

## Episode 111: Roman Stories III (Tyson)

### Summary

Our guest Tyson tells his story of moving from the United States to Rome, starting by working in a bar and eventually becoming a city tour guide and then a Europe-wide tour director.

### Transcript

Nick: On this episode of Roman Stories, I'm talking to my friend Tyson. And Tyson, you're American, but you've lived in and around Rome for - what? - more than 15 years?

Tyson: Yeah, yeah, I moved over there in the summer of 2000.

Nick: Wow, it's a long time.

Tyson: Yeah.

Nick: I bet you didn't think you'd be there that long when you moved there.

Tyson: No, I had no idea.

Nick: But originally, you came ... when you came to Italy, you went to Florence, right?

Tyson: That's right. So the year before, I moved over as a foreign exchange student, essentially, and spent a semester<sup>1</sup> between Siena and Florence, in Tuscany.

Nick: And what were you studying?

Tyson: Umm, modern Italian history, Italian language, uhh, photography and a bit of the nightlife.

Nick: But isn't your degree in finance in the end?

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<sup>1</sup> semester: half a year of school or university, especially used in the United States

Tyson: It is, yeah. So I was able to, umm, take exclusively elective classes when I was there, which meant I didn't have to take anything within my degree purview<sup>2</sup>.

Nick: Perfect. And then how did you then end up in Rome?

Tyson: Uhh, took a train, you know, sometime. Just kidding! I moved back to the States, finished my university degree and then I shortly realised that I wanted to go back to Italy. And it became a matter of trying to figure out how that was possible as an American citizen with the visa works and, umm ... and this was in the infancy<sup>3</sup> of the Internet, so in those days, all the research was, umm, at the library, believe it or not.

Nick: Wow.

Tyson: So you found some old books on how to work abroad in Italy and things like that. And so it dawned on me<sup>4</sup> quickly that I just had to go, and I couldn't wait for the visa, and I couldn't wait to get a job and get transferred. I just had to go and try to find a job. And, umm, it only took a few months of being back in America for that decision to be made. And then it was just a matter of waiting for my degree to finish and going over.

Nick: And so then did you get into tour guiding straight away when you got there?

Tyson: Practically, yeah. So my first job was working at a youth hostel on the Italian riviera, near France.

Nick: Oh, wow!

Tyson: And I was changing sheets and serving meals. I wasn't getting paid, so it was a ... I had a place to stay and I had free food, but I wasn't earning a living. So I stayed there for a few weeks. It was in August, early August, and the weather was great and they locked us out for six hours a day, so everybody just went to the beach, you know. Then you came back and you'd serve a meal and then that was that. And then from there I took a night train, umm, from Genova up north down to Rome, and within hours, I had a job working at a bar in Campo dei Fiori in Rome.

Nick: Wow.

Tyson: I hated it, I absolutely hated it. But I met a waitress whose boyfriend was giving tours at the Colosseum, and, umm, she suggested that I go and follow one of these, you know, free tours of the Colosseum. And so I went the next day and followed somebody else's tour and then was hired, essentially, on the spot.

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<sup>2</sup> purview: range, scope, portfolio

<sup>3</sup> infancy: early days

<sup>4</sup> it dawned on me: I realised

Nick: And did you already have knowledge or experience?

Tyson: Yeah, I had some background with architectural history in my early days of - before finance and business - studying architecture, yeah.

Nick: And so that was what you did, you were giving tours at the Colosseum?

Tyson: Yep, so my first few months, umm, in Rome were actually spent divided, really, between working in the evenings at the bar and mornings at the Colosseum, giving tours. The movie *Gladiator* just came out, so Rome was a hot spot. Plus it was the jubilee year of 2000, which was, you know, a massive year for Catholic pilgrims, so Rome was just full of people.

Nick: And eventually you just gave up the bar work?

Tyson: Yep, yep, two weeks, three weeks into that, I just said, 'No.' I didn't like it. You get to meet a lot of people but going in at 9:30 and not getting back home until 4 in the morning just ... I could do that anywhere, why am I doing that in Rome?

Nick: And then eventually you expanded out with tour guiding, and then you just did more tours around the city?

Tyson: Yeah, and I kind of went back and forth, so I would go home in the winter. Umm, tourism wasn't as, uhh, popular, busy, so it was low season. So the first couple of winters, November-December I would go home, January-February, something like that. And then I would come back. And in the first few years I was just learning the city. You know, you start at the Colosseum, then you go into the Ancient World and slowly, slowly, you realise the main spots, the main sights that everybody wants to see. So you learn the Trevi Fountain, the Pantheon, you know, uhh, St. Peter's, the Vatican, all that. And you just expand from there.

Nick: And do you have a favourite spot, among all of those?

Tyson: Pantheon, for sure.

Nick: Yeah, why?

Tyson: It's the best building in the whole city - architecturally, for sure, and historically, it's amazing. And the fact that it's still there more or less in one piece<sup>5</sup>.

Nick: Yeah, I think it's interesting that it's a little bit under the radar<sup>6</sup>. When people come to Rome, they're looking at the Colosseum and the Vatican, certainly as the top two.

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<sup>5</sup> in one piece (expression): intact, whole, not broken

<sup>6</sup> under the radar: not well known or appreciated

Tyson: Yeah, and I think, you know, tourism nowadays, it's become the African safari. You know, you have to see the Big 5 everywhere you go. And the Big 5 in Rome doesn't necessarily have the Pantheon on everybody's list because they want to see the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps first, because all the Instagram photos are of, you know, 20-somethings<sup>7</sup> taking selfies in front of these famous monuments. And it's not necessarily the Pantheon. So, yeah, the Colosseum, you have the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's, Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps and then the Pantheon is an afterthought for a lot of these people. But I think ... I can't remember who said this, and it was either a modern art author or maybe it was somebody a couple hundred years ago, it could have even been Mark Twain or somebody who said that, you know, 'He who goes to Rome and doesn't see the Pantheon comes back an ass.' I can't remember who the author was. I read that somewhere though, but it's a good summary of it.

Nick: For sure. Right, and eventually you got Italian citizenship, right? You have an Italian passport.

Tyson: Yeah, yeah. The first year I was dodging<sup>8</sup> the - not really, but - dodging the authorities in the sense that I wasn't legal or allowed to work there but I was working for a couple of years. But I realised shortly that ... umm, actually I realised by accident that I was born with Italian citizenship and it was a matter of proving that I was and that took a couple of years.

Nick: And that's ancestry on your father's side?

Tyson: Yeah, on my Dad's side. And so my great-grandparents were all born - on his side - all four of them were born in Italy.

Nick: And then eventually you moved out of the city of Rome to a place called Santa Marinella which is on the beach. And you were in the kind of the first wave of people, I think, who started doing that, and then it became a lot more popular after that.

Tyson: Yeah.

Nick: So why did you do that?

Tyson: Yeah, well I didn't want to live with one of our roommates. I'm sure he'll be the subject of a future podcast. He was a bit of a mess in Rome, and so the two of us (Tyson and another friend) decided that we didn't want to live with him. And we couldn't find a place in a decent neighbourhood in Rome for the price that we were willing to pay. And we had, uhh, one or two other friends that were already living out at the beach. And they suggested or recommended that we just come out and

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<sup>7</sup> 20-somethings: young people aged between 20 and 29

<sup>8</sup> dodging: avoiding, running away from

stay for a winter, basically, eight months or something, and if we liked it, we could stay, obviously. And I loved it.

Nick: Right, 'cause you've been living there - what? - 12 or 13 years now?

Tyson: Yeah, I was, I was ... over 12 years now, yeah.

Nick: And so basically, you can come into Rome whenever you want on the train, it's pretty short.

Tyson: It's actually, umm, in Italian you'd say it's *collegato bene*, so it's connected well, meaning there are frequent trains. Umm, the trains are actually very reliable. And it's not, uhh, heavily trafficked, so you can always get a seat on the train, usually.

Nick: And you speak Italian really well now, but did you struggle at the beginning with that?

Tyson: Yeah, it took a couple of years. You have to make an effort in Rome, because so many people, umm, in the places where you will go, you know, in the big cities, they all know a little bit of English. So if you don't make an effort in places like Rome and Florence, then you can get by without learning Italian.

Nick: Right, you sort of fall in that, yeah, into that trap.

Tyson: Very easily. Because the places you go are restaurants and bars, and those are precisely the places where the people who, uhh, work there might speak English.

Nick: And now most of the work that you do, it's not doing tours in Rome itself, although you still do a bit of that. But you're taking, umm, people around all of Europe on organised tours.

Tyson: Yeah, yeah so I got into that - that was another accident. I mean, everything, I was in the right place at the right time, I can't, you know, describe how many times. And I knew the regional manager for one of these agencies that gives tours throughout Europe. And I only knew her because I used to hang out<sup>9</sup> in an Irish pub with her husband. Right, so it pays off to go to Irish pubs, right? So I had been home in the States for a season, or a summer. And had just moved back. And for whatever reason, I went back to that bar and I didn't know who would be there or anything, I just kind of went and, uhh, he was there and his wife was there. And she knew that I was already working as a tour guide and asked for my email address and I was able to apply for this position, which is ... the strange thing about it is that I wasn't looking for a job, so I never would have found this on my own. And that was the door that got me into, uhh, travel guiding, essentially, throughout Europe, taking groups on buses.

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<sup>9</sup> hang out: spend time relaxing or socialising. See also: Episodes 95 and 106.

Nick: Right, so basically what you've been able to do, which a lot of people who, a lot of people in our circle and our friends in Rome (haven't), is that you've got, in terms of your citizenship, you're good there, your work, you're good there, so you've basically built a real life for yourself there.

Tyson: Yeah, yeah, and it, umm, it wasn't a grand plan. It wasn't ... I couldn't have designed it 'cause I didn't know any of these doors were even there.

Nick: Right.

Tyson: And it was all, sort of, uhh, serendipitous<sup>10</sup> to find all these different types of employment and also the citizenship and a place to live on the beach which was perfect for somebody who travels a lot. And it all kind of, umm, came together. And it didn't occur to me until after it all came together that, 'Wow, this actually, this is pretty great, you know!'

Nick: And do you think you'll stay for a long time?

Tyson: Umm, I don't know, that's a good question. I mean, I'll stay in Europe for sure. In Italy, maybe not. I speak the language, so that's obviously a big part. The food is great, the wine is great. I've got loads of friends there. And of course I know quite a bit about Rome and I can always give tours there, so employment-wise, it's not a bad place to be. But, umm, the bureaucracy there is maddening.

Nick: For sure. Anyway, thanks for sharing your Roman story.

Tyson: Alright.

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<sup>10</sup> serendipitous: fortunate, lucky

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Tyson originally move to Italy?
2. What was the first job he had in the north of Italy before moving to Rome?
3. How did Tyson get the jobs he got in Rome and also his Italian citizenship?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. He was in a car accident last week. He has a lot of bruises but he didn't break anything so he's still \_\_\_\_\_.
2. When TV was in its \_\_\_\_\_, some people used to go and watch it in shop windows because they didn't have one in their homes.
3. He failed two classes last \_\_\_\_\_, so he won't be able to graduate at the same time as most of his friends.
4. After committing the crime, he spent a couple of weeks staying with different friends while \_\_\_\_\_ the police, but eventually he gave himself up.
5. We're too old to stay in youth hostels anymore, because they're filled with \_\_\_\_\_ and it's hard to relate to them.
6. I hadn't seen the woman who would become my wife for many years since school, and then one day I just bumped into her on the street. We went out a few times and the rest is history. It was all very \_\_\_\_\_.
7. I'd been in a nothing job for a few years without going anywhere, and one day \_\_\_\_\_ that if I didn't quit now, I'd be doing it for the rest of my life.
8. She decided to head up the company's new project even though it technically didn't fall within her \_\_\_\_\_.
9. I've been watching a great new TV show that a lot of people hadn't heard of yet. It's a bit \_\_\_\_\_ at the moment but it'll be a big hit soon.
10. He just wants to \_\_\_\_\_ with his friends all the time and he never does anything useful or productive.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Tyson said he hated his job at a bar in Rome when he first arrived. Have you ever had a job you hated? Why?
2. Tyson said a lot of things fell into place for him because he was in the right place at the right time. Have you had things happen to you in this way?
3. Tyson loves living out at the beach, outside Rome. Would you rather live at the beach or in the city centre? Why?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. He spent a semester studying in Tuscany while at university.
2. He worked in a hostel for room and board (food) but no pay.
3. By accident. He says he was in the right place at the right time for a lot of these things that he didn't even know were possibilities.

### Exercises

1. in one piece
2. infancy
3. semester
4. dodging
5. 20-somethings
6. serendipitous
7. it dawned on me
8. purview
9. under the radar
10. hang out