

*Give me strength*  
*Italian Australian women speak*  
*Forza e coraggio*

A bilingual collection edited by  
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This book is now out of print. Below is the introduction to the book and the winning story by A.Marino, originally titled "*My Three Jewels*".

## Introduction

The contribution of Italian - Australians to this country is well known and well documented. As a community we have to work hard to fight stereotypes and win friends, acceptance and respectability.

Italian - Australian women have been somewhat invisible until recent years in Australian society, busy as they were with many problems involving family, home and work.

In early 1985, a group of woman of Italian origin decided it was time to increase our invisibility, to make our voices heard. It was the beginning of the Italians - Australians Women's Associations, which have been not only active in most parts of Australia, but have know become a national organization.

We woman wanted to ensure that our history was recorded, that the sacrifices made by our woman pioneers would be appreciated by future generations. We held International conferences, seminars and meetings. We spoke, listened, discussed and consulted - all over the country. We heard so many wonderful stories that we decided to offer the woman the possibility of writing their own stories. Oral history is also one of our future projects.)

With the assistance of Alitalia Airlines, we launched a national competition. We gave our sisters one year to write their stories. We received 30 essays from all over Australia, and unfortunately were able to award prizes to only 3 entrants.

However, we were determined that some of the women's stories would be published to ensure the feelings of isolation and exclusion they suffered and the difficulties they encountered would be recorded together with their achievements, their tenacity, their courage and their strength. So here are the stories of eight women. We know you will enjoy reading them.

There is the story of Tania, who left Italy with three young children to join her husband who had been living in Australia by himself for four years. The important decision to travel to such a far away country was made for her by her husband, her father and her brother. Tania writes about her loneliness, her hard work in a factory where she put the finishing touches to 103 dresses a day, plus the work at home and the responsibility of keeping the family together.

Tania tells us about her sorrow when a telegram arrives informing her of her father's illness. She makes hurried trip back to Italy but arrives too late, like so many women before her. There is only time to see his grave, and to cry about the things that never were. She has made many sacrifices and has worked very hard, but now that she has reached a degree a comfort, she is happy to have the time for all the little enjoyments of life: the simple joys of strolling in the Botanic Gardens and of family life.

Maria Paoloni, like most of the others, speaks of the anguish she felt in having to leave her family back in Italy. It was 1937, she was young, newly married and expecting her first child. Her best friend in Australia was the postman in Paddington who smiled when he gave her the letters from Italy. When her little girl was born, Maria could not make herself understood. She worried because the baby was sick and nobody at the hospital spoke Italian. She was comforted by her Australian sisters in hospital who, unable to communicate with her, cried with her, showing at least her tears.

Maria and her husband Gino had a little shop and a second child was born. When World War 2 broke out Gino was arrested as an enemy alien and sent to Long Bay. Maria was alone with her little boy. At the end of war, after years of despair, loneliness and struggle, the family was finally united. There were still difficulties ahead. But also much joy, learning to love Australia, but always with that deep love of their native Italy.

Lucia arrived in Australia in 1962, and as she spoke English and was educated, she was better of than most of her sisters. But life for her was just as hard. Her husband was jealous of her independence in her job. He wanted her at home to help him with his career. Her career and her desire to fulfil herself were not important to him.

Lucia had two children, but life was difficult and she experienced the ugliness of domestic violence. She had to fight for everything: a divorce, her home, her financial future, the future of her sons. She found a degree of peace only in later life when she was working with other women. Then she realized that others carried the same burden.

There are many other stories.

## ***Author's Note***

My maiden name is Annaliza Marino and it was the name I used as author of the story below. It depicts pieces of my mother's life, as I understood them in 1986. Writing her story was deeply emotional and healing. I hope you will enjoy it.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annaliza Jackson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Annaliza Jackson (nee Marino)

## ***The Winning Story***

# Annaliza Marino

*Autumn 1951. Soriano, Catanzaro, Italy*

Finally, Mario has sent the immigration papers for me to join him in Australia. But I am so angry with his mother and sister. They actually received the letter a week ago and of course opened it, as they usually do with my letters. Mario's father came to me and asked if I wanted to go to Australia. What a question! I am dying to get out of her house.

I was so excited I raced over to my parents' home and gave them the good news. They were happy for me, but mamma started to cry, and papa's voice broke down as he wished me well. Rosa my sister was crying, as were the other young ones. Silvio is expecting an invitation from Mario to migrate to Australia. I'm happy Silvio is coming with me. I'll feel a lot safer having him on ship with me and I won't feel so lonely. Poor mamma. Silvio was always one of her favourite sons. I think that losing her two oldest children will be very difficult.

The truth is, I don't really want to go to Australia. I love my family so much. I love my village. Oh, how I love this country! I think about Australia sometimes and the stories about kangaroos in the streets. Although Mario has told me that Australia is a country of great opportunity, I know in my heart I won't be happy there.

And with all these rumours going around that he's found another woman, I feel so insecure and frightened. What will I do if he really is living with another woman? What am I to do? If I stay there, I have to live with Mario's nasty mother ordering me about all the time and treating me like a naughty child. I also have to put up with his sister Flora who is always criticising me. She thinks I'm not good enough for her brother because I did not bring a large dowry into the marriage. Sometimes I could just scream. Instead I have to respect her because she is Mario's sister.

I hope when I get there and Mario and I are alone that he will stop throwing things around and hitting me. I think I just couldn't stand it if he didn't stop. Damned horror! That's what really causing the problem. What will people say? Shush. Pretends all's well. Pretend you're really happy. *La vita e una lotta* - life is a struggle. Do other woman have these problems or am I just the unlucky one? Once I get to Australia I'll know for sure. God help me!

*April 1952, Pease.*

Uncle Giulio drove Silvio, mamma, papa and me to Villa San Giovanni. From there we caught a ferry to the port of Messina, where we boarded the Lloyd Trestino ship. So many tears were shed. Everyone felt broken-hearted. I know I've always been papa's favourite child. His eyes filled with tears, his voice shook as he lovingly said his goodbyes. How I will miss him! He seems to be the only one who understands my feelings. I know he's suffered a great deal because of my problems with Mario, but he has to save face, and so he keeps quiet. *Caro papa.*

There were more hugs, kisses, reassurances and advice. It was time to go. When the ship departed from Sicily I left my heart and soul behind.

*16<sup>th</sup> May 1952. On board.*

After a month on the ship I'm becoming tired and impatient. Sometimes I look at the other women traveling to Australia, some of them proxy brides who haven't yet met their husbands, and I think, 'Will their lives be like mine?' Some of the women flirt with the sailors. I don't know how they do it, knowing they have a husband at home waiting for them. But then their husbands have probably had sexual relationships with lots of women in Australia. I wonder what Mario is doing? I know he wasn't faithful when we were in Italy and I can't imagine he's been faithful during this long separation. Why does it have to be so different for men and for women?

*17<sup>th</sup> May 1952.*

Silvio said something very painful to me today. 'Maria,' he said, 'When we arrive in Australia, no matter what happens, I will not be responsible for you.' I am torn apart because the one person on who I relied on to look after me and support em now turns his back on me. I know he's also worried Mario has another woman. He doesn't want to take any responsibility or get involved. He's always avoided any sort of conflict. But doesn't he know how I feel? Mario does have another woman, what am I supposed to do? I know one thing I won't stay with him if he has. And if Silvio won't help me, I'll look after myself. Dammit, I've bought out five younger brothers and sisters and cooked, cleaned, washed and scrubbed for the household of eleven, I can take care of myself.

Oh Virgin Mary, give me strength, please, I beg you. I am so frightened, and for the first time in my life I feel alone.

*May 1952. Melbourne Australia.*

Mario is fast asleep. It's now 2am. Our ship docked this morning. I was so scared. Everyone hurried off to meet their loved ones. I saw Mario waving frantically to catch my attention. He was alone. He was so happy to see Silvio and me, he just couldn't stop chattering and asking questions. We caught a Taxi to our new home, a boarding house in Brunswick. When we walked into our room, I was devastated. It was tiny, dingy little room. There is a bed with faded sheets in the middle, a chest of drawers at one end and a chest of drawers at the other. There are two rickety chairs and a table by the window. The floor is covered with dirty, torn lino. We have to share the kitchen and bathroom with the other boarders. There are lots of men living here. I feel so uncomfortable. Mario could see I was disappointed. He said as soon as possible, we would move into our own home. I can't believe he can accept living in these conditions. He was the 'prince' of our village back home. Doesn't he feel like I do? Doesn't everything feel as strange and alien to him as it does to me? I just wish I were at home with my mamma and papa.

*Winter 1952, Melbourne.*

We still haven't moved out of this room. But Mario promises me that as soon as he leaves his job at Olympic Tyres and starts his own business, we will move to our new home. Mario has confessed to me that he is also very unhappy in Australia. He cried a lot to when he first arrived. But since he made such a fuss about coming to Australia, his pride won't allow him to return home.

Mario had written home long time ago to have some of his property home so he could establish himself here. He signed papers and sent them to his mother, but his brother and

sister collected the money. Mario was given nothing. Typical of that family - Mario has always been the workhorse. But he never complains.

I can't go anywhere because I don't understand the language, so I just sit in front of the window, day in and day out, waiting for Mario to come home. If anyone comes to the door, I show them a note Mario has written in English, telling them to come back at 6pm. Silvio dines with us every night and Mario's friends, fellow countrymen, come to visit us sometimes. But I am a woman. I can't sit and talk with them, and none of them have wives.

*Winter 1952, Melbourne.*

I am starting to get ill. I am losing weight. Mario tries to be sympathetic, but he doesn't understand how lonely and isolated I am.

*August 1952, Melbourne*

Mario is now working at a bakery. We have moved into our new home. At least it is private. There are many Italians nearby and I have become friend with Rosa who lives next door. She has been in Australia longer than I have and has two children. I am still feeling quite ill and I don't seem to have much energy. Mario said he will take me to a doctor if I don't feel better soon.

*August 1952, Melbourne*

I am so ill I can barely walk. Marino took me to a doctor yesterday. I am anaemic. The doctor has put me on a special diet and ordered some vitamin tonic. He also said I am very depressed. I didn't need him to tell me this, but Mario needed to hear it. I miss my family so much I feel my heart is going to burst from the agony. I spend a lot of my time crying. Rosa says I must be strong, that things will get better. She is the only person who understands me.

*30<sup>th</sup> August 1953, Melbourne.*

Today I have probably made one of the most important decisions of my life. I have decided to leave Mario. I cannot put up with the humiliation he makes me feel every time he abuses me. He gets angry over nothing. Tonight he didn't like the food I cooked, so he threw it on the floor and demanded I make something else. I said it was a perfectly good meal and he shouldn't act so childish. He retorted by smacking me, and said to get moving or he would belt me. So I did as he demanded. I have tried to understand that life in Australia is difficult for him. He has to work long hours and he doesn't have the social understanding he had back home, where he had been one of the most wealthy and most respected in our village. But I wasn't exactly a peasant, either. Even though my family was poorer than his, we had our pride and good reputation. Otherwise he wouldn't have taken me as a wife.

When I first met him, through our courtship until the day we married, I looked up to him and respected him. He was a dashing young man and it was love at first sight. I felt my dream had come true. I thought I would have a handsome, kind and gentle husband, but also one that was intelligent and wealthy. What every girl dreams of!

It started on our wedding night. I had my period and asked him to wait until it was finished for us to have our intercourse. But he insisted he couldn't wait. I knew nothing about sex and my first night was disillusionment. It was painful a experience with none of the romance I imagined. It felt just like an animal on top of another. I cried myself asleep. He never touched me again while I was menstruating. But occasionally, when he is angry, he says, 'How do I really know you were a virgin on our wedding night? You had your period!'

Every time he says this I feel anger, hatred and emptiness, and my faith in him is shattered. I cannot believe he thinks so little of me. When he calls me a bitch or a prostitute and tells me I am stupid, He doesn't realise that he is slowly destroying any respect I have for him. Yet I still love him, perhaps because deep down inside he needs me, and in his own way, loves me. Sometimes he can be so lovely and gentle; he's like a little boy. He can be very kind, and if he knows I really like something, he'll go out of his way of buying it. But when he is in one of his moods, he uses that against me, saying that if he didn't love me he wouldn't buy me such expensive gifts. It's all so confusing. If he really loves me. Why doesn't he speak to me more gently. Why does he hit me? Then again, he really never really learnt to love the way I did. He was without a father at the age of two. He had to be a father to his brothers and sisters, and a man to the house to his mother. But I was bought up differently. Everyone always spoke gently to each other and no-one was ever allowed to swear at home. My mother only raised her voice when we disobeyed her or disagreed with her. My father was a gentleman and always showed the greatest respect to my mother. In Mario's house, on the other hand, tantrums and yelling were the norm.

I believed all men were like my father. I had heard stories of men treating their wife's badly, but never in my wildest dreams did I think it would happen to me. My leaving him had nothing to do with not loving him. The fact is, if I stay with him I will lose my self-respect. I know I am not stupid. If I leave him, I will be able to go to work and earn a living for myself, become independent. Perhaps I can even study. How I wish my father had been rich enough to let me go further than just fifth grade.

Anyway, I'm leaving. I am going to enquire about a job at the sewing factory and when everything is organized, I will go. It will be a real disgrace for the family. I know Silvio will be upset, particularly as mamma and papa will pressure him to bring Mario and me back together. But Silvio has never supported me anyway. I am so far away from Pease now, and the family will get over my leaving Mario. And perhaps I'll find a kind and gentle man like my father who'll understand me. I don't know how I'll tell Mario. He'll go crazy. I think I'll just have to leave while he's at work. I'll leave him a note.

*20<sup>th</sup> September 1953, Melbourne.*

I have been felling extremely ill. I feel weak and nauseated perhaps I'm anaemic again. I hope not- I've barely recovered. But last time I didn't have nausea. Anyway, my plans to laeve Mario haven't changed. I went to see the boss at the factory last week and he

said I can start when ever I like. I'll wait until I feel better then I'll go. I receive a letter from mamma and papa. They miss Silvio and me terribly, and I miss them. How I wish I could see them again. How I wish I could see my dear Pease, in my dear Italia.

Mamma says the family and friends always ask how I am. If only they knew the truth. They all thought I was extremely lucky to marry above my social class. But I'm sure mamma and papa know the truth, they can't be so blind. Papa would not say anything, but mamma sometimes commented that things were not always as they appeared, and she suggested that I was not as lucky as everyone believed. Of course, she would go on about the evil eye, too, but I think that's a lot of nonsense, I just think this is just what I was destined to experience. Anyhow, if I don't feel better soon, I'll go and see the doctor.

*25<sup>th</sup> September 1953, Melbourne.*

I went to see Dr G today. He told me I am pregnant. I am very happy to here I can bear children. After nearly four years of marriage, I was beginning to think I couldn't. Mario is extremely exited and has gone out to tell all our friends the wonderful news.

But know I can't leave Mario. No-one will employ pregnant women. How could I survive alone with one child? No, it's possible. I'm trapped. I have to say.

I love knowing I am going to be a mother, but at the same time, this pregnancy means I have to put up with Mario for the rest of my life. I have to find a way to stop him abusing me, or at least to stop him hitting me. I know everyone says that in Australia, if a man beats his wife, he can be imprisoned. Maybe I'll do that. I'll threaten him that I'll call the police if he hits me again. But maybe, now that I am pregnant and carrying this child, he won't hit me. He will come more careful and gentle. With all my heart, I hope so. *Santa Vergine, dammi la forza* - Blessed Virgin give me strength.

*30<sup>th</sup> September 1953, Melbourne.*

Mario hit me again today. And I did it – I threatened to call the police and have him locked away forever. He kept on screaming, but he looked scared. Perhaps that's what Mario needs: someone to stand up to him. To show him that they're not scared. I think that's the only way I can make him treat me like a human being. I wonder if he realises that by hitting me could damage the child. Sadly, he's not that sensitive.

*10<sup>th</sup> may 1954, Melbourne.*

Mario has not laid a hand on me since the night I threatened to call the police. He still screams and insults me, but I'm getting used to it. Sometimes I just block of and think about something else. But if he feels I'm not listening, it makes him more angry and he walks out in a huff.

The baby's moving again, Any day know, Dr G says. I'm scared about going to the hospital and having this baby. I don't know what to expect. I can't say any English, other than 'hi how are you? I'm fine thankyou.' At least Dr G is Italian. I'm sure he will be a great support to me. Rosa says she will come and visit me everyday. She is a wonderful friend, more like a sister than a next door neighbour. Since we moved into our house about a year ago she has been the only person I can really talk to.

*16<sup>th</sup> May 1954, Melbourne.*

I think the baby is coming. I want to tell Mario so he can take me to the hospital. But he's in the kitchen with all his friends and I feel so embarrassed in front of all those men. Mario has a big mouth and every little sense of privacy.

I went to see Rosa. She says I should tell him no matter what. She often says she can't believe the same man who has bought me coffee in bed every morning since the day we married could also be so insensitive. I hope these men leave before I actually have to deliver the baby, otherwise they'll all end up embarrassed.

*18<sup>th</sup> May 1954. In hospital, Melbourne.*

Yesterday at 5.25am I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Isabella. Mario wanted to name her after his mother. I'm not really happy about it, even though it's our custom. After all, Donna Isabella was extremely unkind to me during the time I lived with her in Italy. She thought I was a fortune hunter. If only she'd known how much I loved Mario, not his money. She was always causing problems for us by accusing me of not being a good enough wife and of squandering his money. She said this when I bought some buttons to sew onto a cardigan I had knitted. I wasn't even allowed to take a piece of bread from the cupboard. Often her accusations would lead to arguments between Mario and me, even to me hitting me. Mario's sister also disliked me intensely. When Mario left for Australia, things got worse. They couldn't stop tormenting me, as if I couldn't be happy. They couldn't accept that a basket weaver's daughter might have style and intelligence. I know I speak good Italian, despite my limited education. At least when Mario was at home I somehow felt protected from them. He occasionally took my side and stood up for me.

Anyway, my little Isabella seems to have taken after Mario's side of the family, blond hair and very fair skin. She is really quite beautiful. The hospital staff aren't very friendly. They sometimes come and mumble something to me but I can't understand what they are saying. I feel very depressed and cry a lot. I'm not normally this sensitive. I asked Dr G about it and he said I'd feel better soon.

I'm very angry with Dr G, He refused to speak to me in Italian when he came in to see me this morning. I couldn't believe it - the audacity of the man! I told him the only reason why I'd employed his services was because he spoke Italian. If I'd wanted an English-speaking doctor I wouldn't have asked him. He eventually responded in Italian, but he was embarrassed in front of the Australian nurses. I wondered whether any of the nurses could speak Italian, but were too ashamed to admit it. How could anyone be ashamed to speak Italian? Italy with its wonderful history and culture, those warm and caring people. How can these people with no culture - they were all convicts anyway - presume to be superior to us? I don't think I am superior to them, but when they act like this, I certainly start to feel it. But at any rate I must learn English.

Mario has been very kind. He bought me some home made soup to help my milk. But I miss my mamma, especially now I have also become a mamma. I fell so alone.

*July 1954, Melbourne.*

Today my younger brothers, Sandro and Paolo, arrived in Melbourne. I am so happy to have them with me. I somehow feel closer to home. I miss my mamma and papa so

much. I often find myself holding back big tears which swell up into big lumps in my chest. I love them so much.

Isabella is a sickly child. She's just getting over a whooping cough. The doctors thought she would die, but she's survived. *Grazie ,Dio mio*. I'm still concerned about her tummy. I am sure the doctor didn't tie her cord properly at birth. She cries so much and her tummy seems to swell.

*August 1954, Melbourne.*

The other day some men came to deliver some sand to fix the driveway. They dumped it on the footpath. This morning some children came and started to play on the sand. I didn't mind, but they started throwing it onto the road, so I went out to tell them not to. One of them ran home and their mother came out with a broom screaming at me in English. She actually wanted to hit me! I raced into the house and locked the door. I just cried and cried. What's wrong these people? I didn't want to hurt her child.

God help me understand these people and its ways.

*January 1955, Melbourne.*

I went to see Dr G again today, as I have missed a couple of periods. He says I am pregnant again. He also says I have to stop breastfeeding Isabella. Poor Isabella. It is the only thing that helps her when she is grizzly.

*June 1955, Isabella.*

We have a new business, a grocery. It has living quarters upstairs. It is quite nice.

*18<sup>th</sup> August 1955, Melbourne.*

I had a beautiful baby boy last night. We called him Roberto after Mario's father. I kept trying to tell the nurse that Roberto was coming, but she insisted there was plenty of time. Just because my English is not perfect, it does not mean that I am stupid. Anyway, the pushing feeling started and I began screaming. By the time the nurses came to assist me, Roberto was already half way out. At least he's alright. The nurses here were the same as the hospital where I had Isabella. They don't allow the babies to sleep with their mothers. I only see him at feeding times. I can't wait to go home. Isabella is missing me terribly.

*10 November 1955, Melbourne.*

My feeling that something was wrong with Isabella was justified. We took her to the specialist and he said she has an umbilical hernia. She will have to go to the hospital next week for an operation. I am so worried about her. Please god, I beg you, let her get well.

*19<sup>th</sup> November 1955, Melbourne.*

I go to see Isabella three times a day. First I have to feed Roberto then prepare some food for Isabella and take it to her in hospital. She won't eat or drink anything the nurses give her. They just say she cries all day and cries herself to sleep at night. She is so tiny and helpless. My heart breaks to see her so distressed. When I leave she screams 'Mamma no! Mamma no!' I can't stand it. I come home and cry. Mario is very upset. The hospital won't let me stay with her. At least if they would let me feed Roberto in hospital,

I could be with her a little longer. My poor baby. Please God will she be out of hospital soon. Now I understand why my mother used to say, 'only when you become a mother will you understand a mother's suffering.'

*16<sup>th</sup> November 1955, Melbourne.*

I told Mario today that I want to help in the shop. I am sick of staying up stairs like a prisoner. I want to meet people. I want to learn something than just keeping house. Mario agreed, but he said that once I made the commitment I would always have to help like a partner. I agreed. Tomorrow's my first day. I am quite excited.

*17<sup>th</sup> January 1956, Melbourne.*

Today was my first day working in the shop. Mario would only let me serve the Italian speaking customers. He said when I learn to speak English, and then I can serve Australians. Not many Australians came into the shop.

It felt strange serving Rosa over the counter. I am so used to her coming upstairs for a cup of coffee. She's offered to look after Isabella and Roberto.

However Mario is a bit bossy. He even scolded me in front of a customer. I don't care. At least I'm not upstairs alone. When I heard Mario chatting away, laughing and joking with customers, I used to feel so jealous of his freedom. I think I am going to like working.

*December 1956, Melbourne.*

My brothers left for Adelaide today. They said there are more opportunities over there. Mario wants to follow them, but I am happy here. We have lots of friends and the business is doing extremely well. I don't want to go.

*January 1957, Melbourne.*

Tomorrow we depart for Adelaide. Mario has sold the business. I am so depressed. I told Mario, 'One day you'll be sorry you left Melbourne on account of my brothers.' He doesn't understand that they don't like him very much. And when we are together, I have to do all the cooking, cleaning and washing. None of them ever gives me a hand. Mario thinks I don't like my brothers. But I do love them. Only I know they have their own lives, and they have never given me any support. None of them ever stood up to Mario when he abused me. My marriage is cross to bear. And I am really going to miss Rosa.

*February 1957, Adelaide.*

It is nearly a month we have been in Adelaide. We are living with my brothers. The house is quite big and comfortable. Mario has bought a new grocery business. They work from home. I have to go with Mario during the day, so Silvio, Sandro and Paolo look after Isabella and Roberto. When I come home, everything is in a mess. No-one gives me a hand to do anything. How lucky men are!

*June 1957, Adelaide.*

My little Roberto is extremely ill. He has pneumonia and I am worried sick - he looks so pale and thin. The doctor is very worried about him. Virgin Mary, please don't let my little Roberto die.

*July 1957, Adelaide.*

Roberto has recovered, thank God. We were all so worried. Little Isabella would go sit next to him, hold his hand and say that everything would be alright. I am so glad to see that they are so close. They never fight my little jewels.

*October 1957, Adelaide.*

The doctor informed me today that I am pregnant. God give me strength!

*March 1958, Adelaide.*

I have only one month of pregnancy left. Still no-one gives me a hand with anything. Mario insists he needs me in the shop. He doesn't think that I might cause myself damage carrying heavy crates of soft drinks. The varicose veins in my legs are getting worse. My left eye has been giving me problems. The doctor says it is due to the strain of my pregnancy, and that I will be better after the delivery.

*15<sup>th</sup> April 1958, Hospital.*

Yesterday afternoon I had a beautiful baby girl. I haemorrhaged after birth. The doctor says I will be all right. We have called the baby Rosa, after Mario's aunt. Of course my sister Rosa will be so happy. I wish mamma and papa were here to share my happiness.

I need you so much, mamma. I don't know how much I am going to cope with work, four men, two children and a baby, all by myself. Virgin Mary, give me strength.

At least the staff in this Hospital are polite. Perhaps because it is very small and privately owned.

*18<sup>th</sup> April 1958, Adelaide.*

Mario bought me home today. He made an effort of tidying the house of my homecoming, which is more than I can say for my brothers. Mario says I can stay home a week to rest before going back to the shop.

There is now one to look after Rosa. As I am breastfeeding, I'll have to take her to work with me. At least I am not leaving her with strangers.

*May 1958, Adelaide.*

It's nearly a month now since Rosa's birth. I am constantly feeling exhausted. Last week I left Rosa on a bottle just for the day time. I still breastfeed her every morning and every evening. Mario says we can baptise her in a couple of weeks, but we won't have a big party like we did for Isabella and Roberto.

I've decided to take correspondence lessons on English – it's about time. I don't know how I can manage it but I'm determined to learn.

It's so difficult to get good Italian novels and magazines here, but Silvio manages to find them time after time. How I love to read!

There is one good thing about working in the shop: I am so busy I forget my problems. The customers are very nice too. A lot of Greek people come to the shop and I am learning to speak from them. I feel good when I can greet them in their own language, and they enjoy it too. I would've made a good student, given the opportunity. I am also enjoying learning how to run a business. Mario doesn't give any credit for my

intelligence, but I sometimes think I know better than him. But he's the boss. I just take the orders!

*June 1958, Adelaide.*

We baptised Rosa today. It was a small gathering, and everyone came to our place for dinner afterwards. Every time I go to church in Australia, I feel it's not the same as it was in Italy. They do things differently here. They don't sing the mass like we do in Pease, and there doesn't seem to be any community feeling among the congregation. Even the baptismal ceremony is much simpler, but I am slowly getting used to Australian ways.

*Early January, 1959, Adelaide.*

Last night I just couldn't take Mario's insults anymore. He has such a foul mouth; he's always calling me a prostitute and a bitch. I was fed up. I ran out of the house. It was around eleven o'clock when I walked down the end of the street and then came back home. I can't leave my three jewels, they would never understand. When I came back, he accused me of having a lover. I can't believe it! He's the one who goes chasing after women behind my back, and then he has the gall to accuse me. When could I possibly find the time to have a love affair? Anyway, one man is more than enough. Sometimes I think I would have been better off as a nun. At least they don't have to put up with the impossible demands of men.

*O cara mamma, perchee cosi difficile la vita della donna – why is a woman's life so difficult?*

*November 1959, Adelaide.*

Isabella has been promoted into the upper school. She has had many difficulties, but I am so happy and proud. Roberto starts school next year. I hope he will be alright.

*February 1959, Adelaide.*

Roberto started school today. But he was very different from Isabella. He didn't cry. He was comforted by Isabella being there with him. Those two really get on well together and look after each other. They are very protective of Rosa as well.

*December 1960, Adelaide.*

Mario and I met Roberto's teacher today. He came first in his class. Sister Marie advised us to send him to the private collage next door. She said it is an all boys school which emphasises academic achievement. Mario and I are so proud. We talked about it and decided we will send him there. As a mother I love my children the same, but somehow I can't help feeling something special for Roberto. Maybe because he's the only one who looks my side of the family and has our temperament. The girls take after Mario's family. I hope they don't inherit the bad temper.

*Maria Virgin, proteggi i miei giolli da qualunque male – please guard my jewels from all harm. I pray they will never want for anything.*

*March 1965, Adelaide.*

Tomorrow we depart for Italy. Finally I am going to see mamma and papa again. I am so excited about going home; I could just burst with joy. Oh, how I have missed that beautiful land of mine!

*6<sup>th</sup> April 1965, Messina, Italy.*

The Galileo docked in Messina this evening. It was raining and very cold. How wonderful to be in Italian soil. I felt alive again, as if I had a reason for living. Mamma and papa were so pleased to see us, especially the children, who looked a bit bewildered by the whole experience. As Messina was only a stopover on our way to Naples, our meeting came an abrupt end. But we will be together again soon.

*7<sup>th</sup> April 1965, Rome.*

Late this morning we arrived in Naples, Mario's brother Adriano was there to greet us, as were my brothers Carlo and Paolo and my sister Rosa and her family. We all drove to Rome, where we are staying with Adriano and his family. It's a little crowded for Adriano has four children and Mario's mother is also living with them. But we'll all manage to fit somehow. It was wonderful to see everyone again. I am so happy to be back in Italy, I wish we could stay here forever. I feel so much at home. I understand the language and the ways of my people and they understand me. When I am in Australia I felt no-one understands anyone.

*20<sup>th</sup> April 1964, Pease.*

Yesterday evening, we arrived in our home town. The country side is as beautiful as I left 13 years ago. It doesn't seem so long ago now. When we got to mamma's house, I could hear the bells of St Dominic's ringing, calling us to church as they did when I was a little girl. All my aunts and uncles came to greet us. Isabella, Roberto and Rasa clung to me in fear. They had never seen so many old people dressed in black, all wanting to kiss and cuddle them. They'll get used to it. It's so good to be home.

*21<sup>st</sup> April 1965, Pease.*

I got up very early this morning. I was so excited. I went to the balcony and breathed the fresh mountain air. I looked down the road that leads to the village square. So many memories of childhood rushed through me. I remembered I was only fourteen, and as was my habit every Wednesday, I went down the road to the river to do the weekly washing, it was wintertime; I had my period and was in pain. While I was washing the clothes, it started to rain. But I couldn't go until I had finished. I worked as quickly as I could. When I finished I put the heavy load on my head and started for home. The road was slippery; I fell and grazed my knees. I began to cry and wished my parents were rich, but I picked myself up and continued home. When I got home mamma ordered me to change my clothes and get onto other housework. She never demonstrated any sensitivity towards me. I used to think she never cared about me. Now I think she was preparing me for harder times to come.

I also remember when how I was forbidden to sit on the balcony for fear of young men might pass and make romantic comments. One day my father caught me on the balcony as young Carlo was walking by singing. Papa stormed in, threw me to the floor and said that if he ever caught me on the balcony when a young man was passing by again he

would kill me. But I understood that he was just trying to protect me from the local gossip, and how the village used to gossip! It was the first and last time I ever saw the village so angry. He was always so gentle and understanding. He could have forced me to marry a number of men, but he wanted me to have a say. It wasn't until Mario arrived, a young and handsome man of the world, that I gave my consent. Mario was so kind and gentle then. He changed so much after marriage.

There were also happy memories, like visiting with my girlfriend and going for walks in the piazza. All the young men would try and catch our attention, but we wouldn't take any notice. I went to mass every single day. I really loved to go. It was my daily outing. I wasn't always allowed to go to the piazza with my girl friends, but I was always allowed to go to church.

When the war came there wasn't much joy and laughter, food was scarce and we all lived in fear. Silvio was conscripted into the army and spent over a year as a prisoner under the Germans. I'll never forget the news of the Germans coming to Pease. It was frightening. All the men took their daughters out of the village into hiding. I still cringe at the sound of low-flying aeroplanes.

From the balcony I turned to the lounge room. We only had two rooms and a kitchen, so we couldn't all sleep in the house. We older ones used to go to my grandmother's house and the younger ones would sleep here.

From the window in the lounge room one can see Paesetto, which sits on top of a hill. I'd nearly forgotten how beautiful the countryside was in these parts. It was this very window that I used to sit and embroider linen for my dowry. But when I could, I would read instead. Silvio collected all the Italian classics. I would hide these under my embroidery and read while my mother was working in the kitchen, out shopping or visiting. A few times mamma caught me. Oh my God, she was so angry. She would say, 'what good will reading be when you get married? You'll have to learn how to cook, clean, wash and sew and look after your family.' I know she meant well, but I resented those words. I resented all the stupid laws which said men came first and women second. It was alright for my brothers to read – I had to learn how to be a good wife and mother. Well, know I am a good wife and mother, and the reading gave me no harm. People comment my good Italian and I feel proud, as only I attended school to the fifth grade. I would have loved to go to high school.

Sandro was the only one in our family that was given the opportunity to study. I remember I used to help him by listening to him repeat his lessons. It gave me a sense of importance, as if I could share his learning. Funny, I also remember changing his dirty nappies. I am very proud of him. He gained a law degree and has a job as a Director with the Department of Social Security. I can hear the bells of St Dominic's ringing. I must go to church.

*20<sup>th</sup> May 1965, Rome.*

An amazing thing happened this afternoon. Mario, Isabella and I were in the bedroom chatting, when suddenly Donna Isabella, Mario's mother walked in. she got down on her knees and begged for me to forgive her for all the pain she had given me in early marriage. I told her that there was nothing to forgive about and that she had always been

really kind to me. I can't believe that it happened. Could it be that after all these years she is truly sorry for what she did? I felt very humbled by her actions. I started to feel guilty about having represented her so much and thinking so unkindly of her. Poor woman. If I'm honest, I have to say she had a terrible life herself. Her husband died and left her with five children, two of whom died in tragic accidents. I can only imagine how she must have struggled to bring up her children. I think it was her faith in God which kept her going. At least she was rich and always had assistance from her own family.

*15<sup>th</sup> August 1965.*

Today is our last day in Italy. Tomorrow we drive to Naples, where we take the *Marconi* back to Adelaide. Oh, how I am going to miss this country. I wish I could stay. There would only be one problem with living in Italy, and that has to put up with family squabbles. My family and Mario's family never met eye to eye. On the other hand, I'm sure I could learn to live with it. But I can't persuade Mario. I think it's that pride of his, and also his fear of starting over again. We have become quite successful in Australia, although we would have been richer if we had stayed in Italy. But one must follow one's destiny. The children seem to want to return, even though they love being with their cousins. I suppose they miss their school friends and uncles and cousins in Australia. But maybe we will settle in Italy one day.

*16<sup>th</sup> August 1965.*

I shed a lot of tears when we departed. I just can't forget the words papa spoke the day I left Pease: 'Know that I have seen you I am ready to die.' When I think of those words I shake with fear. Please God keep him safe.

*August 1967, Adelaide.*

Last night I dreamt the cornerstones of our house in Pease had crumbled and the whole house had collapsed. This morning I received a telegram saying that papa had just died. What unbearable pain! I loved my papa more than anything in the world. Such a kind and loving man. He was always softly spoken. Often when my mother cooked, and it was too salty. Papa would gently tell her and she would snap, 'Drink water!' And he would just answer, '*Si, Ornella, come dici tu* – Yes Ornella, as you say'. He had such patience and understanding. It was always my mother who was in a hurry to marry me off, but not papa. He used to say that it must be my decision – what an enlightened man! Even when mamma complained about me reading instead of embroidery, he reassured that a little reading could only do me good and not to worry about my wifely abilities. *O papa* – I love you so papa, why did you leave me? Dear, dear papa.

*27<sup>th</sup> October 1975, Adelaide.*

Tomorrow is my Silver Wedding Anniversary. Sometimes I can't believe I have been married such a long time. I have changed over the years and Mario has also mellowed. He hasn't hit me again since I was pregnant with Isabella. However, he's never rid himself of his foul tongue and temper tantrums. But I'm used to it now and realise he doesn't mean what he says; it's just his way of venting his anger and frustrations. I have wanted to leave him many times since that first time, but I just couldn't. I would have lost my children, who are the most important things in my life.

Despite Mario's tantrums he is quite generous. For our anniversary he has bought me yet another beautiful diamond ring. He has bought me so much jewellery over the years. He's not always generous about my buying new clothes or shoes, yet he has always wanted me to dress elegantly. In fact, he has always been proud to have me by his side, and so he should be.

Even though I was born in a village, I've never felt like a village girl. I always worked hard to rise above the situation into which I was born. Sometimes, when our accountant or lawyer comes over for dinner, they often compliment me not only of my cooking, but also on my high standard of English. This annoys Mario. He feels threatened. He thinks that if I know too much, I will try to be the boss.

That's why he won't let me do further studies and wouldn't let me go to English classes. I had to do English correspondence. Now, sometimes I sit down and read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The children are really proud of me when I relate something I've have read. Mario doesn't make any comment at all.

Since Mario bought the grocery shop in Melbourne, I have always played a part in running his business affairs. Slowly, as my English became better than his, he would ask me to take telephone calls and enquires. Yet he's never openly admitted or appreciated the importance role I've played. One thing I must say, though, is that Mario always asked my advice my advice on his business deals, even though he didn't always take it. So far, my advice has been right.

Isabella, Roberto and Rosa are so naïve, I wish they were more worldly-wise. I try to guide them but it doesn't work. Isabella is certainly the strongest of the three and seems to have some influence on the other two. But I love them all – their lives started inside me. I wonder if I'll make it to our Golden Wedding Anniversary?

I think the family takes me for granted sometimes – they don't realise what would happen if I were to go. I am sure there would be many problems. My brothers won't have anything to do with Mario. They only come over because of me, he still doesn't realise it. The only one who could possibly hold the family together is Isabella, but unfortunately, I think this would be even stronger than her. Funny, I feel like a vital link in some construction: pull me out, and everything will fall apart.

*Winner of the first prize in the ADIA/Alitalia competition.*