

## Carmine Melino

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At the far end of the ruin of Villa Jovis on the island of Capri is a tree at the edge of a cliff. Holding the tree, one can lean out over the precipice to see the azure waters of the Mediterranean swirling far below. It is said that the emperor Tiberius would hurl his enemies from that spot, allowing a final glimpse of astonishing beauty. I know this spot, and I know trails and alleyways, corner tables and swimming holes that confirm Capri as one of my favorite places on the planet. And this is because I have a decades long friendship with two exceptional people, Gerry and Carmine Melino. One cannot really know them without knowing Capri.

Others in this tribute to Carmine Melino tell of his two natures, the scientist and the poet, of his contributions to our understanding of hygiene and its history, of his poems in Italian and Greek (Greek!). Like them, I can see Carmine sitting at his desk in Rome, working on a manuscript that might be a deeply researched treatise on clean water or an ode to a siren calling from the rocks. Sorting the wonderful artwork by Gerry, or photographs of antique medical equipment. And like them, I can feel his kindness, his welcoming hug, his gentle hand on my arm.

I have spent hours talking with Carmine, in Rome and in Capri, despite the fact that I do not speak Italian, and he did not speak English. Our silent discussions were often about current events, using the pictures in the

newspaper to illustrate our points, the view of the Marina Piccola from the balcony of his house, or simply about the sun and the breeze. He would pour me a glass of red wine, and we would talk.



Fig. 1 - Carmine Melino with his books. Photo courtesy of Dino Pedriali ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dino\\_Pedriali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dino_Pedriali)).

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I was with Carmine when he received the terrible diagnosis that his thyroid cancer had returned, and despite the late hour, we immediately went to Capri for several days. Some months later I returned, to find that the surgery had eliminated his ability to speak. With a shrug, he indicated that at his age, he had already said all he wanted to. Our conversations continued, unabated.

Of course, he continued to write and publish (Figure 1). His was an unparalleled

intellect, and I miss him, as all his friends do. I can see him in the tiny streets near the Piazzetta, carrying a bag of papers and a piece of fruit, on his way to some appointment, walking slowly and with purpose. It was one of the last times I saw him. But I imagine him standing at the cliff at the Villa Jovis, a younger Carmine, roaring his love for Capri into the wind off the sea, indelibly linked to that tiny, beautiful island.