

Anne Fortier on JULIET THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY



It all started with my mother, who grew up in Denmark but never felt at home there. As soon as she was out of high school, she ran away to Verona, Italy; from then on, she always considered herself more Italian than Danish. Later, she returned to Denmark; and when I was born we became a little two-person Italian island in the middle of conformist Denmark—everything about my home was Italian, and I spent a lot of time learning Italian and listening to opera with Mom. Needless to say, all my friends thought she was rather eccentric. When we went on vacation, we would always go to Verona, and we would always have to visit Juliet’s balcony and grave—it was tradition. One of my greatest treasures was a little plastic statuette with Romeo and Juliet. Tacky, but hey, I didn’t care.

I began writing when I was 11 (I sent my first manuscript to a Danish publisher at age 13—that makes me shiver, actually), and whenever I had a chance, I would sit in a corner of my room and write. I was an awkward late-bloomer (very much like Julie in **JULIET**) who never had boyfriends except the ones I created for myself on the typewriter. I suppose it was lonely growing up alone with Mom; and that was my good fortune, for it left me hours and hours to read and write. Mom always encouraged me to do that instead of helping with the dishes at night, saying, “anybody can do the dishes, but not anybody can write.”

After a while, Mom started her own business and didn’t have time to travel; I went to university and became busy with classes and exams. But several years later I moved to the U.S. and Mom retired. She started traveling again, and this time she didn’t just want to go back to Verona; she wanted to explore something new. So she ended up in Siena in Tuscany, and she fell in love with the place. The first time I met her there, I was completely swept away by the medieval atmosphere. One evening, Mom said, “So, what are you going to write next?” When I didn’t reply right away, she looked at me in that special way of hers and said, “Did you know that the first version of *Romeo and Juliet* was set here in Siena?” I still remember that moment.

From then on, I started researching Siena history and the genealogy of the *Romeo and Juliet* story. It was a fantastic project, because it was something Mom and I could do together, despite living so far apart. I would be in the U.S., working in film and shaping my narrative, while she explored Siena, going to archives, visiting museums, talking to people—basically serving as my “eyes” on the ground. I would email her lists of things I would like her to check out, and she would sneak into banks and other locations and draw plans of the buildings. Amazingly, I have only been to Siena once since that first visit . . . everything else is based on Mom’s eyewitness accounts, drawings, and hundreds and hundreds of photos.

Obviously, I am going to dedicate **JULIET** to her!