

DAD'S EULOGY

Mr Mario Piovesan

Born on 9/06/1914 in Ponzano Veneto, Treviso (northern) Italy.

Died on 23/07/09 in Adelaide, South Australia, Aged 95 years.

Funeral Mass at Mater Christi Church, Seaton, Wednesday 29/07/09.

Before Dad's death, the thought of preparing a eulogy summarising his life's experiences seemed an extremely difficult task – because it seemed at the time that there wouldn't be much of interest to say about his life.

On the surface, it seemed to all of us that he had lived a very simple and uncomplicated life, but his very quiet and unassuming nature masked a very adventurous, courageous and determined spirit - as well as some wonderful achievements over a life spanning just over 95 years. I would like to share some of these with you, particularly some of his earlier life which some may not know much about – but which was typical of the hardships endured both in Italy and Australia by so many of the early migrant families at that time.

Dad was the youngest of six surviving children – 5 boys and one daughter, born on 9/06/1914 in Ponzano Veneto, a small town approx. 5 kms from the centre of Treviso, which itself is approx. 30km N of Venice.

He was born in the year of the outbreak of the 1st World War and he very soon became entangled in the hardships which war brings to its people. He told us that British Army Officers lived in his family home during the fighting against the Austrians in the mountains a short distance to the north of his home, and would feed him sweets.

He was fortunate to complete his 5th year of Elementary (Primary) schooling before commencing work on the small family land holding, which was not large enough to support all the children during the Depression which followed WW1. His second eldest brother Angelo left for Adelaide in 1927 when Dad was 13yrs old. He would never to see Angelo again, because he died in March 1949, just under a year before Dad arrived on the 29th January 1950.

Dad first left home at the age of 15 with his brother Leone (7yrs older) to work in a Carozzeria in Milan, or what we would now refer to as a Vehicle manufacturing plant. This was almost certainly the start of their careers in trades associated with the vehicle industry, which stood them both in good stead for the rest of their lives – ultimately for Dad in Adelaide, Australia and his brother Leone in Caracas, Venezuela.

Dad started his compulsory military service shortly after he turned 20yrs of age on 2/08/1934 and completed his service on 27/09/1935. As a result of living conditions still being very difficult on the land and there being a shortage of regular work in post WW1 northern Italy, his older brother Leone left to find work in the former Abissinia / current Ethiopia in early 1935, which was one of several Italian colonies in NE Africa before WW2. For the same reasons, Dad was invited to join Leone in 1936 and his other older brother Attilio later emigrated to Adelaide in 1937, to join up with Angelo.

In Ethiopia, Dad and Leone had set up a small mechanical and vehicle repair workshop some 200km West of Addis Ababa (the Italians pronounced it “Addis Abeba”) in a small town called Abalti, close to the city of Gimma. Their workshop was next to a difficult ford / river crossing located on the Omo Bottego River, which ensured they were never out of work repairing broken truck axles and the like. Dad was not married, but Leone was married with three young children aged 5, 3 and less than 1 year when he moved there in early 1935. Zio Leone was later joined by his wife and two of his three surviving young children after Easter 1937, the middle child having died of tetanus later in 1935 – during his absence. Another daughter was later born in Ethiopia in January 1938. I am sure this experience had a lot to do with his life-long love of young children, because they all had fond memories of Dad caring for them. They said he was their favourite uncle, something which was often repeated by those who remained back in Italy and who got to know Dad before and after WW2, and during his several visits back to Italy after 1973.

Dad was required to re-enlist into the Italian army on 18/06/1940 following the outbreak of WW2, where he served in Africa and narrowly avoided being shot during an air raid. His fellow machine gunner beside him was not as lucky, he was shot through the head!! Dad was taken a prisoner of war by the British in 1941 and was loosely based in Kenya. The Italian male prisoners (both soldiers and civilians) were interned in work camps, whilst their families were eventually repatriated back to Italy by arrangement with the Italian Government and the Red Cross some 12 months later. Our Aunt and her 3 children were shipped back aboard the ship the Julius Caesar from the English held Somalian port of Berbera. It turned out to be a rough 40 day trip around the Horn of Africa, through the Straits of Gibraltar (where they passed through mined waters), before entering the Mediterranean Sea and landing in Genoa, Italy.

The English farming workforce in Africa had been severely depleted due to their military service commitments and at the time, food was at a premium during WW2. Dad and other similar mechanically skilled and trusted volunteer prisoners were put to work harvesting grain crops, supervised by a Maltese Lieutenant. He was soon put in charge of several Harvesting Combines and for about two and a half years travelled the length and breadth of Kenya and Ethiopia harvesting wheat and working on farms, before volunteering to be sent to London to work in the British Naval warehouses along the Thames.

His boat trip to England was also an approx. 40 day trip around the Horn of Africa and I remember him telling us that they were in such a poor health condition when they arrived, that they were fed and rested for nearly a month before being put to work on the wharves.

As prisoners of war, they were very well cared for and often had days off on weekends to go to watch the soccer. However, they also had to endure the German V1 and V2 bombing raids in the shelters - and had some narrow misses. Some explosions were strong enough to knock their cups from their hands while drinking. Despite experiencing some scary situations, he generally was very well cared for and spoke well of his captors (i.e. compared to Mum’s cousin who had been a prisoner on the Russian front, very poorly fed and beaten for stealing potato peels from the rubbish bins when starving!).

The prisoners were returned to Africa after the end of WW2 and he was eventually discharged from the Italian army on 29/04/1946 and returned to Italy. Zio Leone on the other-hand was not freed immediately and did not return to Italy until 1948, from where he left for Caracas, Venezuela in 1949.

On returning to a war-torn northern Italy after the war in 1946, Dad met Mum - who lived in the neighbouring town of San Pelaio, and he obviously impressed her. Thus began a very brief courtship, but the lack of reliable, regular work in the area forced Dad to move to Belgium, where he and his eldest nephew Sante (some 13 years younger) found work in a Steel Foundry with many other Italians in the small town of Tubize - approx. 30 km from Brussels.

Whilst in Belgium, he kept writing to Mum and they were eventually married by Proxy on 15/09/1948. Mum then joined Dad in Belgium, where they lived and worked for over a year and Mum became a fluent speaker of the French language. From Belgium, they completed their Applications to migrate to Adelaide in Australia – where Dad now had two (2) older brothers (Angelo and Attilio), as well as to Argentina where Mum had some Aunts who migrated there after WW1.

Their Australian application was the first to be approved, so they returned to Ponzano to complete their travel documents. They then travelled to Genoa, where they boarded the Sebastian Cabot on 28/12/49, bound for Australia in 3rd Class segregated Men's and Women's quarters below deck.

Mum was 8 months pregnant with me at the time and spent most of the trip below deck, suffering from sea sickness!.

She was joined there by an equally sick Mrs Elvira Campagnolo who was travelling out to join her husband with a one (1) year old daughter, so Dad's love of children again came to the fore and he spent much of his time looking after young Gilda above deck. This began a life long friendship between the families, which culminated with Mrs Campagnolo taking Dad under her wing when he joined her at the St. Hilarion Village at Fulham after Mum's death (from 6/02/06) and later at the Nursing Home at Lockleys, from September 2008 until his death last week.

Their boat eventually landed in Melbourne on the 29/01/50 where they were met by Zio Attilio, who had arranged for them to fly from Melbourne to Parafield Airport in Adelaide in a "state of the art" Fokker Friendship aircraft (Adelaide Airport did not exist until approx. 1956). Mum, now 9 months pregnant, had worn her overcoat in the middle of summer to disguise her pregnancy - to enable her to make the flight!! They were picked up by truck and taken here, to Kidman Park. I was born a few days later on the 2/02/50 after the jolting truck ride. Mum had been taken to the Quambi Hospital on South Terrace (now the St Andrews Hospital) for the birth, where she was very fortunate to find a doctor who spoke French!!

Here they were as new arrivals with a new born child in the middle of a very hot Adelaide summer, in a small 3 roomed fibro home which uncle had bought, but which was still situated on Eugenio "Marena" Zalunardo's land not far from here on Grange Road - between Findon Rd (the old River Rd) and Frogmore Rd. When Mum surveyed the dry surroundings from the middle of the paddock, in the sweltering 40s C temperature, she wondered "what the hell have we done!" Anyone who has ever been to Mum's lovely old 3 storey stone home just outside of San Pelaio, Treviso would understand!

Their fibro house was shifted down onto zio Attilio's land some months later, immediately next door to where our cousin Nillo's house now stands on Hoskin Ave, Kidman Park. It was supported on timber stumps and located in the middle of a paddock where cattle grazed and, when they scratched themselves on the corner of the house, it would shake so badly that Mum always thought it would topple over. Our nearest neighbours were the Schievenin family who lived in another rented house next to ours on zio Attilio's land (later occupied for many years by Leandro Bortoletto and family), the Santins new home approx. 150m to the South across zia Rosalia's land – set back quite a distance from Frogmore Road, the homes of zia Rosalia and zio Attilio to our East - on the Western side of Frogmore Road, and the all the Tonellatos on the Eastern side of Frogmore Road. The milk used to be delivered daily into a billy-can on Frogmore Road, approx. 300m away, and Mum had to be careful to dodge the snakes along the path, to drop off the billy-can and later collect the milk.

We lived there for about 4 years during which time very strong bonds were formed with our close neighbours the Tonellato and the Santin families, who already had long standing friendships with zia Rosalia's and zio Attilio's families, as well as the many other Italian families scattered around the area on Frogmore and Grange Roads – most of whom were from the Veneto region.

After arriving in Adelaide, Dad soon found work as a Panel Beater but in about the 3rd year of their 4 year stay at Kidman Park, Mum was hospitalised with Encephalitis and spent several months at the RAH - at times close to death.

She was one of only 3 cases in the whole of Australia at that time and the only one to survive unharmed. During this time, Dad would have damaged vehicles delivered to the house so he could continue his repair work and at the same time also look after Renz and myself, who were only 2 and 3yrs old at the time. Mum survived and Dad continued to take on as much work as he could, which enabled them to eventually buy a block of land a kilometre or so further up Grange Road at 1 Richard Street, Flinders Park, later to become part of the suburb of Findon.

Building materials such as bricks, concrete and reinforcing bars were still very scarce after WW2 and there was a size limit placed on homes which could be built at that time. Dad, with the help of many fellow Veneti in the building game, managed to get hold of enough materials and build the family home – which was largely completed just before the Earthquake of 1954. There was no such luxury as concrete paving around the house in those days, the cement bricks were rendered externally and the walls remained unpainted for many years. The two front rooms also had no timber floors for many years, but it was a lot better (i.e. more comfortable) than the old “baracca” (shack) at Kidman Park!!

The move to Flinders Park forced both Mum and Dad out of their comfort zone once again, away from the support of the close-knit Italian community around them at Kidman Park and the interpreting skills of my cousins – upon which they had relied heavily up to this time. They had moved to a new developing area where they were the only Italian speakers at the time.

They quickly formed very strong and lasting friendships with all their neighbours. Mum was forced to move from her reliance on Italian and the French she had learned whilst in Belgium, which had served her very well during the hospital visits for the birth of both myself and Renz – as well her own illness a few years later.

Mum quickly improved her English, but Dad for some reason seemed content to get by with his limited vocabulary – which was unusual given his long exposure to English as a prisoner of war and his new Australian work environment.

The years that followed for Dad continued to be filled by very long working days and nights in often uncomfortable conditions. He was one of the best in his trade and for this reason, he was always in great demand. He would start work at 7:00 in the morning on his regular day job, be home for an early tea with the family and then off again most nights to work for another three to four hours doing the same work – but possibly for a different employer or friends. During those early years he regularly worked 6 day weeks and often 7 days a week, but he made sure he kept either Friday or Saturday nights free for playing cards.

Few Panel Repair workshops had concrete floors in those early days and most of his time was spent in a kneeling position working in poor light and very noisy surroundings. The wearing of ear protection and protective knee pads was unheard of during his working life and the use of strong spotlights was then very rare.

If he wasn't working weekends for his regular boss, he would agree to do private work in the home garage on weekends, where he had especially cast into the concrete floor some rail line offcuts to act as anchors for his hydraulic jacking pump – which he used to straighten car chassis panels. He occasionally undertook a special repair or modification job at home on unique sports cars like an Aston Martin or an E Type Jaguar and we were very proud of his skills. His passion for sports cars would later become a passion for watching Formula 1 Car Racing on TV into the early hours of the morning once he retired, a passion he shared with one of his former work colleagues Luigi Mori just down the road from here at Findon Crash Repairs.

The introduction of imported Japanese vehicles was the scourge of all Panel Beaters in the late 60s and early 70s, because their thinner and lighter panels made them difficult to straighten and file to a smooth finish. The cheaper cost of car replacement panels started to reduce the need for really skilled workmen like Dad and this coincided with his move to work for Corletto Crash Repairers on South Road at Hindmarsh, where they specialised in repairing heavier commercial vehicles. This suited Dad at the time, despite it being heavier and more awkward work which required a bit more agility. He worked there until his “formal” retirement at the age of 65, although he continued to work casually as a Panel Beater until his late 70s (for more than 10yrs).

Dad had continued to work really long hours until 1973, when he was persuaded by Mum to take his first ever holiday and to go overseas – 23 years after they had arrived in Australia. Until this trip back to the old country, both Mum and Dad had harboured the idea of returning to Italy to live – but with both sets of parents now deceased and after discovering that their home towns and the country had changed so much during their absence, they were very happy to return to Adelaide and finally decided to take up Australian citizenship.

Up until that time, Dad had also only ever allowed himself the occasional Sunday off, when he would go off to play either Borella or Bocce and have a drink with his friends at one of the privately owned rinks at the home of either Leandro Bortoletto, the Santin's or Romano Dametto - all of which were within several hundred metres

from here. However, after that initial three months break overseas, his workload on weekends started to slow down and he began to enjoy life a lot more. He loved his Bocce with a passion and was very competitive, eventually going on to represent the Veneto Club and his State in club and interstate Bocce competitions. The top of the kitchen cupboard at home was filled with his trophies, an experience he joyfully shared with several of you here at his funeral today.

He also loved playing cards, which in the early days were played on either Friday or Saturday nights in private homes, on a rotating roster. These were very noisy affairs, particularly if there were two tables playing and eight or more players present. There was much yelling and table thumping – later topped off around mid-night with supper of home-made salami with cheese, followed by coffees with Grappa that went into the early hours of the morning. You never slept well on those nights and one always dreaded getting up for breakfast the next morning because you could smell the cigarette smoke even before you opened the kitchen door!! Amongst the attendees on those nights were some long standing friends from the Kidman Park and Lockleys market gardening families (Albert and Luigi Tonellato, Vittorio Marchioro, Angelo Innocente, Gino Piovesan and Narcisio Ballestrin). All this was eventually replaced by the opening of the Veneto Club in 1974, where he enjoyed playing cards on Wednesday and Friday nights, as well as Bocce tournaments on the weekends.

Dad was always a very active and strong man. He was not a book reader but enjoyed the Italian papers, especially the sports section dealing with the soccer. He could not stand being idle, so after his “formal” retirement he used to help out friends with making salamis in late Autumn and then followed that with vine pruning during the winter months at the Torresan winery at Flagstaff Hill, as well as Mr. Corletto’s vineyard and the Maglieri winery at McLaren Flat. He continued to do this well into his late 80s. I can’t imagine it was much fun being out in those cold, sometimes wet and windy winter conditions, on his feet all day in rubber boots. He loved working with his retired Veneti friends because he enjoyed their company, and it kept him out of Mum’s way around the house!! It also gave him some spare pocket money to use at the Veneto Club, as he enjoyed his independence from the treasurer of the family!!

Like so many of his friends, including those of you here today, Dad and Mum migrated to Australia to ensure their family would have a safe and secure future, compared to what they experienced around them in a war-torn Europe after WW2. Together they achieved their goals with great success, none of which would have been possible without Dad’s outstanding work ethic.

The way he went about it was by honesty and hard work. He lived a simple and uncomplicated life. Those long working hours enabled the family to be financially secure and his example also taught us the rewards of a strong work ethic. However, he didn’t want us to learn his trade, he wanted a better future for us and we were all encouraged to pursue our studies.

Some of our early childhood memories of Dad were of us sitting on his lap receiving cuddles and hugs. Decades later he was doing the same with his grandchildren. He continued to demonstrate this love with his great grand-daughter just several months ago before he died. Along with his calm outer appearance, the grandchildren would

always notice his smile and the joy in his eyes - which were capable of breaking down any language barrier that may have existed between them.

The grandchildren were fascinated by the stories he told around the dinner table about his time as a POW in Africa, before coming to Australia. There were times when their truck convoys were camping out overnight in the jungle and the sightings and sounds of the wild animals all around them kept him as alert and as scared as he had ever been. He told them stories of how the native African young boys used themselves as live bait to lure large pythons down from a tree and, with their arms raised in the air, they would wait until the python had wrapped itself around them (from the ground up) – before killing the python with their knife. A much more dangerous way to get food than his fishing in the local river with a stick of dynamite!!

Dad's passing represents the end of an era and a generation. He was the last surviving member of his family, leaving us children to continue the bloodline. It is witnessing the arrival of the next generations (our children and our grandchildren) and the happiness they bring us, that makes Dad's passing easier for us all to understand and accept. Life goes on, as he would want it to.

On behalf of my brothers and our families, I would like to thank you all for coming to Dad's Funeral Mass today – but more particularly, for having been such good friends to Mum and Dad over the years. I know they both treasured the friendships above everything else. That very strong sense of community which existed amongst those early migrants is rapidly dying out with the passing of Dad's generation of friends. It was that support for each other which helped them get over the pain of leaving behind and then losing their distant mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters overseas without ever seeing them again. You all became part of their extended family here in Adelaide.

Their involvement with the Veneto Club and the Trevisani nel Mondo functions made it possible for them to catch up with so many of you over the years and that gave them a lot of pleasure, so I would like to acknowledge the important role these organisations have played in their lives.

We would like to also extend our very sincere thanks to the staff of the St Hilarion village at Fulham where Dad spent about 2½ years and the Nursing Home at Lockleys where Dad passed his last 10 months. He was lovingly cared for by the staff and the wonderful Sister Dora, who also visited him when he was in hospital and looked after his religious needs.

Last but by no means least, I would like to personally also thank Father Emilio for the wonderful encouragement and support he has provided to Dad since Mum's death just over 4 years ago, whether here at church after masses or when he has been visiting the St Hilarion homes. Father has a very genuine empathy for the old and the sick and his contributions to cheering up Dad and taking care of his spiritual needs have been very reassuring and comforting to him.

Angelo Piovesan
27/07/09

Additional memories added by Angelo Piovesan on 15/11/20

Memories of where Dad worked:-

- 1) Cannot remember where he worked just after we first arrived, when he also had work delivered to the back of our Hoskin Ave “baracca” during Mum’s illness;
- 2) Then at Richards / later to become Chrysler, at the old Le Cornu’s warehouse on Anzac Highway - compliments of Alf Keeley who worked at Chrysler (our next-door neighbour after we moved to Richard St. in Flinders Park);
- 3) Then at Kilkenny – in the red brick building next to the sharp three (3) way intersection, just North of the railway crossing on Kilkenny Road;
- 4) Then at Central Crash Repair (owned by “Snowy Young”), initially in the tin sheds opposite Bailetti’s Sports Store on Hindley St (where the multi-storey Car Park now stands) – before they moved around the corner, off the laneway between Hindley St and Currie St / Light Square;
- 5) Then at Corletto Crash Repairs on South Road; and
- 6) Then for Luigi Mori at Findon Crash Repairs – after he officially retired!!
- 7) Not to mention all his pre-retirement part-time work for Corelli on Findon Road and Vince surname (?) on Wanda Ave, just off Grange Rd - next to Findon Crash Repair.