

Now, let me introduce myself.

My name is Julian Rigotti and I am a South African born male of Italian descent. I have lived a modest, rather uneventful life and nobody will remember my name when I die. However, in some regards, I have lived a life that is worthy of the Gods.

I am a humble man. I believe in right and wrong, and I have spent a large portion of my adult life pining for what I have always considered: the unattainable.

By this, I am referring to my unbelievable fortune as I relive a moment in time every day that I thought was lost to me forever: The girl that I thought I had lost forever ...

Looking back, I can recall many a time when I was discouraged by my peers to pursue what was considered by many to be an unrealistic pipe dream or unhealthy obsession with the past.

My romantic outlooks on my relationship with Sheila seemed to be far too idealistic and just plain sad to most of my peers. However, my family supported me in my venture and as I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, I decided to risk it all and find my "Fusina Girl" again.

Now, you may ask; "What is a Fusina Girl" and my reply to you would be the following: The female embodiment of an outrageously romantic dream that I pined for during the darkest moments of my adult life.

Sheila Lam, is my Fusina Girl. An Asian beauty with a heart of gold that I shared two passionate nights with during the prime of my young adult life, during the period of ambition, freedom naivety and young misdirected optimism of my youth. In other words, the events that took place that defined the course of the rest of my life.

And with no further ado, let me begin my tale of love, passion, heartache and remorse; beginning with a hot European summer romance during my stay in Venice, Italy in 2003.

When I was 18 years old, I had set my mind on travelling to Italy in order to learn more about my Italian roots and while working in a wild hippy resort on the Venetian lagoon, I came across a young & very shy Asian Beauty, quietly sitting on a wall on her own, paradoxically, during one of the largest outdoor parties of the summer at a camp site then known as "Fusina", the wildest Kontiki stop in Europe.

*Now this was not any ordinary campsite. Much like Vegas, those who have been to Fusina however do not talk about Fusina, unless they are talking to one who has already been there.*

*Usually though, a simple nod of the head to one that has been to Fusina is enough, because those who have been, know what went on there during the hot Mediterranean summers of the late 90's and early 2000's ... and that is enough. We are all entitled to our sins.*

*Because Camping Fusina was a Kontiki tourist destination that began in the late 60's, I have come across many people who have been there over the years. Wealthy, respectful seniors, 30 somethings and elderly ladies and gentlemen ... Respectful people that you would never have known where once wild and free sunflower children of the past.*

But for me, Camping Fusina was something quite unique indeed. It was the origin of my love story, one like no other, unique to my beautiful wife and me; the young Asian Girl that I mentioned earlier.

I was in the Bar, amongst hundreds of different youths, young women flashing their boobs, drunk strangers grinding up against each-other and many nameless faces that are blank and lost to me to this day. Through the crowd I saw her, automatically I had to approach her and when I opened my mouth all I could muster was "Why are you sitting here all on your own?" - I smiled and so did she, and that was enough for me: The moment that would burn into my mind forever. For me it was over, I did not know it then but that smile would haunt me for the next 15 years of my life,

through marriage, divorce, success and failures, I felt incomplete until the day that I would be reunited with her once again.

*... in any event, after some small talk, I asked her to the lagoon edge. It was a beautiful, hot summers night with the humidity levels at nearly 100 percent. I mustered up the courage to ask her for a kiss, at the time, she did not know it but I was extremely nervous, ironically she saw this as a sign of confidence and after that kiss, we spent the next two days in each-others arms until the moment that we had to say goodbye.*

Now, to remind you. This was the early 2000's. There was no Facebook, no smart phone, no WiFi ... If you wanted to keep in contact with someone abroad, you had few options: Phone them, costing absurd unaffordable amounts of money, or write to them via snail mail, which was still popular back then or if you could afford internet, you could use email. It was expected that we would never see each other again but this is where the story really begins: She took the risk and just before getting onto that red Kontiki bus, she handed me a note with her email address on it as seen here. I did not even own an email account at the time and did not even know how to get one, (Hey, these things were not main stream yet) but I accepted the letter, read it, felt like death as I watched her at the back of the bus as it drove away and disappear for what I had presumed would really be forever).

The following day it all went belly up! I became very ill and had to leave the campsite. I travelled a hundred or more kms back to my grandparents home in Northern Italy in order to recover and it was later that I learned that the unthinkable had happened: several weeks later I received a letter from one of my friends that was working with me at Fusina. He had brought the letter back home with him after leaving the Campsite himself. The letter was from my beautiful Asian girl that I had spent such a wonderful two days with, lying on my back under the stars.

The unthinkable had indeed happened! This crazy girl had left her Tour group and travelled from Austria back to the campsite on her own in order to have a few more days with me before leaving again for Hong Kong. This time, the letter wrote that she missed me and had to see me one last time.

By the time that I had received the letter, she was long gone and after 4 months in late November, I returned back to South Africa where I opened an email account so that I could get back in contact with her again.

We spoke and kept contact for several months until my email account was closed by my service provider because I missed a payment. Back then you had to pay for email. Once I had managed to reconnect my account, I realized that it had been corrupted and I had lost every email that I had ever sent, including the ones from Sheila. I was unable to contact her and 15 years passed before I was able to speak to her again.

Now you must wonder how this happened? Well, I had kept all of the letters that she wrote to me in a little box that had gone missing while I was moving into my new apartment back in 2004. 15 years later, my handicapped sister discovered a piece of paper that she had planned to scribble on which fell out of one of my old school books. That is what she would have typically done ... instead she did a remarkably different thing. She can be very loud and boisterous but my father bent over on his laptop suddenly found her alongside him, quiet, with an unusual demeanour. She held out her hand and offered him a piece of paper. My father saw it was squared, and old, and recalled the many letters that a beloved uncle of his had written from Italy, precisely on such squared paper. A sense of nostalgia swelled in him as he reached out to accept it, his mind switched to Italian now to read what he was certain was one of the letters from his late uncle. Yet as he began to read it he realised that the words were not in Italian, but in English!

My sister, job done, smiled and without a word quietly left him.

He immediately realized what it was!

He sent me an email saying that he had this strange experience of Carmen approaching him and quietly handing him a note, smiling and leaving him without a word to read it.

He included the email address ... as he later explained, it was with sadness rather than with hope, as Life does not wait and this was now 15 years later.

He himself had heard me pine about my Fusina girl, the one that I could not forget, many times over the course of the 15 years that had passed.

One day, many years ago he saw a movie starring Ethan Hawke called "Before Sunrise".

I think it spoke to him about my Fusina girl so he told me all about it. Oh yes, I said to him, I know the movie, and have seen it more than once, and I always think about that girl.

Every now and again we would then watch the movie together – almost out of reverence for the gems that Life can throw up ... and caught up in the ending that had no resolution ...

Then some years later the sequel came out ... we both sat down to watch it ... and it was torture, we were on the edge of our seats, and once again an ending that was unresolved, ambiguous, with a huge question mark ... that, after all is Life.

I needed to explain this before I continued with the note ...

So, in any event, her email address was on the piece of paper.

After trying variations of that old email address that no longer existed I tried one last version.

It was 6 hours later that the impossible happened, that I received a return message that read: "Hi Julian".

Simple words, that felt like the radiance of a thousand suns!

I realized, that I had found my Fusina Girl again!

And it turned out that she too would watch "Before Sunrise" and wonder, like I did, what had happened to the boy she fell in love with, and was still in love with, that she had left her Kontiki tour for, only to find he was no longer there when she got back to Fusina ...

It was 2 weeks later that she landed in Cape Town South Africa and 3 months later in Hong Kong that we were married!

And finally after many years of wondering what happened to that shy beauty from Fusina, I felt a peace that I thought that I would never know.

We are happily married and have a wonderful life together.

I call her my Key, as she unlocked a side of me that I thought was lost forever.

She calls me her Cupid, the pet name that she gave me in Fusina all those years ago!

I love my wife and I dedicate this memoir to her and the 15 years that we were apart!