

Saying Goodbye to Naples' Last 'Acquaiola'

Roberta Cutillo (June 25, 2019)



Naples says goodbye to Carmelina, the city's last "acquaiola," known and beloved by all those who have passed her historic "water counter" at 30, Via dei Tribunali.

Carmela, or Carmelina, the historic waterseller of Naples' Via dei Tribunali passed away on June 24,



2019. The news was given by the globally renowned pizza-maker [Gino Sorbillo](#) [2], a long-time friend and neighbor, the historic Sorbillo Pizzeria being located right next door to her “banca dell’acqua,” or “water counter.”

"Ciao Carmela l'Acquaiola dei Tribunali...R.I.P." Sorbillo [tweeted](#) [3] on Monday morning.

Well into her 80s, Carmelina was a true institution, she represented an almost extinct yet emblematic figure, that of the “acquaiola.”

The term roughly translates to “waterseller,” and refers to men and women who sold water and later other refreshments such as pressed orange or lemon juice on the streets. Though the practice dates back to the Middle Ages, it had mostly died out but persisted in Naples, where it was still quite common as recently as in the 1960s and 70s.

Initially, acquaioli (sometimes also called “acquafrescai”) used carts and moved around the streets, later on however some began to settle into permanent shops.

Carmela’s “banca dell’acqua” - literally “water counter” - has occupied its current location at number 30 of Via Dei Tribunali since the late 1800s, surviving wars, earthquakes and even occasional acts of vandalism.

That marble countertop, always surrounded by bottles and framed by citrus fruits hanging overhead, is a time machine. Having remained almost identical throughout the ages while everything around it evolved, it stands as a monument to the city’s past - not just its History with a capital “H,” the one of kings, queens, noblemen and heroes - but to its real, human past preserved in popular traditions.

Carmela, reportedly Naples’ last true acquaiola, was what kept this particular tradition alive and it’s no wonder that the entire city is sad to see her go. However, the shop is there, still in the hands of her family, who can continue to carry it on.

Meanwhile, her funeral was held this morning in the famous Church of San Lorenzo Maggiore and her memory will live on, forever immortalized in the image of her small figure standing behind that marble counter.

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Links

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/carmela-acquiaolajpg>

[2] <https://www.sorbillonyc.com/>

[3] <https://twitter.com/ginosorbillo/status/1143166174332641292>