



Saving San Filippino

In every Italian town, there are churches and statues and fountains that have stood for centuries, giving us a window into times long ago. However, much of it is in danger of succumbing to time’s tendency to erode all that man makes. The Oratorio San Filippino is one of those sites—and Rita Richardson has decided to do something about it.

Located in Castiglion Fiorentino—a Tuscan hill town—San Filippino is a 17th century baroque chapel that was named for Saint Philip Neri, a 16th century priest known as the *Apostle of Rome*. His works started with helping the poor and the sick who suffered on the streets of Rome. In doing so, he gradually developed a following and created his own religious order called the Oratorians. Many Oratorian churches exist throughout Italy (and the world as well), one of them being San Filippino.

Rita, whose mother was born in Naples, stumbled across the Oratorio San Filippino while she was visiting her college-age son, who was studying abroad at the time. With boards covering its windows and plaster peeling off its outside walls, San Filippino looked like an abandoned building that had little to offer. However, when Rita entered the church, she discovered 400-year-old art, sculptures, and architecture—history that was fading away.



The history and craftsmanship that exists inside San Filippino.

So when Rita returned to the United States, she started the Friends of San Filippino, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring the church and preserving history. She reached out to the surrounding community to aid her mission, many of them answering the call. With the support of locals and donors from the States, Rita hopes to not only preserve the church and its historical Italian art, but also create a blueprint by which others can do the same.

Through this mission, she has become a part of the community, so much so that she’s begun teaching English classes to the community’s children. One of her lessons involved the story of Saint Philip Neri’s life and how his charitable works gave common people hope (he even taught them music in addition to providing food and shelter). Rita talked about a church that honored him, one in a beautiful little Tuscan town. Before long, the children began to realize that the town she was talking about was *their* town.

“Dov’è? Dov’è?” they asked. *Where is it? Where is it?*

Rita took the children outside and pointed just a few yards away from their school at a piece of history they didn’t know was there—and if it weren’t for Rita, would vanish forever.



San Filippino’s deteriorating walls that face the street.

Find out more about San Filippino and how you can help. Visit <http://friendsofsanfilippino.org/> and travel with Rita on her journey on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofSanFilippino/>