

## **Eulogy for ANGELO INNOCENTE (26.11.1921 – 11.2.2012)**

“Are you here?”

These words always greeted my sister and I whenever we visited mum and dad to have a meal together, play gin-rummy, keep each other company. Now we're here again with him, to spend one last time together.

This brief eulogy is on behalf of my mother, sister and Uncle Gino who was always a part of our family, since when as a 17 year old he arrived in Adelaide from Italy and lived with us for eight years till his marriage.

Angelo had three great loves in his life. First of all Elsa, then his much loved home town, Caselle and all who hailed there, and his family.

Angelo was a wonderful father. A few weeks before his death he asked my how the money was holding out. He said he didn't want to put Mirella and me out in any way. And then he added, 'I've always tried to do my very best for you and your sister'. For Dad there were always four equal parts in everything he did. He had a firm sense of parity and fairness. Dad did everything he could to give us everything we might want or need or desire. As a 16 year old Mirella craved a pair of pedal pushers. Mum wasn't so keen and balked at this request. The request went on for one entire weekend. On Monday morning when Mirella woke up she found the exact amount of money she needed for her much desired shorts. Angelo had left it for her, under her pillow, before going to work.

Dad did his best at everything. In all he did he showed us what he valued in life. This is such an obvious lesson but one that you only fully acknowledge in the course of your own life and choices. I think he never compromised on any of his core values: honesty, sincerity, compassion and faith. He was also a gentleman in all the senses of this word. He was a gentle man.

Angelo worked with a business partner and in his own business for many years. He had clients from all over Italy and many parts of Europe. His relationships with these market gardeners was always exemplary. As a child I remember these clients - Calabrians, Neapolitans, Bulgarians, Slavs, Greeks - dropping around to our home in the days before Christmas to settle their accounts. They would sit and have a beer with dad and whoever else was there at the time. They would bring produce as gifts. I think these Christmas visits were such a great symbol of the meaning of Christmas – peace and harmony to all men of all lands and faiths.

Angelo had a long working life. At 13 he went to work in Switzerland as a farm labourer. He was a soldier during World War Two, he was a miner, he worked in factories, he ran his own business. But he always said he was a *contadino*, a farmer, a 'peasant' in the true, honourable sense of the word. And he was proud of his *contadino* origins.

Angelo loved to live life to the full. He loved to travel. He and Mum travelled to Italy ten times and visited family in France, Argentina, Brazil, Canada. When they arrived in Sao Paolo in 1976 my mother's two brothers recognised Angelo the minute he exited the plane. They hadn't seen him for over 26 years yet they cried 'Angin, Angin' as soon as he took the first steps from the plane. Dad loved remembering this arrival.

He was at the World Cup in Spain in 82 when Italia won the final. My parents travelled widely in Australia on trips organised by various Italian clubs - the Trevisani, Friulani, the Club Veneto. I remember a family trip taken in 1965 – our first one – when we drove to Melbourne. Angelo had scheduled the journey and we started the trip with his singing non-stop till we got there - '*A Tintinara beviamo il caffè!*'

But returning to Caselle was always the greatest joy for him. Caselle represented his youth, the War years and his family, especially his beloved grand-parents, Angela and Luigi Innocente. Dad always told the story of the first time his grandfather tasted ice cream. He didn't know how to eat it, so he blew on it! From his grandparents I think Angelo learned about love. His grandparents' marriage was really a mirror for his own with Elsa – long, respectful, full of patience and love.

Dad always wanted to maintain what he called 'our traditions'. He planted *radicchio* - summer and winter crops, he always kept chooks so Mum could make his favourite meal, *polenta* and sauced chicken, he made wine and wine's by-product, *grappa*, he killed a pig annually and made salamis, *cotechino*, *capocolo*. He organised reunions for those born in 1921. His life was full and rich and he never ceased to be in awe of life. The world and its inhabitants were endlessly interesting for him.

We've got lovely memories of this church, Mater Christi. I remember as a child we came to Mass, maybe for one of the Holy Days. A visiting Italian priest was hearing confessions in a room off the main altar. Dad decided to go to confession. A very long time went by and Mum, Mirella and I were getting very concerned. What on earth was he confessing? Towards the end of Mass he emerged. We asked what had happened. Nothing he replied, I said my confession and then we had a chat about Italian football!

Another night, more than forty years ago, we came to a blessing of the cars. All the families stood proudly by their car. Ours was a canary yellow Holden. It was about 1963. When the priest came to our car he did a double-take. That day had been a scorcher and the front windscreen had been entirely shattered. The car looked ridiculously odd and we drove it to Church that evening without a windscreen. But nothing was going to stop our car being blessed!

Angelo had a great way with language. I fear that we are going to lose so many of his expressions, his sayings. If someone drank a lot Dad would say that the following day their

hair would be sore; whenever we cooked a great meal he would say that the dish was now part of the “Seven Wonders of the World”; if it was really hot he would say ‘it’s pretty cosy’ .....

But the dearest thing to my father’s heart was his dear Elsa. He would often say she was his Guardian Angel. They were married for over 64 years and knew each other for over 75 years. They respected, loved and helped each other for their entire marriage. They worked together for 30 years, lived 30 years in retirement together. On their Golden Wedding Anniversary Dad made a very brief and poignant speech dedicated to my mother. His final sentence proclaimed “As a life companion she has been Numero Uno!”

Now Dad is no longer with us. But he will be always in our thoughts and deeds. He always asked us not to forget him. He did not have to ask this of us. We could never forget him.

On behalf of Elsa, Mirella, Zio Gino and our Zia Vittoria, my father’s sister who lives in Canada but who is near us today I know, I wish to thank you all for being such true and loyal friends to my father. And finally, I want to thank this beautiful country of ours that welcomed my father more than 60 years ago and that gave him the possibility to grow into his manhood and become the father and husband we so loved. Bye Dad.

**Aida Innocente 15/2/2012**