

BOLETTIN

BOGIANEN IN ACTION

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Our Tagline “Bogianen in Action”

First, by way of a premise, in modern written Piedmontese the letter *o* without an accent is pronounced like the Italian *u* as, for example, in *Boletin*. The verb *bogé* means “to move” and is related to the French *bouger* and the English *budge*. “Bogianen” can mean two things. It’s an imperative meaning “Don’t move!” and, as a noun, it refers to people who don’t move or are unmoved. A certain E.A. Reynolds-Ball, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London and married to a woman from Carmagnola, published a book in 1927 entitled *Hidden Italy: Piedmont and the Piedmontese*. In it, he claimed that “The character of the Piedmontese is very unlike the popular conception of the Italian temperament. They have not the gay and insouciant disposition of the Italians of the south, but are more serious and unemotional.” To that you can add stodgy, phlegmatic and stick-in-the-mud. That’s the *bogianen* stereotype. (The more positive flip side is the image of a people who hold their ground and won’t give up an inch of territory in an armed conflict.)

To come down to our own particular situation, a Piemontesi nel Mondo board member, Fernando Dan di *santa memoria*, sometime in the 1990s, invented the clever play on words “Bogianen in Action.” This was meant to highlight our organization’s many activities in spite of our do-nothing regional image. We have sometimes given credence to our tagline, and sometimes not.

The Mystery of Bagna Cauda or Marzipan in Sweden

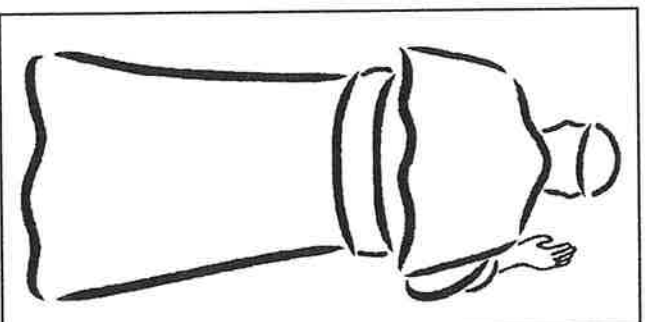
Marzipan is a confection made from almond paste and sugar. The Sicilians long ago acquired a sweet tooth from their Arab overlords. As a child I used to devour little *marzapane* fruits (apples, oranges, prickly pears), contained in a miniature Sicilian cart, sent to us by Zia Santina and Zio Cesare in Catania. Marzipan is also all the rage in Sweden, to the extent that the country actually celebrates a Marzipan Day (*Marsipanens Dag*) every January 6th. The leading world producers of almonds are the U.S. (i.e., California), Australia, Turkey, Spain and Morocco, which means that the closest almond supplier to Swedish confectioners is over 1,600 miles away.

To a far lesser extent, there’s an analogous situation in Piemonte. Our signature regional dish, *bagna cauda*, has three basic ingredients: olive oil, garlic, and anchovies, plus the crudities that you immerse into this “hot dip.” These can range from Savoy cabbage, to cauliflower, to bell peppers, to *tupinabò* aka Jerusalem artichokes, etc. Now, garlic can be grown just about anywhere, but there is no olive oil production in Piemonte, and anchovies do not swim in the Po or in any of its tributaries.

The ingredients reflect our history. Piemonte used to be part of the Duchy of Savoy, and that entity included Nice and a good part of the Côte d’Azur. Hence, olive oil and anchovies. But there’s a more direct north/south connection. Oneglia, in Liguria on the Mediterranean, was for centuries a carve-out belonging to the Duchy right in middle of the territory of the Republic of Genova. Its olive oil bona fides is confirmed by a wonderful museum sponsored by the Fratelli Carli company and documenting the history of the olive and its various uses from the Levant to the West. (On your next visit to the Italian Riviera, check out the Museo dell’Olivio located in Imperia at Via Garesio, 13.)

HABUIMUS PAPAM!

Yes, we had a pope. Francis, who died at age 88 on April 21st, was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio into an Italian immigrant family in Buenos Aires. His father was born in Torino of a family from the area of Asti, and his mother was Argentine-born, with parents who hailed from the provinces of Genova and Alessandria. He spoke and read *piemontais*, was proud of his heritage, and as pope visited his Italian cousins. Right after his death, among all the many news items regarding him, there was a list of his favorite foods. Papa Francesco, of course, liked Argentine standards such as empanadas and big thick steaks, but also listed were *bagna cauda* and *ñoquis*. More telling is what he kept folded in his breviary, a book of psalms and prayers read daily by priests: a letter from his maternal grandmother, Nonna Rosa, who had encouraged his vocation, and the dialect poem by Nino Costa, *Rassa nostran-a*, which Bergoglio could recite by heart.



The Bic Pen

Remember the Penna Aurora, highlighted in the Spring 2023 issue of the *Boletín*? Produced in Torino since 1919, its high-end writing instruments rival the French Mont Blanc brand. Well, way at the other end of the price and quality spectrum, there's another famous pen with a Piedmontese connection. In fact, it's actually named for someone born in Torino in 1914, Marcel Bich, scion of a noble Valdostan family from Chatillon. (His great-grandfather, mayor of Aosta, had been raised to the barony by King Carlo Alberto of Sardinia.) Marcel's father, an engineer, emigrated to France, and in 1930 the family acquired French citizenship. Marcel obtained a law degree from the Sorbonne and served in the French Air Force at the outset of World War Two.

In 1945, he founded a company which made ink and accessories for fountain pens. Then, in 1950, he bought the patent for the ballpoint pen from its Hungarian inventor, László Bíró. (In fact, another word for ballpoint pen in British English and Italian is *birro*.) In 1953, his eponymous Société Bic was launched. Since then, more than 100 billion BIC pens have been sold. (*Wikipedia* doesn't lie.) In the 1970s, cigarette lighters and razors were added to the line.

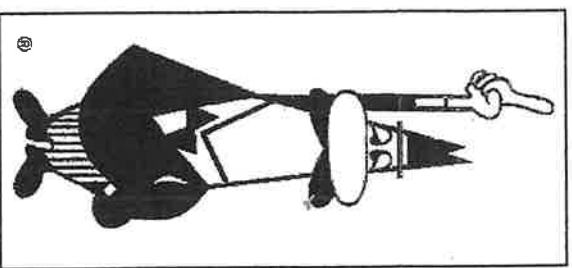
Besides being inexpensive, another feature common to BIC products is that they're basically use-and-toss. You can't change the ink cartridge on the pen, you can't add fuel to the lighter, and you can't change the blade on the razor. All these limited-usage devices, though very convenient, are the bane of environmentalists. Used throughout the world, they are found in landfills throughout the world.

Marcel Bich was an ardent sailor and in 1970, with his boat *France*, he was the first non-Anglo to compete in the America's Cup race. Remembering the family origins, before his death in 1994, he donated the stunning fortress castle of Ussel to the Region of Valle d'Aosta as well as a generous bequest for its upkeep.

Ah, Globalization!

On April 16, Reuters reported that Bialetti was going to be purchased by NUO Capital of Luxembourg for the sum of 53 million euros. NUO Capital is the investment arm of the Pao Cheng family of Hong Kong. Founded in 1933 in Omeglia (Novara), the company makes the Moka coffee pot, beloved throughout the world and a symbol of modern Italian design, enshrined, in fact, in New York's Museum of Modern Art. The company has been facing deficits over the past several years. It attempted expanding into direct retail sales with stores in malls and shopping centers without success, and its gambit into cookware was also a failure. By the end of fiscal 2024, Bialetti was 82 million euros in the red.

As some sort of consolation, remember that the iconic British carmaker, Jaguar, is owned by Tata Motors of India.



The Piemontesi nel Mondo of Northern California is a non-profit organization incorporated under the laws of the State of California. Its mailing address is 678 Green St. #3, San Francisco, CA 94133