



## Antonio Raffaele Placanica

November 12, 1932 - July 31, 2024

ANTONIO R. PLACANICA

Nov 12, 1932-July 31, 2024

Antonio Raffaele Placanica died peacefully on July 31st in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the age of 91. He confronted death as he confronted life: with acceptance but not apology, with understanding but not sentiment. He was a person of complexity and contradiction. He loved and was loved by many, yet could be dismissive of people and activities that didn't appeal to him. He was curious about many subjects and single-minded in his opinions. He could be acerbic and utterly charming, often in the same sentence. To those who knew him well, he was and will remain an unforgettable part of their lives.

Antonio was born Anthony Ralph Blasting on November 12, 1932, in Herkimer, New York. His parents were Anthony F. Blasting and Lucy Shevat Blasting. He had one sibling, his brother Ralph, who died November 5, 2021. After retiring from his career as a schoolteacher, he began intensive genealogical research on his family: Placanica/Gimigliano on his father's side and Scivetti/Depalo on his mother's. He traveled regularly to Puglia and Calabria, and in 1997 he changed his name to Antonio Raffaele Placanica. He was especially known and loved in Giovinazzo, the seaside town in Puglia where his mother had been born in 1907. He made many friends there as he enjoyed his cafe macchiato in the morning, a Campari in the afternoon, and

fresh octopus salad at the end of the day.

Antonio's multi-faceted life took him to the monastery, the military, and middle school. He left home at the age of 13 to study first for the priesthood and then to become a Franciscan friar. He abandoned his seminary studies for both health and philosophical reasons, returning home briefly to work in one of Herkimer's furniture factories. In 1952 he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed as a radio operator in the Marshall Islands. Thanks to the GI Bill, in 1956-57 he attended Siena College in Loudonville, New York and then transferred to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, majoring in German. He completed a teaching certificate and began a career teaching German, English, and Social Studies at Franklin Junior High in the Wayne-Westland School District. For over 20 years he had a profound and positive influence on many young people because he truly cared about expanding their horizons. He enjoyed his students and made life-long friends among his teaching colleagues. He was less enamored of administrators. "Those who can't teach," he was fond of saying, "become principals." Although he was a committed teacher, he did not hesitate to retire at the age of 54 so that he could enjoy an unrestricted life. He spent the next 30 years traveling as often as possible to Italy and Germany, sometimes in the company of friends but often alone and for weeks at a time. With his distinguished beard, stylish clothes, and broad knowledge of culture and history, he was often taken to be a professor or freelance intellectual—and he could hold his own in any conversation.

Antonio spent 45 years of his life with his partner, Norman D. Cramer. They were men who preferred to keep their private life private, less for reasons of public propriety than their own sense of decorum. They did not hide or apologize for their lifestyle, nor did they feel the need to display it. Although Antonio was in many ways fiercely independent, his life was undeniably diminished after Norman's passing in 2007.

The man that Antonio became was of his own making. Born into the working-class immigrant society of central New York State, he became a lover of art, dance, opera, history, languages and literature. His critical framework was simple but consistent: "If it's popular, it can't be any good." He chose his friends carefully and relished an evening of good food and conversation. He avoided crowds, games, and anything that might be called "entertainment." He declared himself not very sociable but managed to charm almost anyone he met. Despite his best efforts at misanthropy, he was warm, witty, loving, and compassionate. Antonio's generous heart and open spirit made the day a little better for the people he met, and changed some of our lives forever.

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# Tribute Wall

SM

“*Ralph Blasting, Jorge Martin, and I made a doughty trio during our year on JYM-Junior Year in Munich [1979-80]. I first met “Unc” when he visited Ralph and he rapidly became the honorary uncle to Jorge and me. I’m forever grateful to Unc for opening up himself to these crazy, German-besotted young people. As I had no more uncles still alive, Unc became my adopted uncle in spirit. He teased, cajoled, taught, supported, and entertained me over the almost 50 years we knew one another. His kindness was supreme—we still treasure the knitted blanket and pillow he made for “Baby Sarah” (now almost 30 years old). He regaled me with tales of Italy’s boot—and Puglia has long remained a bucket list goal simply due to his waxing eloquently about the people, cuisine, and sights. I had a delightful stay with him and Norman when we visited historic Greenfield Village. He also periodically treated me to dinner at the Black Swam in Kalamazoo during the Medieval Institute where we would drink and giggle like teenagers until we left at closing. It always comes down to people: his loyalty and humor made him the most beloved of mentors. I’ll miss you, Unc!*”



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**Susan Morrison** - August 18, 2024 at 03:54 PM

MG

“ I met Antonio first in 1980 in Munich. We became friends very soon. When I came to Detroit to study at Wayne State I spent my first two weeks at his and Norman’s house in Dearborn. I was his guest many times enjoying his excellent cooking, his Manhattans and his wit. Anthony saw me starting my family, he became a good friend to my wife, too, and my girls. We kept meeting in Munich, Bonn and Hamburg. I enjoyed his critical mind, his friendship, his comments on politics, church, writers, films.

I am so glad that I could see him in Ann Arbor in 2020 when we met and had a good time just a few weeks before Corona started. My wife and I will miss him dearly. May he rest in peace.

Michael Göring, Hamburg, Germany

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Michael Göring - August 11, 2024 at 01:46 PM

DM

“ When I think of Antonio I think of his love and visits to Italy. He came home with pictures and gifts. I treasure all, especially the beautiful paper necklace he bought at an Italian shop that only sold items made of paper. He taught me a few Italian words, I was not a good student.

I see that I am not the only one familiar with his culinary abilities. I have enjoyed many lunch offerings, especially of beans and cornbread.

We shared a love of paintings and ceramics, early music concerts and conversation. I turned the TV off when he came to visit. He had a sense of humor. He told me the story of his students getting to class early and covered his desktop with Smurfs, and the time in the Air Force when he was on KP duty he accidentally stepped in a tub of pancake batter. The chef just laughed and stirred the batter, mud and all for breakfast the next morning.

Smart he was! I don't know how many languages he knew. He was very philosophical and was considering teaching a class in Mythology to Lurie Terrace residents, the place where lived. Antonio was intelligent, loving, kind and generous. I will think of him every time I wear the scarf he knitted for me. I almost forgot to mention his knitting skills.

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Dorothy Mitchell - August 08, 2024 at 11:37 AM

JJ

“ I can't remember when I met Mr Blasting. My mother and he were colleagues at FJH. I did have him as my English teacher. I thought I was awful at English but he always reassured me that I was doing wonderful. He was part of our family. I love his love of pottery and wild rice. I love how he could wash white shirts and make them look so exotic and crisp. He was such a great conversationalist, was honest, and truly cared.

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Jennifer Ann Jennings - August 07, 2024 at 09:10 PM

JL

“ Though we weren't related by blood, Antonio Placanica was always "Uncle Anton" to me. My grandmother, Rosie "Oma" Naegele, was like a sister to him, and I fondly remember the weeks in the summer he would spend at Oma's house as he visited family and friends in Upstate NY.

*I lived with Oma for nearly ten years of my life, so during those weeks, Uncle Anton was the best roommate I could ever ask for. I was constantly in awe of his knowledge of all things culinary, culture and philosophy. It was Uncle Anton who taught me how to make German Goulash, Rouladen, and Sauerkraut from scratch. As we shared the meals we prepared together, Uncle Anton would love to talk with me about the things you weren't supposed to talk about at the dinner table, i.e. religion and politics. Uncle Anton also encouraged me to continue my education, no matter what, as he considered being an educator to be a very noble pursuit, even if it didn't make you flush with cash. I can honestly say that he is one of the reasons I wanted to become a teacher and one of the reasons I continue to be a lifelong learner. He encouraged me to get my doctorate and be the most well rounded person I could.*

*When it comes to Uncle Anton, I regret two things: 1) Him not living long enough to see me obtain my doctorate and 2) The fact that I didn't take the time to call him, one last time, when I knew he was on hospice. I really wished I spared a moment to tell him thank you for being there for me when I was younger, and I love you.*

*I know Uncle Anton was not afraid to die. Over one of our dinners he simply stated to me that "it's a part of life." I also believe that he had no fear of death because he knew that he lived a full life of learning, family, and love. Rest in peace, Uncle Anton, or as you might have preferred, Riposa in Pace.*

*With Love,  
Josh Lanza*

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**Joshua Lanza** - August 06, 2024 at 11:30 AM