

Eulogy Oscar Mattiazzo September 2017
St Margaret Mary's Church, Croydon Park

We would like to thank each of you for coming today and thank Father Anthony for travelling all the way from Sydney and to Brother Krish –a friend in Dad's final months

How do you describe a life so richly lived?

Our Dad, our Nonno, our Zio, our Friend – he was something different to all of us.

Thankfully, we did a lot of talking with Dad over the years and many of these recollections have been recorded by Madeleine Regan in the Veneti Market Gardeners Oral History Project - all 151 pages and we cherish every word.

From difficult beginnings he immigrated at age 11 to Australia in 1934 with his mother Virginia to join our Nonno Angelo who had left 7 years earlier. The signs of a successful life were seen early. He became Dux of Nuriootpa Primary School where he started only a year or so earlier barely able to speak English. What an intellect. We only recently discovered that the enterprising young Oscar started a shop across the road from the school selling sweets and ice-cream to children at recess and lunch time.

This enterprise seems to flow through much of Dad's life. From being camp leader at 19 in the Allied Workers Council in Port Augusta where he was interned during the war years he wasn't afraid to go over the heads of those in power to negotiate for better food and conditions, while not being afraid to do the odd deal on the side for himself. He was Jitterbug Champion of Port Augusta and admitted he shed a tear at the end of the war because he had such a good time. But at the same time he would admit that he felt lucky that his parents had come to Australia because if they had stayed in Italy he too could have been killed on the Russian front like his dear cousin Primo, only a year older. As Dad said, it was better to be born lucky than rich.

It wasn't all good luck though. His beloved mother died aged only 46 when he was only 18 and this affected him deeply. The war put an end to his ambition to be a fitter and turner. He could have become bitter but instead adopted the philosophy of *Che sara' sara' ... whatever will be will be*.

He moved to Hindley Street to work in Zia Carmela Rossetto's shop with Anna and Modesto, one of the three continental stores in Adelaide at the time. He remembered with great fondness those Hindley St days and that 'gang' of boys who met at Bailetti's and became lifelong friends. Never any money, playing cards and billiards, staying out all night, dancing at

Kings Dance Hall – oh to be a fly on the wall. He loved Frank Sinatra and the Crooners and was, by all accounts, “a bit lairy”, as mum would say. He loved cycling and soccer and was in the original Savoia soccer team which became Juventus and scored their first goal.

Being a delivery boy for Zia Carmela introduced him to the other great Virginia in his life, our mother – kind, beautiful and above all a hard worker. They built a busy and successful grocery business across the road here in Croydon. They were married on the Saturday and started work on the Monday. He recalled how he missed his game of soccer on the morning of his wedding. When his lovely bride joined him at the altar he leaned and said to her, “We lost 1-0”. He spoke with great admiration for mum in the way she adapted to life in the shop. The customers loved her. They strove for exceptional service, even if it meant getting some extra rations in unconventional ways. He also spoke with gratitude for those that worked so hard in the shop – though I think he still owes Sunta 10 pounds.

They raised their three daughters with the help of Nonno Angelo and Nonna Maria with cousins Bennie, Robert and Edda. In fact mum and Dad’s first house was on the land where this church now stands until they moved to 298 Torrens Road – the house with the fancy fence - just a few houses up the road from here.

Many happy days were spent around Frogmore Road with our beloved nonni, zii, cousins and friends, bonds which continue today. I have an image of them all sitting up in heaven around a table drinking coffee, women doing the dishes! You have been such a huge part of our lives and have been a wonderful support all our family.

He loved a drop of wine or grappa in his coffee. In the last few days of his life we have very happy memories of Dad sipping a few drops saying ‘ I can feel it doing me good’. He seemed to survive on Brother Krish’s communion wafers and a few drops of wine.

With the rise of supermarkets the days of picking orders for customers and home deliveries were over. He discovered travel and would structure the rest of his working life as an ‘Investor’ so he could travel when he wanted. Two World Cups, two Olympic Games and reconnection with our family in Italy where ties remain closer than the miles between us. I think these days we call that work life balance.

They moved to West Lakes and developed great friendships with our neighbours sharing many, many cups of tea and the golf crew where he scored a hole in one but was too blind to see it.

Dad had a love of the outback and he loved driving often leaning back to talk to those in the back seat. Many of us have had white knuckle rides, Dad usually not wearing a seatbelt. That

love of driving meant distance was never a barrier and he would readily travel to Mt Gambier and Whyalla to his daughters - sometimes just for the day.

He embraced Coober Pedy, pioneering new drilling techniques with men who became lifelong friends. Once again always thinking outside the box, of better ways of doing things. In fact, the tabernacle is decorated with opals Dad donated to this church. He said he felt happy driving to Coober Pedy and sad coming back. He loved the freedom, the dust, the heat, the people, the fun.

Velia wrote to us: *"Eravamo dei giovani immigranti in cerca di fortuna lontano dalle nostre famiglie ... tu ci hai dato subito fiducia"*. We were young immigrants in search of a future far from home... and you gave us confidence.

We all deeply respect the way Dad cared for mum during her illness. After she died we came to know Dad in a new way often travelling with him overseas and here in Australia. He loved visiting Northern Australia and particularly loved the contact with people in Arnhemland. We travelled to amazing remote places. He always loved to experience new things and always had an open-mind.

He liked to give the impression of someone a bit cheeky but for those of us who knew him well, he had a strong sense of fairness. Though he did well for himself in life he instilled in us that we should always consider those less fortunate and that we should make decisions not just to benefit ourselves but for the greater good and vote accordingly. Dad was a generous man who donated liberally and had a wonderful relationship with many call centres across the country.

The child shop keeper, the deal maker, the horse owner, the developer. He was a risk taker, a thinker and an innovator but also a man who believed in equality and a fair go.

You will all have your own memory of Dad, a trusted confidante. Many came to him for advice and you can be assured he kept your confidences and has taken many things with him. In the last few days we have been struck by how many people said how they really enjoyed talking to Dad, that he had a willing ear - for the young and the old.

People appreciated his wisdom and his perspective. He never told you what to do but always gave you another way of looking at things, even 'til the end when his mind was as sharp as it has ever been. We will miss that.

He retained a quiet faith never really suffering those who boasted of their piety but rather admired those who lived by example. In later years he took comfort in listening to two Italian

masses – one with Father Anthony , loudly, on the radio and listening to Pope Francis on a Sunday night.

We talked about his resilience, about how he kept trying. Even in recent months once he accepted his new situation at The Philip Kennedy Centre he started going to the gym and making an effort. He would say ‘ if I don’t try I will feel like I let myself down’.

We called him the Phoenix because he kept rising from the ashes. Finally though his poor old heart couldn’t match his will to live. He did not want to die because he loved it here so much but he accepted his situation. *That’s Life*, he’d say. *It is what it is*.

Dad loved many things in life but none as much as the company of his family, especially his grandchildren. His conversation always came alive around them telling stories of the old days and competing fiercely at Briscola. None of this ‘letting the children win’ business. He rarely gave us the satisfaction of saying it but he was hugely proud of us all. We have all turned out pretty well and it must have been very gratifying for him to see that legacy. Now we have a new little Oscar to carry on that wonderful name and live his own life – Dad always said ‘just be yourself’ and accepted the choices we made.

Dad, today we honour your life and what you have taught us: fairness, integrity, and not letting yourself down. We will miss your wisdom.

We love you and will honour you in the way we lead our lives.

Perhaps we will leave the final words to the man himself:

“Well, I think I could say that whatever happens in life, none of us are really perfect, but be as just as you can and as fair as you can, and take things- how can I put it – Che sara’ sara’, not to dwell too much on the things that went bad for you because you must learn by your mistakes”

That’s Life.

Vicki, Helen & Christine