

# Under the Spell of Tuscan Goats

by Mara Lusi

**I**t all started with wine. It always seems to in our household, my husband being an oenophile (lover of wine). We had been living in Italy a little over 2 years. Weekends were spent exploring the countryside near Rome and enjoying the local cuisine and wine. One day trip took us to the Chianti wine region in Tuscany. We drove through the lovely hills of Tuscany to arrive at the Banfi winery.

While my husband browsed the wines, I browsed the rest of the shop. I discovered a glassed-in cupboard that contained skin care products made from Cashmere goats' milk. They were produced by a company called "Chianti Cashmere." The brochure that was on display with the

products stated that the company was owned by an American woman named Nora Kravis, and that this was the only Cashmere goat farm in Italy. It was located in Radda in Chianti (Tuscany).

Returning back to Rome, I e-mailed Nora Kravis to ask her if she sold the Cashmere fibre, as well as the skin products. The answer was no. The farm used all of the fibre to produce its own textile products, mainly shawls. Deciding that this had been a one time experience, I forgot about Nora and Chianti Cashmere.

Sometime in February of 2005, I received an e-mail from Chianti Cashmere Co. The headline was "ALL THE CASHMERE YOU CAN COMB FOR FREE." It went further to say, "All the guests at our farm between March 15 and April 15, 2005 can help themselves to **as much free cashmere** as they can comb off our goats". Was this an offer too good to resist? You bet!

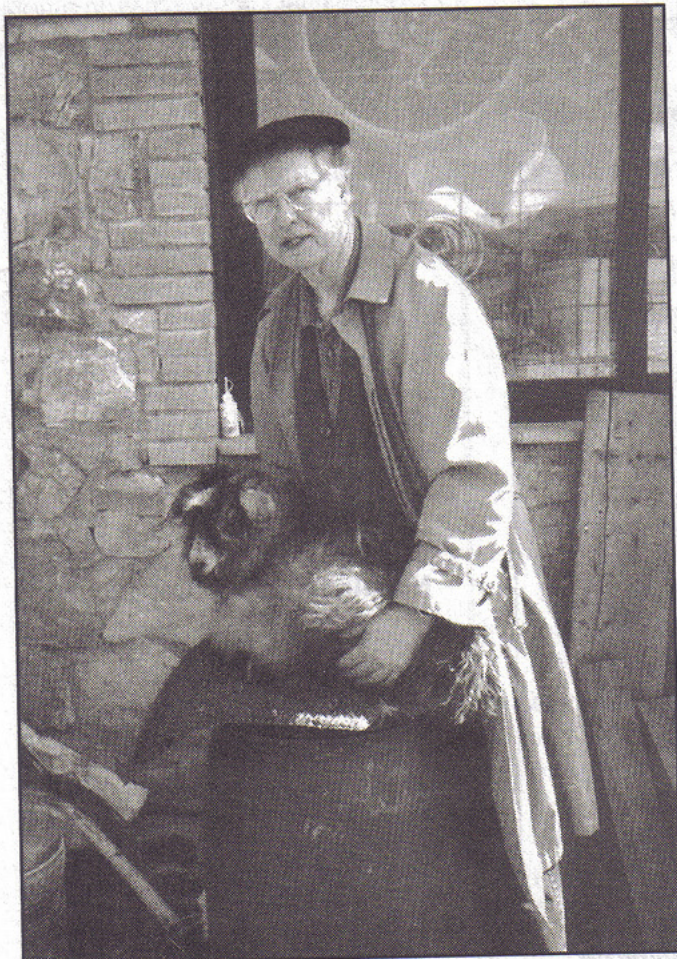
We had wanted to go to the Chianti region for a holiday. April, after all—spring, the hills "alive with the sound" of the vines budding, warm weather, fresh air. We spent 3 days at a wonderful place called Castello Vicchiomaggio, a castle once owned by the Medici family that now is also a vineyard that produces very good wines. The Castle *may* have been the place where Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa. He is reputed to

have stayed there on a few occasions. Many places in the area have this claim, but I like to think that it was here. We did stay in the Leonardo suite!

I had e-mailed Nora Kravis that we would be arriving to comb goats on the Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> (the day that Pope John Paul died, by the way). She had agreed and told me to not come before 10 AM. We arrived at the farm about 11AM. Poor Nora was up to her neck in work. Her help had not arrived and she had guests coming to her B & B that afternoon. On the patio outside her house, she had new puppies to be looked after.

She took us to a pen where she had corralled the smaller of the goats that needed to be combed, gave us a comb (a dog comb) and asked which goat we wanted to start with. When I had asked her the names of the goats, she told me that they had no names—she had too many to name them all. I picked out a multicoloured goat, but she said that one was very wild and could not be caught. So, she caught another one and lifted it onto a barrel. She told my husband to hold it, and showed me how to comb, from the bottom up to get the down. She was quite firm with the combing. Then she left us to it. We decided to name this goat "Greve," after a town near where we were staying.

Well, I combed poor Greve, bleating and struggling, for about a half hour. I got maybe a good handful of the down. That was it. This goat was perhaps not shedding enough yet. We decided to try another one, since all of the goats put aside were still in the pen where we were. I still wanted the multicoloured "un-catchable" one. My husband did the "expose yourself" thing. Janis opened his raincoat wide and went toward the goats. Those who could manage to get



Janis with Radda