

## ENRICO REBULI - EULOGY

### Early Life

My nonno Enrico or (Richetto as he was also known) was born on 18 June 1921, 99 years ago today!

He was born in the small town of Bigolino in the province of Treviso in the Veneto Region in the North East of Italy.

Enrico was named after his uncle, his father's brother, who fought on the Russian front in World War II and was buried in Hungary.

His father Giovanni was born in Bigolino and his mother Filomena Barbisan was born in Levada approx. 5km away. Filomena passed away at age 37 when Enrico was just 6 years old. His father did not remarry.

Enrico had 3 siblings - Maria born in 1914, Ginevra in 1916 and Theodoro born 1920.

He grew up on a property with a large house but there were 3 families and 3 generations living together, paternal grandparents, 3 brothers and their wives and children.

His family members were agricultural workers who grew pasture for three or four cows which were in a stable and they also grew grapes.

Enrico went to school up to grade 3 in Bigolino. He learnt how to read and write but wasn't very enthusiastic about going to school or doing homework, so from a young age went to work in the fields with his father and brother Doro.

He would also work as a child gathering lime stones from the Piave riverbed.

When Enrico was about 11 or 12 there was a division of the family property. His father was given the stables and some of the land, so he learnt how to use a scythe to cut corn, strip the wheat and he hoed under the vines and pruned them.

The money they earned was from the sale of wine and milk, everything else they grew was for use by the family.

Enrico attended social gatherings and religious festivals in Bigolino, The Sagre, La Cuccagna and other festivities. He went to them all but didn't have any money to spend. Life was tough.

He did not know about celebrating birthdays, not even in Australia did they celebrate birthdays. It was the way they were brought up, the only celebrations were those he attended in the village.

Enrico lived in Bigolino until he was 17 and then went to Torino to live with a cousin. He stayed for 9 months but didn't earn much money at all, so went to Aosta in the north-west to work in the hydro-electricity tunnels.

At first he was carrying iron rods and after the authorities saw how hard he worked, they asked him to work with explosives. He worked three shifts tunnelling through mountains and was able to save money working there for a year, being paid well for the mining work.

## **Military**

In 1939/40 when he was 18-19 years old he had to present himself for military service. When it was time to return home after his service, he didn't have much money to take home to his family so didn't want to return. He eventually did and arrived in Bigolino on a Sunday when his father and aunt were at mass. He was ashamed and didn't want to greet them when they returned, but his aunt gave him a great welcome and his father was happy to see him and did NOT talk about money.

It was a hard life for a young person.

Upon returning to Bigolino, Enrico registered for the army.

He was working in the fields with his father when the police came for him. He was given a week to be with his family and then had to go to the army barracks in Belluno (approx. 60km North of Valdobbiadene), where he was enrolled in the corps of the ALPINI (mountain troops) which he described as being very bad, a tough. They cut his hair and gave him army clothes and he slept in a dormitory. The newest recruits had to do all the work.

After a couple of months of army exercises they had to set up camp in Agordo in the mountains.

As an 'Alpini' Soldier they learnt mountaineering skills and they set up camp for a few months when he heard the announcement - 'WE ARE NOW AT WAR'. They left the campsite, went to Belluno and then onto Molfetta (a coastal city abt. 1,000 km south of Belluno) where he embarked on a ship that went to Montenegro. The army then moved to Yugoslavia.

He remembered being sent to work every week on foot and doing guard and surveillance duties and cleaning up places that had been bombed. He also remembered being attacked by partisans.

From Yugoslavia, his army corps was sent to South East France, but luckily he wasn't in a combat zone. He was working as a medical orderly looking after the wounded. He was also involved in building concrete barricades that were put in place in the ocean to prevent the English from landing in France.

In September 1943 he learnt from the French that Italy had surrendered and that the war was over for the Italians. If they remained in France they could have been taken prisoners so the army group dispersed, surrendered their arms and were free to go their own way. They decided to go home, but this was extremely risky as the Germans were still at war and were in Italy. Enrico had to travel from West to East approx. 600km in territory that was controlled by Germans and fascists. The safest way was by foot. It took about one month to return home.

In Spring 1944 he was at home with his father, sister and brother when German soldiers arrested him outside his home. After the assassination of a local fascist leader in Bigolino, the Germans forcibly seized him and four or five other locals in reprisal and took them to Valdobbiadene and then to Treviso where he was destined to be executed in front of a firing squad. Some say that his brother Teodoro, who spoke German fluently having worked

in gypsum mines in Leonberg ,Germany prior to the outbreak of WWII, together with some highly respected political personalities went to Treviso to plead for Enrico's life.

From there Enrico and the others were sent as political prisoners to Dachau the first of the Nazi Concentration Camps in Munich, Germany.

Enrico along with some other able-bodied prisoners were used as slave labor for Germany's war efforts. He worked various places and finally in a local sawmill. One day he and another man saw that a gate had been left ajar, so they made the brave decision after 9 months in Dachau to escape together. He did whatever he had to do in order to survive the journey home which took many months.

He finally made it back to Bigolino early 1945.

### **Marriage**

Richetto met his wife Maria (or Eti) before the war. He had always known her because they lived close to each other.

In fact two Rebuli brothers Enrico and his brother Doro courted and married two of the Dal Toe' sisters; Maria and Amabile!

Enrico and Maria married after the war on 28 Sep 1946. In fact they got married rather quickly, as on her wedding day Maria was 4 ½ months pregnant with Bruno.

His daughter Rosanna was born 17 months after Bruno in Bigolino in July 1948.

During this period after marriage, Enrico went and worked for a year in Belgium in the coal mines and he also worked with his brother in the coalmines near Asolo-Cornuda for 18months and recalled walking and cycling there and back. However the work dried up.

There was not enough land in his fathers plot, he was now married with two children and yet his father was still the head of the household, with Enrico giving him his pay packet.

### **Emigrating to Australia in 1951**

Enrico's uncle Brunone was first to emigrate to Australia in 1927.

Then his brother Doro came to Adelaide in 1949, followed by Amabile and Johnny in April 1950.

Brunone passed away in Adelaide before the birth of Enrico son Bruno, but his aunty, Zia Nanna offered to sponsor him and pay for his trip to Australia. He accepted her offer. It cost her \$67 which he eventually would pay back.

So at aged 29, Enrico made the trip alone, taking the boat '*M.N Ravello*' from Genoa. He travelled third class.

After 50 odd days at sea he disembarked in Melbourne, where some people from Bigolino met him and took him to the train station for the final journey to Adelaide, where his brother met him on arrival.

And so his life began in Adelaide.

He lived on Torrens Road at Croydon in a shed with his brother alongside a house which belonged to an old widower (Mr Cook). They lived there for almost four years before he bought a house in Croydon.

Six months after his arrival in September 1951 his wife Maria and two children would arrive with his sister Ginevra. His other sister Maria and his father Giovanni would remain in Italy.

### **Working life**

Enrico first worked in Adelaide at a flower farm in Marion. He would go with Peter Mattiazzo on their bikes working weekends weeding. He used to live on that weekend money.

After the flower gardens, he started working in the market gardens for the Santin brothers, working odd hours, weekends and whenever needed, weeding and picking vegetables. He only stopped after a while because of the distance.

In August 1954 Enrico started working at General Motors Holden. He also worked overtime at Finsbury in a factory ROH. He worked two shifts at two factories.

The children stayed at Oscar Mattiazzo's before school because both Enrico and Eti left early for work. Eti also worked at GMH.

He initially worked as a cleaner at Holden's Woodville plant and also had some work as a machinist in the packing area. He enjoyed working.

On 27 September 1956 aged 35 he became naturalised as an Australian Citizen.

Enrico only worked, he said he rarely went out. He visited family and friends and went to weddings. He went to the Tonellato wagon on Frogmore Road with others for gathering and social functions and went there to make wine because they had the equipment.

Mum said as a family they did have picnics in the hills, went camping and fishing along the river, hunted for big mushrooms and he took them to the show every year.

When the Elizabeth factory opened in the early 60's he and Eti would make the trip out north each day.

At Elizabeth he was a leading hand with Maintenance Housekeeping.

He was 60 years old when he decided to leave work retiring from GMH in 1981 after 27 years service. Upon retirement he received a gold watch and a Holden Retiree Gold Card which he valued extremely highly.

### **In retirement**

He received a package and bought four flats at Kilkenny as an investment. He was quite happy to leave Holden as he already had a business at home repairing watches, which he taught himself to do.

Nonno used to say that when he was at GMH he sometimes made more money fixing watches than he actually made working at Holden. He fixed all the big bosses watches - all cash money!

In the 80's and 90's I clearly remember people, usually old Italian men, coming to the house on a daily basis. They would come through the back gate carrying either an old-fashioned

clock or watch and headed to the garage to drop it off to nonno. He would spend so much time in the garage and 9 times out of 10 he would be able to fix the problem.

I remember nonno would often be wearing 3 or 4 automatic watches at the same time, to test if they were working correctly. He would have one on each wrist and a few up his arm. He also used to get nonna to wear them. It was quite funny seeing that as a kid.

### **Return to Italy**

Enrico returned five times to Italy the first trip was in 1972 after 21 years away. He was able to postpone holidays for two years to take extended leave.

He said his first visit home was a peaceful time. He did not meet anyone who caused him trouble during the war. For him it was gone, finished with.

But the first trip was a difficult one, as he did not get the chance to see his father again after leaving Italy as he had passed away 2 years earlier in 1970 aged 82. This upset him greatly. He considered his father Giovanni a very good father.

He like being in Italy visiting his sister and brother who had returned and other relatives and friends.

But he didn't like Italy enough to go back there to live. People had employment and also worked the land, but he would often say that there was no life in Italy.

On one of his return trips Enrico visited Dachau. He said he saw the ovens and remembered the process of sending people there. He also remembered his time carrying bodies and placing them in graves. He was heartbroken when he saw those things and felt gratitude that he had survived.

He talked a little bit about the war with us in his later years, but would often stop half-way through a story becoming too emotional to continue.

He told us he used to eat bird droppings and shrug his shoulders and say - "Eh that's what you had to do to survive - caro (dear)".

He told mum when she was a little girl and then Bianca and myself when we were younger that he had been shot in the arm in the war and had the scare to prove it.

Then one day about 20 years ago around the dinner table, he told us casually with a grin on his face, that he actually hadn't been shot and that the mark on his arm was from an incident with a tool when he worked in the mines. Mum couldn't believe it, he had been lying to her for the past 40 years.

Nonno was - 'un po furbo' .....a little crafty.

### **Family**

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

In 1978 he bought a new home in Kidman Park and always said he never regretted the decision to settle in Australia.

In 1983 Enrico suffered the painful loss of his son Bruno when he was just 36 years old. Support offered by his family got him through this extremely difficult period.

We have many fond memories as children hanging around the house at Kidman Park and spending time with nonno.

### **Stories**

We all remember going with him as little kids to pick mushrooms on Tapley's Hill Road on the land opposite the airport. He would always find some, cut them with an old knife and then bring them home for nonna to make risotto con funghi.

He spent most of the past 40 years since formal retirement fixing things around the house. He would either be painting the house, mowing the lawns or in his vegetable garden.

He loved his vegetable garden and growing tomatoes, lettuce, zucchini and radichi. He also had a fig tree. He spent many hours tending to his garden. He also made salami and used to hang them in the garage. He loved cooking a BBQ.

He loved riding his bike around the neighbourhood. He would call in to visit relatives and friends as everyone lived close by. He was extremely active.

Enrico did not waste a single day in his whole life. He was up early, would always dress nicely and he would shave every single day.

He was disciplined, careful and meticulous in his activities and he was also a very anxious person.

He had a unique whistle and anytime he did some work where he had to concentrate he would inadvertently whistle, he especially did this when he was fixing watches. He was fixing watches at 97, with his hands still as steady as a surgeon.

He wouldn't let anything go to waste. If one of us dropped some food on the ground he would pick it up and say there was nothing wrong with it and eat it, or if we left meat on the bone he would grab it off our plate and finish it off and say "what's wrong with you".

You weren't allowed to have a shower for more than 2 mins at nonno's, he would bang on the door, tell us to hurry up and to not waste water.

This mindset comes from his upbringing of having very little, so he placed value on everything.

Nonno was a real character, always smiling and always loud. He had a wicked sense of humour, used to say plenty of swear words in Italian, especially when things went wrong. Words such as "ostia" and other words which started with dio (god) that I can't repeat. He was as witty as they come.

When we went to visit as kids and were in the car leaving, he would always stand at the end of the driveway and have a race with the car as we took off.

He loved wine, white more so than red and he drunk a little bit of processo. Each year he would buy his batch of grapes, come home and go about the process of making wine, bottling it and storing it in the cellar he dug in the garage.

He wasn't a heavy drinker, but liked 'un bicchiere di vino' (glass of wine) each afternoon and night.

About 5 years ago he sold all his equipment and had no wine left, so he asked me if I could take him to this winery in McLaren Vale called Tinlins, a bulk winery to go get some cheap wine.

I said absolutely and that I would be there the next morning to take him, he was so happy. It was probably the first time he hugged me!

I arrived the next morning and as usual he was standing out the front ready and raring to go with his 3 x 20ltr containers. 2 were proper plastic wine containers and the other was a Mt Franklin 20ltr water cooler.

We made the trip to McLaren Vale, it was the first time he'd been on the Southern Express way, seeing the overpasses, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He ended up purchasing 2 containers of dry red, 1 of dry white and 2 flagons of Cream Sherry, he was set for years. I remember when it came time to pay, nonno told them their prices had gone up and painfully and slowly went to his top pocket to get out his wallet to pay. He then produced a bunch of crisp \$100 bills about \$500 worth. The total only came to about \$150 as the wine nonno had bought was real quality stuff, it only cost \$2.20 a litre!

When we pulled up at nonno's and I opened the boot there was this awful smell and a pool of wine in my boot! We had lost about 5 ltrs of white wine from the Mt Franklin water cooler. Once we poured it all into a damigani, I turned the cooler upside down and saw that there was silicone on the bottom of the container. As the handyman he was, Nonno had tried to salvage the cooler by doing a patch up job, but obviously didn't do it properly!

Within 12 months he had drunk the 60ltrs so we made a second trip together to Tinlins this time to get 40ltrs. He was 95 at the time but still managed to drink it all again.

From when he was about 90 nonna had to move into St Hilarion, so nonno was now home alone. Mum provided him a lot of support, but he kept busy gardening, doing housework, washing, cooking, tinkering with watches and visiting his wife every day. Most Sunday's over the past 10 years I would pay him a visit, bring him the paper (which was like bringing him gold) and just sit in the lounge with him for a few hours. After never being allowed to change the channel he would say to me 'guarda cosa che voi'. (watch whatever you like).

Mum would often turn up and walk in, finding us both fast asleep in rocking chairs. For some reason for the past 10 years I talked to him exclusively in Italian. Most days when I was stumbling for my words he would say 'parla inglese' (speak in english). Nonno was also deaf in one ear (he said it was from the mines) and slightly hard of hearing in the other, so you had to talk loud to him to communicate. Quite often at 10mins to 4, nonno would tell me to get ready to leave as he was going to visit nonna at 4pm. He was deadly serious, wasn't mucking around. At 4pm on the dot he would switch the tv off and kick me out, nothing would get in the way of him going to visit his wife and make sure he was there before the 5pm dinner time. The love and care he showed for his wife was remarkable.

Nonno bought holdens his whole life and drove his Holden Nova until he was 97 years old. He had it for 21 years and averaged only 7,000km a year.

I remember following him home one day along Tapleys Hill Road and watched him driving in the bike lane. Despite this, he was a brilliant driver, he used to be quick off the mark and every time he left our place he would reverse out and burn off quicker than normal. He never had an accident in all his years until he backed out of his garage bumping into mum's car and then after speaking with mum decided to voluntarily surrender his licence and move into St Hilarion in December 2018 at age 97.5yrs.

**He was barely ill his whole life.**

I only remember visiting him in day surgery once when I was about 10 year old. Nonno had an operation to cut the nerves in his hand as they had tightened causing his little finger to curl over 90degrees. He used to laugh and show us that when he washed his face in the morning his little finger started to go up his nose so that's when he decided to get it fixed.

On another occasion about 5 years ago he rang us to come around as he couldn't get out of bed, because of a sore neck. We took him to hospital to get some scans and I remember the Doctors looking at the scans in bewilderment. He only had a stiff neck, but they said that the scans were equivalent to what you would normally see in 21year old. Nonno was about 95. He had no arthritis.

He pushed himself to the absolute limit physically and mentally to stay at home as long as he could. Despite having a pacemaker his health was exceptional. He was fit and strong, never complained and just got on with things. At St Hilarion he was a real character, walking all over the place and he was up and active. All the staff commented on what a beautiful man he was.

The only real positive aspect of him moving to St Hilarion though and away from Kidman Park was that he was now with nonna. In fact he was only one room away from her. They would share cups of coffee with each other and sit across from each other at each meal service. He was 98 and she was 94, they were married 73 years and their love story continued right until to the end.

Nonno had 8 great-grandchildren and he met all of them, Bianca and Steve's 4 children and Alana and Jonathon's 4. He was always happy to see them and embraced them all in such a loving way.

Nonno was a very special man, mum said he was the best father she could have ever hoped for. He was certainly the best nonno.

Our memories of him will live on forever. Nonno Richetto - 'Salute' and Happy 99<sup>th</sup> birthday.