

MARIA REBULI - EULOGY

Early Life

My nonna Maria (or Eti as she was also known) was born on 10 October 1925.

Nonna was born in the town of Valdobbiadene in the province of Treviso in the Veneto Region, in the North East of Italy.

Her father was Giovanni Dal Toe' and her mother was Rosa De Faveri from Farra di Soligo approx. 10km away.

Nonna had 2 sisters; Amabile and Giuditta and 2 brothers; Guerrino and Adriano.

Nonna's mother Rosa passed away when Eti's was only 15 years old and after a few years her father Giovanni decided to re-marry. He married a lady called Caterina Gatto from Alano di Piave, who was a widow herself with a son called Nando.

Giovanni and his new wife then had 2 children together - Battista and Bianca who were nonna's stepbrother and stepsister.

All in All - Nonna's father had 7 children plus his wife's child Nando.

The Dal Toè family was a patriarchal set up and at the head was nonna's grandfather Agostino Dal Toe'.

Agostino was a well accomplished businessman and trafficked in grappa and tobacco (illegally) as well as running a large farmhouse that belonged to some wealthy people. The farmland was of abt 60 acres and had vines, corn, wheat, vegetables of all kinds, fruit trees, animals including chickens, ducks, cows and pigs.

Agostino had 6 children himself. 3 boys - GIOVANNI (nonna's father), ONORATO and PIETRO and also 3 girls, MARIA, EMMA, and GIOVANNA. The 3 girls eventually married and left the household to live with their husbands.

The boys remained with Agostino and worked the farm as "Mezzadria" meaning they would go halves on whatever the farm produced with the owners of the farm itself.

The 3 boys eventually married, so there was AGOSTINO (who became a widower himself) living on the property, with:

Nonna's father GIOVANNI, his second wife Caterina and 8 children including nonna.

ONORATO with his wife and 3 sons.

And PIETRO who married Regina Lucchetta, with whom he had 1 son and 3 daughters.

....so when nonna grew up she lived with at least 22 other family members under the same roof! They luckily lived in a very large building and were fairly well off compared to others.

Times were still extremely difficult in the area though, as it was the period after WWI ...then The Great Depression and then WWII.

Like the other children in the family, Nonna went to school to a basic level and that was it.

As she grew up she started helping out on the farm and doing various chores to support the family.

Besides working at home, she later worked in the Filanda where silk was spun to produce silk thread.

The name 'Eti' was given to her as a young woman because 'etto' in Italian is 100grams and as she was extremely thin, they called her 'Eti'.

Marriage

Eti met Richetto before the war. They had always known each other because they lived close by.

Nonna was 20 when she married Nonno in Sep 1946. On her wedding day she was 4 ½ months pregnant with her first child Bruno.

Her daughter Rosanna (my mother) was born 17 months after Bruno in Bigolino in July 1948.

Like all women after marrying, nonna went to live with her husband at his family home in Bigolino which was also on farmland.

Nonna continued working in the area while nonno went to work in the mines.

Mum said nonna told her she would often have to leave her as a baby unattended upstairs, to go downstairs to prepare lunches for all the family members who were working on the farm.

When nonno returned from the mines, he worked his father's plot for a while, but there wasn't enough land to work.

Also, they were now married with two young children yet their pay-packet went to nonno's father who was still head of the household.

The courageous decision was then made to move to Australia for a better life.

Emigrating to Australia in 1951

Nonno arrived first in Adelaide travelling alone and then six months later aged 25 nonna made the long journey with her two children and nonno's sister Ginevra.

They departed from Venice taking the ship called 'Toscana' and arrived in Fremantle. A week later they disembarked in Melbourne, it was September 1951.

The journey took 50 odd days and they travelled third class.

Nonna's sister Amabile had already arrived in Adelaide with Johnny 18 months before nonna, but nonna's 6 other siblings never left Italy.

So life began in Adelaide.

Nonna and Nonno first rented a shed on Torrens Road and lived with her sister and husband Doro who was nonno's brother. The shed was alongside a house which belonged to an old widower (Mr Cook) who nonna and Amabile looked after.

They lived there for almost four years while trying to get ahead before nonna and nonno bought a house on Aroona Road, West Croydon.

Contrary to the way the family setup existed in Italy, here in Australia and especially within nonna's family things were very open and democratic. There was no patriarch.

There were no real women's or men's job. Nonna had a role to carry out as a wife and mother, but if nonna didn't have time to wash the dishes, nonno would. If nonna didn't have time to sweep the floor nonno would do it. Nonna wasn't afraid to speak up but rarely had to as Nonno never imposed his manhood on nonna. Nonna had a free life here and enjoyed it.

Working life

After nonno started working at General Motors Holden in 1954 Nonna joined him at the Woodville plant shortly after.

When the Elizabeth factory opened in 1963 they both would make the trip out north each day.

Nonna worked in The Trim Fabrication, sewing area, when it moved from Woodville to Elizabeth.

Nonna had a bad car accident in the late 70's that caused whiplash. It caused her plenty of trouble and she had to have an operation to fix a neck injury. She tried to go back to work at GMH but was forced to give up work just short of her long service leave.

All in all, nonna worked full time at Holden's for over 20 years whilst also raising a family.

Funnily though, despite working at a car factory nonna never got her driver's licence. She tried to learn once, with nonno teaching her to drive back and forth up the driveway, but things didn't quite work out.

(Mum was there to witness it). Nonna was getting the hang of it, but nonno as the instructor, was a little bit too impatient talking too much, telling her to accelerate, then brake which caused nonna to put her foot on the wrong peddle and accelerate by mistake, knocking over two bikes in the garage. Nonna hopped out the car, slammed the door and despite wanting to, never tried to drive again.....and it was due to nonno's driving instruction!

Nonna worked a lot but she did enjoy going shopping every Saturday. She would catch the train from West Croydon and meet up in town with her sister Amabile and her friend Elda. They went in very early as the shops closed at lunchtime. They would go to Myer, Harris Scarfe and John Martins and Nonna mainly like shopping for shoes.

She would often say to her daughter Rosanna on Friday night, "if you're a good girl and get up and clean the house tomorrow morning, I'll bring you home a present." Mum thought that

was a good deal, so she would get up early on Saturday's to scrub the floor with steelo and vacuum the whole house and when she finished she would wait outside by the front gate and look up the road until she could see nonna walking from the train stop.

When she did see her, she would start running all the way up to meet her and help her carry home all the shopping. While this was happening, nonno was at work (he was working 7 days) and Bruno was fast asleep still in bed. Mum said these were fond mother and daughter memories.

Return to Italy

Nonna returned five times to Italy the first trip was in 1972 after 21 years away.

Going through all nonna's photos from these trips, she spent a lot of time with their cousins Marisa and Nino Rebuli and with her sister Amabile and Doro who had recently returned to live.

She liked being in Italy visiting all her relatives and friends. You will see some images from these trips to Italy shortly when we play the slideshow.

Naturalised

For some reason still unknown, nonna didn't become naturalised as an Australia citizen in 1956 when Nonno did (along with Rosanna and Bruno) but she was naturalised 16 years later aged 46 in May 1972. Maybe there was just no urgency for her to do so earlier.

Family

Nonna had three grandchildren, my sister Bianca who was born first in 1976, then myself and cousin Alana who lives in WA.

In 1978 she bought a new home at 16 Browning Avenue Kidman Park. She loved living in the area, her relatives were nearby and she got on extremely well with all her neighbours and built some strong relationships.

In 1983 she suffered the terrible loss of her son Bruno when he was just 36 years old. She coped through this period the best way she could, mainly by not talking about it.

Hobbies

Us grandchildren, we have many fond memories of going for walks with nonna down to the River Torrens to feed the ducks and hanging around the house at Kidman Park. On occasions we slept over as kids, Bianca and Alana would always sleep in bed with nonna, nonno was in his room and I had to sleep on the floor in the lounge.

Mum said one time when she came back from a night away at Wirrina Resort, nonna told her that I was too hyperactive and wouldn't go to sleep, so she gave me a few sips of West End draft and I was a sleep in a second.

After she finished working, just to pass the time away, Nonna used to catch the bus to the city with Elda or walk around to Target to go shopping or just to browse and on her way home she would often stop off at Francesca and Dante Mori's house for a coffee and then invite them over after tea, for a game of cards.

Nonna loved to play cards on Friday and Saturday nights with her friends. They used to play for 5cents, sometimes 10cents, they really just played for fun and to share each other's company.

Nonna enjoyed her time in the kitchen making lasagne, polenta, crostoli, fritole and we all remember rolling dough to make gnocchi with nonna. She also used to make a beautiful salad with radicchio grown from the garden and especially for me she would buy a cabbage and slice it as finely as possible, dress it and put it next to my plate.

Nonna had a sweet spot for liquors and liked Cherry Brandy, Baileys and Limoncello, which she even made batches of and froze to drink later. When nonno was having his afternoon nap, mum and her would take the bottles outside, sit in the sun and sample various liquors.

Nonna's other vice was that she liked to smoke a cigarette every now and then. I clearly remember her sneaking into the backyard away from nonno, with mum keeping watch, so she could light one up. Mum said nonna didn't even know how to smoke, but it was something she did back in the 70's and 80's. I vaguely recall her allowing me to have a few puffs once.

Nonna loved her garden and spent many hours tending to it. She loved all types of flowers, but roses were her favourite.

Nonna loved her TV shows. Every day she watched 'Days of our Lives' (with Ridge, Brooke), 'Bold & the Beautiful', 'The Young & the Restless', 'Sale of the Century' and at night-time she watched the '6 o'clock News on Channel 9' and then 'Prisoner.'

Nonna loved jewellery and at times she would wear a ring on every finger!

When she was in her early 80's, Nonna suffered from a stroke. The stroke cruelly robbed her of her speech and the ability to really be able to communicate with us. I remember nonna was given some cue cards with pictures and words on them and I recall Daniella and Mia when they were only 6 or 7 themselves, taking nonna through the cards and helping her try and improve her speech.

Nonna stayed home for about 3years but after a few falls, fainting episodes and a few calls for an ambulance, there was no choice but to admit nonna into St Hilarion at Seaton in Dec 2011. She spent 8.5yrs in St Hilarion.

At first Nonna was very unsettled but with mum or nonno visting every day, she soon settled into a routine at her new home. At first she enjoyed returning to her house for a few hours every month or so, for a coffee or a birthday, but as time when on she was happy just staying at St Hilarion. She participated in physical therapy exercises and other activities including craft and enjoyed attending mass every Friday.

She liked getting her hair done at the onsite salon, but she especially enjoyed when Bianca would visit to colour and style her hair. She also like it when I said rude Italian words to her to make her laugh and when I would say to her 'sei una bella tosa' which would always make her smile.

18 months ago nonna welcomed nonno to Saint Hilarion. They slept one room away from each other and would share cups of coffee and sit across from each other at meal service. He was 98 and she was 94, they were married 73 years.

They had a very special bond and we always knew that when one of them passed the other would pass soon after. So it was not entirely a shock that nonna passed away 41 days after nonno.

Nonna was a very caring woman. She was very loyal and would help any of her relatives or friends whenever they asked.

She had some setbacks in her life, but she never felt sorry for herself, never complained, she just got on with things. She was a strong woman, both physically and mentally and very strong-willed.

The day before she passed she was still able to walk with her trusty blue mobility walker. She never gave up on life.

Nonna was blessed with 8 great-grandchildren and she was always happy to see and embrace them.

She led a full life of 94 years and she has left us with many beautiful memories.