian news. I've racked up 1,040 days learning on Duolingo (to be fair, mostly Italian, but also French, German, Hebrew, and Japanese). If we are in a country, I attempt to speak some of that country's native tongue. I find it fun, and the effort is appreciated, I think—the effort and intention if not the actual words, which are often unintelligible. World peace through communication and understanding, one interaction at a time, perché no?

While running, I listen to famous American songs in Italian. In fact, I wrote much of this post first in Italian, then had it translated into English. Pretty funny!

So, a Rome plan for my birthday: perfetto! December 1, I'll run the seven hills of Rome at dawn, then meet up with my friends and family for a cappuccino, possibly a cornetto!

I'm debating whether to start the run at the Bocca della Verità, the Mouth of Truth—somehow fitting for a birthday, but perhaps too much, too strong—or the Circus Maximus. Perhaps start with the truth, end with the circus?

I'm also debating whether to include Vatican Hill, not technically one of the seven but tempting as it increases the challenge from a 10K to 15K, approximately.

The hills—Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, Viminal—form the geographical heart of Rome, the boundaries of the ancient city. They were once seven settlements that eventually acted together, starting on Palatine Hill with Romulus and Remus in 753 BCE. Romulus and Remus were twins, sons of the god Mars (some say), though they didn't know it at first. Abandoned by the river to die, they were instead saved by the Father of the River, Tiberius, and, well, it's complicated. The brothers fought over which hill to found the city on, and you can tell from the city's name who won. Rome seems a better name than... Remu?

All of which doesn't really mean a ton for my run. Except, in a way, it does. Running is one of my traveling companions. A way to become present. To wake up and reset. I have so many vivid memories of "place"—the specialness of a location—that have happened while outside on a jog. Perhaps the Roman hills will offer great vistas from which to gain

perspective on this, my single human life. One of my favorite things about the city is how alive it is, new, modern, yet still wearing the beauty and importance of past centuries in grand form.

Tonight I'll finish watching *Roman Holiday* with Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck, to help me decide about the Bocca della Verità—which is featured in the film. (A bit of unnecessary, fun research!) It is said that the intense visage will bite the hand off of any liar who dares place theirs in its gaping maw.

On a hill in Rome, I will start a new age. With both hands intact.