

9-2018

## The Color of Olives

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### Scholarly Commons Citation

DeTore, J. L. (2018). The Color of Olives. *Ovunque Siamo: New Italian American Writing*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://commons.erau.edu/publication/2224>

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## Joanne L. DeTore

### **The Color of Olives**

A hot July day.

I spread the Utica Club Beer towel on the plastic  
chaise lounge that sits on the wooden deck my father built  
overlooking our above-ground pool.

The neighbor boys wait  
with binoculars for this daily ritual.

With my glass of water and paperback  
next to me, I grab the jar of cocoa butter,  
push my fingers into the cool cream,  
spread it on my thighs,  
more basted chicken  
than sun goddess.

I am 15,  
trying to tan,  
trying to fit in,  
in the sun  
cooking my skin  
into angry red blotches

to appease my mother  
as much as myself.

At least once a year  
my mother asks our doctor,  
“Is she anemic?”  
“No,” he says, “she’s just light-skinned.”

I was “Mayonnaise Face” or “Ghost.”  
Too light in a class filled with  
olive, cappuccino, and espresso shades,  
I stood out.

The nuns took notice,  
gave me more difficult books to read.  
I got Lord of the Flies,  
they got Flubber.  
I got more assignments,  
had different expectations.  
I was worthy.  
I was white,  
I was part WASP.

Sitting in the shade of my back patio,  
preparing lessons to teach college students,  
I wonder what I would have become,  
who I’d be,  
if I were the color of olives,  
instead of cream.

**Joanne L. DeTore**, Ph.D. is a 3rd-generation Italian American from Central New York. Her work has been published in a variety of journals including *Reed Magazine*, *Voices in Italian Americana*, *Italian Americana*, *Review Americana: A Literary Journal*, *The Apple Valley Review*, *Slow Trains Literary Journal*, *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *Art Ciencia: Revista de Arte, Ciencia e Comunicacao*, *And/Or Literary Journal*, and *Florida English* and in the books, *Anti-Italianism: Essays on Prejudice*, *Fractured Feminisms: Rhetoric, Context, and Contestation*, *Joy, Interrupted: An Anthology of Motherhood and Loss*; and *Sweet Lemons: Writing with a Sicilian Accent*. She is an Associate Professor of Humanities and Communication at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach where she teaches a class on Italian American Film and Culture and is a member of the Executive Board of the IASA.