



ANNA ROSA NANNETTI

1944

OUT OF DARKNESS, LIGHT
LIFE AFTER MASS MURDER - MARZABOTTO 2011

Association of Relatives of the Victims of Nazi-fascist massacres in the boroughs
of Marzabotto, Grizzana, Monzuno and neighbouring districts

To the martyrs who were shot
To the martyrs who were deported
To our surviving families,
true PEACE BUILDERS



Niccolò dell'Arca - Il Compianto (1463 c.a.) - Chiesa di Santa Maria della Vita, Bologna.

*Guardai la terra ed ecco solitudine e vuoto,
i cieli, e non v'era luce.
Guardai i monti ed ecco tremavano
e tutti i colli ondeggiavano.
Guardai ed ecco non c'era nessuno
e tutti gli uccelli dell'aria erano volati via.
Guardai ed ecco la terra fertile era un deserto
e tutte le sue città erano state distrutte
dal Signore e dalla sua ira ardente.
(Geremia 4, 23-26)*

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DIGI GRAF S.r.l.

Via Cartiera, 118 - 40037 Sasso Marconi (Bo)

Tel. 051.6781100 - Fax 051.6781122

www.digi-graf.com

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INTRODUCTION

This book collects the eye-witness accounts of various people who survived the atrocities of 1944 in the boroughs of Grizzana Morandi, Marzabotto, Monzuno and adjacent districts.

A first part was published in 2008 as "The Children of 1944". The stories of survivors and relatives will go on being collected.

This volume includes:

- Accounts by "Children of 1944".

- Accounts by adult survivors.

- Contributions by families and friends of survivors

- Scientific contributions.

- Documentation of what the eye-witnesses relate: the aid received from Switzerland; reception in the most important Refugee Centre in Florence – to some a definitive home base, to others a momentary stopping place before moving on to other Refugee Centres; the places where men were selected for deportation to Germany; and the places destined for labour camps.

- Monte Sole today. Pages are devoted to people who have helped, or still help every day, to keep the memory alive by their moral and material support, by studies, prayer, constant readiness to guide visitors round the sites of the massacres, recount the story of events, investigate it further, and those who invite us to speak in schools or institutions in their towns and cities.

- Visits to atrocity sites. Children's comments.

- Remembrance Day. Shlomo Venezia and Elena Bono.

PREFACE

So, a new collection of stories by the children of 1944.

Anna Rosa Nannetti, one such herself, continues her search for the voices of a diaspora, spinning into one thread the lives of those who were the unsung victims of Monte Sole and its atrocities. She here completes her task with voices of adults and institutions, people who witnessed those events in their day, raising the collected eye-witness accounts, if possible, to still greater heights of humanity and pathos. The book that caused such emotion in those who had a part in its stories, and other readers besides, here takes on more vibrant significance still.

It is generally known that the sentence which convicted various Nazi criminals on an equal footing has now become definitive. Much has been said about that sentence – or rather, those sentences, since the first degree conviction pronounced by the Military Tribunal of La Spezia was followed in 2008 by an equally weighty decision on the part of the Rome Court of Appeal. There was likewise lengthy debate immediately after the first verdict as to the utility of a criminal trial held more than sixty years after the event.

I think that those who voiced their legitimate doubts have received a definitive and exhaustive answer. There is a line demarcating civilization from benighted barbarity, and on this side of the line stand the founding values of justice and responsibility. That, surely, is the criterion justifying a trial that was clearly exemplary in the respect shown for the rules by all those conducting the court, as well as in the depth to which the facts were plumbed and the variety of voices given a hearing.

The debate was followed by public law studies which completed the reasoning of the trial (including a recent essay by Pezzino and Baldissara, “Massacre”).

We now stand at the more arduous juncture in which, at this distance from the events, we need to preserve their memory and lodge our appeal with future generations. It is here that the extraordinary operation conducted by Anna Rosa becomes such a vital pivot in this task of transmitting culture and preserving values.

The simple legal component was undeniably rich and essential, and so was the judgement upholding the impelling need to honour humankind (on a par with many other such judgements in the course of the last few years). Over and above these, however, is the need to reckon with the wider world, which this book helps us to do.

Besides the horror at the killings and the betrayal of humanity, the Monte Sole massacre had the tragic additional effect of wiping out a whole society of humble, dignified beings that animated the mountain bastions between Marzabotto and Vado.

Hence the great value of Giorgio Diritti’s epic “L’uomo che verrà”, over and above its beauty of form in many scenes: for it fixes indelibly the faces, words, habits and lives of the people of Monte Sole which the wind of History swept away.

Against the buffets of that disrespectful gale the strength and patience of Signora Nannetti acquire all the greater magnitude. As I pen these words I realize the privilege I had in acting for the civil plaintiffs at La Spezia, and shall always be proud to have done so. But these few words cast me in a simpler role: I too am a “son” of this neck of the woods, brought up to remember their story.

I recognise, as others will do, not just the stories in themselves, but above all the spirit of a small farmer society which the efforts of many have brought back to life, but which needs conserving as memory battles against the inexorable march of time. This the accounts assembled by our author enable us to do as each and every reader internalizes them and stores them away. And thus they take their place alongside History which tends to focus on the Great Events and forget “the people who built the walls of Thebes”.

Note, too, that this is no purely cultural operation: what we are updating are the very principles underpinning our national identity which we are required untiringly to spell out and proclaim.

Calamandrei was wont to maintain:

“Wherever an Italian died in the cause of liberty and dignity let your thoughts travel, for that is where the Constitution was born”.

I believe his words of advice should still be heeded: so by all means visit the shrines of the massacre to find the values that would shortly stem from them, but in the same spirit read, too, these stories of the children of 1944.

Attorney Manrico Bonetti

*Counsel for the civil plaintiffs in the trials investigating the massacres of Grizzana -
Marzabotto and Monzuno*

TO THE EYE-WITNESSES

Dear friends,

Thank you for welcoming me into your homes so kindly and considerately, enabling us to get to know each other more than will transpire from your accounts. It was nice to see old friends again, relatives, fellow-townsfolk and recall together our many emotions, so many events. But for all of us who didn't know one another, what we went through was of a deeper order, I might say UNIQUE.

Over those terrible days, months and years, though separate in our towns and villages and hamlets, we were united in our pain, our despair, the preservation of our dignity when it was constantly trampled underfoot.

We may not have known each other, but we helped one another to salvage our lives, especially the weakest of us, and prevent our families and communities from being wiped off our part of the globe, as a delinquent "extermination plan" intended. We asked ourselves the same questions, consoled ourselves with our nearest and dearest who would talk to us, caress us in word and deed, drawing on the highest human qualities.

When we did meet up so many years later, we told our tales without restraint, a few hours, a few days. We spoke with tears, and pauses amid the flow of our stories, smiling at times and even amused to remember some naïve attitude, or how we marvelled at the unexpected and beautiful.

We shared the story of our martyred families and these confidences brought us closer together. To think of all the people they loved, or were loved by. How much love they had dispensed, how much they had received. All that love which had silently fostered us was something we discovered anew, became aware of at those meetings in your homes. We now know for certain where we got the strength from to begin again and forge a new life, appreciating its value to the full.

Ours is a story of pain and love.

*On top of the love from those who were barbarously murdered, we enjoyed the love of those who survived, those **giants** capable of passing on to even the smallest and weakest of us that legacy of love from those no longer physically near us, and enriching it day by day with the gift of their whole selves.*

Impressed on our hearts, minds and flesh, all of us witnesses bear an obligation to our dear ones whose death cried for JUSTICE. It took sixty-two years to be able to walk into a court of law and speak of Justice, reconstructing the true story of those events. We stepped forward and spoke of them as only a family member knows how. We can all reel off dates and episodes, but when it comes to recalling our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, wives, husbands, grandparents, uncles and aunts, there is nothing like our testimony, we who were loved by them and loved them in return.

We are more than witnesses, we are above all the living record of their lives.

Our dear ones' expectation of Justice was borne in on us from the start and has been etched on our flesh as a daily commitment, expressed in all our human relations, of the heart and the workplace, in our families and in society. Always we live with THEM.

This all emerges from the present stories. Our decision to meet and get to know each other as witnesses has opened our hearts and makes us more united, more empowered. Our example has helped many survivors, silent so long, who now wish to be heard. Let us preserve the gift of MEMORY by keeping alive in our hearts and histories the record of those who are no more.

TO OUR READERS

Dear friends,

Thank you for wishing to know us. After hearing us speak of what we went through during and after the atrocities, many of you have felt impelled to buy our book and re-read our accounts in silence and solitude, the better to ponder them.

This deep desire of yours to 'get inside' the stark facts we endured, from a historical, human and personal angle, has made us feel your respect and esteem for how we dealt with that 'evil' which wanted to see us annihilated but didn't succeed. Although our lives are permanently seared by grief, the faces and hands of so many good people have etched furrows of light within us, guiding us through the worst darkness and opening paths of light for us to travel. With this help we have turned the day-by-day struggle for survival into a gradual conquest: our rebirth. It has been a hard road, but eased by so much solidarity.

You stand beside us inside that light by the fact of reading our stories and being moved. Some have said they wept. You have weighed the horrors of total war, the responsibility of those who wanted it or connived at it consciously or unconsciously.

At the time we were weak and unready; we lacked the weapons and we lost. Today, however, we may say we have won. Each with our own talents, we have striven to act on what we learned through the lesson of pain. We have understood that each of us must safeguard peace, standing united day by day in resistance to bullying, injustice and poverty, be it economic, cultural or moral.

We have understood we need to be protagonists in our decisions, and learn to distinguish, lucidly and advisedly, between governors who want the common good, and those who thirst for power to the extreme point of contempt for all life.

We have understood that whatever is built on 'evil' by persons, institutions and organizations is something we must strive to understand, if we are to defend ourselves and oppose it.

Our blood relations, giants of mankind, proved genuine BUILDERS OF PEACE. They managed to turn pain into love, defend the weak, rebuild their families, their houses and their communities.

That was their victory, and ours, against war.

To Anna Rosa Nannetti

Dear Anna Rosa,

More than a friend, you are a sister to me, since I too, like you, have turned my pain into action.

Thus instead of tears and lamentation, all my painful yet uplifting time as a partisan in the 6th operational zone here in Liguria has flowered in action and regeneration.

Instead of repining over your dead, you have transformed grief into vigorous and even legal action, and like me, you have written and spoken out. Yours has been one long witness to the truth, to what is right: in a word, to freedom which makes man worthy of his name, for whoever accepts slavery degrades himself to an object, a thing to maltreat, buy and sell, and send to the crematory ovens.

As one of Jesus' disciples says to the aged Abimelek in my story "Piccolo Abi" (*), I will say to you: "God bless your faithful heart".

Faithful to your dead, faithful to your sorrow, and to your sense of outrage.

To the truth.

Elena Bono

Dictated to Stefania Venturino on 5 July 2011, at Chiavari

(*) Elena Bono "Morte di Adamo" published by EMM3E

EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS

Who are “the children of 1944”?

These are children who found the wonder of life inside their mother’s womb, and then shared her martyrdom.

These are children nourished by their family’s love and the scents of our homeland for a brief few days, a few months.

These are children who died when barely adolescent, looking their executioners in the eye, powerless victims of humiliation and violence.

These are children who survived the bombs, the mass murders and the deportation of their relatives.

These are children who, with what was left of their family, fled their homes, their hamlets and villages, and returned to find their houses ransacked, their animals stolen, their fields mined.

These are children who underwent hunger, cold, illness, long marches, journeys in open army trucks across rivers, woods and mountains, hoping for a welcome at some Refugee Centre, some barn or cowshed, cottage or Church.

These are children who, when war ended and their houses were being rebuilt while their relatives sought paid work as best they could, were sent away to boarding school, farmed out to relatives, friends or strangers: painful forms of separation from their families.

These are children who survived the Triumph of Evil through the loving altruism and welcome of so many persons.

These are children who learned to hope for a better world and daily fought to see that hope fulfilled.

CLAUDIO PASELLI remembers the children of LA QUERCIA.

FRANCO PASELLI 40 days old

CLAUDIO PASELLI 2 years old

ANNA PASELLI 3 years old

Ten members of my family were killed on 30th September 1944. Tiny Franco, forty days old, was tossed in the air and shot. Named after him, at my father Ardilio's insistence, there would be a public garden in Bologna, the "Casa Marzabotto" headquarters of Brema-Vegesack and the Marzabotto kindergarten.

On 29th September 1944 the SS came up the river Setta, rounded up my family from our home at La Quercia, and took us to the church of San Martino where forty-seven people had already taken sanctuary to pray. They were sure the Church would save them, but not a bit: they were herded out, shot and their bodies later burnt. Another seven people were shot at various farms. The shooting took place on 30th September 1944.

Very few succeeded in getting away.

The only person in my family to remain in church was Dante Paselli. Dante had a leg in plaster, and tried to sneak off as best he could. He was shot down along the track from the church to San Martino cemetery. He was eighteen years old, like his wife Anna Naldi Paselli who died a few hours later with their son Franco.

Others that died with their children were Lisetta Salvador Paselli and her little daughter Anna, and Anna Ventura Paselli with her baby son Claudio.

Though Duilio Paselli, head of the family, managed to escape, his wife Ester and daughters Fedelia and Malvina died with the rest. The other sons were serving in the army: my father Ardilio at Cefalonia, uncle Antenore in Russia, while uncle Martino, a prisoner in Germany, was acting as a translator in a concentration camp. He got back home to find the family home in ruins and ten members killed.

My father Ardilio came home in 1946 after serving at Cefalonia, being captured by the Germans and then kept prisoner by Tito's partisans. He made it his mission to keep alive the memory of the massacres on those terrible days in 1944. He would take guided tours to the Marzabotto Memorial Chapel and visit the worst points of Monte Sole. He welcomed everybody, even when he came across people with opposite ideas to his own.

The other six brothers reacted to the drama by silence. Uncle Cesco, whose wife Anna Ventura and son Claudio were shot, never spoke again. Their father Duilio, granddad to me, and his seven remaining sons rebuilt the house at La Quercia. After the killings, granddad gathered up all the statues of saints and religious objects, dug a hole and buried them in defiance. He then commissioned a marble plaque, showing a young woman and man kneeling to watch the rising sun, a symbol of hope.

The marble plaque is still on the wall of the house. The whole event is mentioned in the book *Silence on Monte Sole* by Jack Olsen.



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Giovanni Brigotti

I realize it must be hard to talk about those times, especially for those who experienced them on their own skin. I am ten years old, the great-grandson of Cesco Paselli. My father still finds it very hard to talk to me about his grandfather Cesco and what happened, since it is still extremely painful for all who survived.

Even Cesco's daughter, my granny Bruna, finds it too painful and just CAN'T MENTION the subject.

The only thing I know about grandpa is that on the anniversary of the massacre, he used to spend the whole day at his dead relatives' tomb, playing the accordion which he played very well and very feelingly.

One month ago at school we celebrated the day of remembrance. That was when the full meaning of the day dawned on me: how we all have to remember the awful things that happened in the war so that they NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN!

FRANCO LEONI LAUTIZI aged 5 years and 7 months

I was five years old and seven months, that 29th September 1944. I lived at Ca' del Piede a few kilometres outside Marzabotto in the parish of San Martino. My parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, the whole farming family, worked from dawn till dusk to scrape a living from the soil.

For some days we'd been sheltering from the bombing in a cave carved out of the rock in the side of a gully as you go down from Ca' del Piede towards Rivabella. It was a drizzly, unpleasant sort of day down in the cave with various other families from round about and the odd evacuee from town. We virtually ate and slept down there for fear of the shells and the Germans.

My mother Maria Martina Sassi was pregnant and her birth pains had just started, so she and granny, Amalia Bondioli, decided to quit the shelter and go home which was a more suitable place to give birth in, and I tagged along with them. When we got there we found the cowshed practically burnt down and the house itself beginning to catch fire. We were afraid the Germans would be there any minute, so Mummy and Granny took what they needed and back we went to the shelter.

While we were going down the track, an SS patrol from the path along the headland of Ca' di Dorino opened fire on us. We cowered in the ditch beside the track but there wasn't much cover at that point so there seemed nothing for it if we wanted to survive but make a dash to a nearby haystack. Granny Amalia got a bullet through her head and didn't make it, mum and I reached it but she was hit in the tummy and I got a bullet in my back and my hip. I didn't feel pain, but only a sensation of enormous heat all over my body. Mother kept clutching her belly and crying out. The pain from the wound on top of the labour must have been dreadful, and the time seemed never-ending before she died. I huddled up beside her until dark fell and some people came from the cave to fetch me. They moved me onto a blanket expecting I too wouldn't come through. In the blackout of the moment I could hear my father Armando's voice: he was crying hopelessly, saying he didn't care if he lived or died. As it was, the SS caught him next day and shot him. A year later we found his body in a ditch, along with a friend.

The Germans came next day and moved us to San Martino. As we crossed the places I knew, I saw the whole grisly spectacle of the war: women and children lying dead in ditches and things I can't bring myself to describe.

When we did make it across the front line after various adventures, I was taken for treatment at the Allies' base at San Benedetto Val di Sambro. War was bad enough, but for an orphan of both parents, what came after was a disaster: hunger, punishment and the orphanage where the nuns are not always daughters of Mary, especially if you no longer have anyone to stand up for you.

The bullet I got in my hip slanted through into my tummy, the bladder to be precise. For years I was plagued by pain, since no-one ever bothered to think that if a bullet comes in, there must be an exit hole, otherwise it's obviously still inside. If I wanted to survive, I had to grow up and become an adult when I was still a child.

When the front passed over in springtime, we returned to our ruin of a house, La Quercia: me, grandpa and an aunt, my father's sister. I spent about a year with them, living from hand to mouth with what we could scrape from the land: radicchio, snails, hedgehogs, even cats. We got diseases from the filth, like scabies, bronchitis, and hun-

ger, hunger. That was until the parish priest took a hand and I ended up at college, if that's what you can call it.

Five years I spent at that orphanage, where many's the time I prayed to my mother to take me with her. I was so miserable, I wished I was dead.

Sunday was relatives' visiting day. I would lean on the gate from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon, staring down the road to see if there was anyone for me. But there never would be, not a face I recognized or a sweet to call it a holiday.

When primary school was over and I'd done the entrance test to secondary, a lady of a certain age (56) suddenly appeared: Pellegrina Lautizi, short, refined, gentle and soft spoken. She asked if I would be prepared to go and live with her. My reply was: "*Any chance of eating?*" (such was the backlog of craving for food that I'd accumulated by then). Her answer was: "*More than you can possibly eat.*"

She took me to her home in the province of Ascoli Piceno. She was a well-to-do unmarried lady with a house and farms. She had more than my wildest imagination had dreamt of: I had gone from a layer of hell to an immense paradise, though adverse destiny was once again in ambush. An incurable complaint robbed me of her in the short space of a year. She just had time to get a surgeon to remove the bullet that had been plaguing my bladder for years and, most important, to give her surname to me and my younger brother Pietro by proper adoption. When I learnt from the doctor that he had no way of lengthening her days, I tried to repay her love and affection by constant acts of attention and by calling her Mummy. With that single, to her so important, word, she passed away at peace.

At the age of twelve I was an orphan once again.

I was forced to part from my parents far too soon, a part of me went with them, their death left a gaping hole inside me. I would like to think that from where they are they are looking on and sending me a smile. They are alive for ever in my heart.

GOODBYE MARTINA, GOODBYE ARMANDO: if your sacrifice served to make the world a better place, I'm proud of being your son.

I'm Claudia Girelli and I'm doing first year of secondary school at Rimini.

Granny and mummy took me to see *L'uomo che verrà* (The Man to Come). I can hardly believe things like that really happened, even though I've heard our friend Franco's story and my grandparents have told me what they went through during the Second World War.

Granny remembers the round-ups by night. She was twelve years old, sleeping on the settee, when the Germans barged into the room. They felt her plaits and then covered her up, saying "No partisan". She saw houses burning and people killed on the hills of Romagna. Granny thought the film was realistic, that's the way it was, in the Romagna Apennines too.

Franco was the centre of a tragic story, unluckily for him.

His baby brother didn't make it, whereas Martina the heroine manages to save hers, she sings him a LULLABY, cradling him as she rocks on the swing.

It was amazing to hear her speak her first words.



... the cowshed was practically burnt down and the house itself beginning to catch fire... Mummy and Granny took what they needed and back we went to the shelter.

MY MOTHER

She was beautiful, my mother, just 23, that 29th September.

Her face was gentle, calm, my beautiful mother.

She held my hand along the track that wound down to the shelter,
she groaned with the pains of the new life she was soon to bear, and granny soothed
her, helped to hold her up.

She was beautiful even in the birth pangs.

Machine-guns crackled, catching us off our guard. Wounded in the belly, in one
second she knew she'd lost it all. Her hands red with my blood, granny's eyes begin-
ning to glaze; she clutched her stomach, trying to hug me away from the flying lead, as
a hen shelters a chick beneath its wings.

Her cries of pain and despair had something inhuman yet
even then she had a caress for me.

Such a gentle soul, my mother.

If there's anyone in heaven, they must know what's going on down here.

She was just a girl, my mother.

The nightmare has dogged my life, yet in it I see mother's gentle smile.

She was truly beautiful, my mother.

Franco Leoni

ANGELO BACCOLINI aged 4

I used to live at Casa Simoni, a hamlet belonging to Vergato. For a long time I repressed all I went through at that age. Mother helped in this: she tried to prevent what we'd seen and experienced in wartime from weighing on me and my sister. She always told us not to wonder why we'd suffered and what happened: the only answer we'd get was that it was war. We would never find those responsible, wars are simply a thing to condemn.

Everything woke up inside me when there was the trial at La Spezia. During the cross-examinations images came back to me, voices, the memory of those sad moments. I felt pretty bad. I remembered my sister Floriana, who had been six years old, and my mother Ida Falconi, and I realized why they had behaved as they did, which completely changed our way of being.

The story mum told was that, at that time, German soldiers and local people were stealing animals and my family decided to create an animal shelter to protect them. We had a number of farms managed by uncle Calisto, while uncle Ruffillo worked for the Inland Revenue and my father, Giuseppe Federico, for the railway.

Mother came from Montecauto Ragazza. She came to Casa Simoni on getting married in 1937, and in 1938 my sister Floriana was born. That wasn't very popular, her being a girl who wouldn't carry on the family name. Mum put up with all this for the sake of a quiet life. She was always on her own, with Dad away at war in Libya. In October 1940 Dad managed to get home leave for my birth, and then he was exempted for heart problems. They took him to Ravenna hospital, and when he came home he resumed his job at the railways. But he was a changed man: "*he saw corpses everywhere*", was how she always described it.

On that 29th September the three brothers were working in the stone quarry, making an animal hideout for our own and those from the other farms, since we were getting a lot of pilfering from Germans and neighbours. Uncle Calisto was determined to save them and sell them for a profit, seeing that times were forecast to get worse. When the SS came they demanded to see papers. Father had his railwayman's card, Ruffillo his revenue document, but uncle Calisto had none on him. They ordered him to look sharp and fetch them, or they would shoot his brothers.

I remember that day very well. Uncle rushed towards us down the vine rows shouting: "*Give me my papers or they'll kill my brothers*". Mum started screaming and aunt Egidia clung to him and begged him not to go. At the time granny Baccolini was ill in hospital at death's door.

The three brothers were taken to the Stables at Pioppe di Salvaro, a large building opposite the church of Pioppe. Mum followed them some of the way, but was advised to go back home, as the men rounded up would either be going to Bologna or would be deported to Germany.

That evening she went down to the Stables with a bag full of food, and aunt Egidia went with her. The sentries on guard wouldn't let her pass, so she created a scene and slipped the bag through the half-open door. Through a vent-hole she managed to speak to uncle Calisto who told her he needed to talk to her alone. He was waiting for her next day on her own, and they made arrangements according to whether they were sent to Bologna or Germany.

The next morning mum turned up with the usual bag of victuals, ready to listen to Calisto, but she wasn't by herself and uncle wouldn't say anything. They parted with

the remark: *"Maybe tomorrow we'll see each other at home."*

Mum came home. There were lots of people who knew what was happening, so we children were shut in the bedroom with some toys and asked not to come out.

Dad and my uncles were shot on the evening of 1st October at the Pioppe Cistern called 'la Botte'. On the morning of the 2nd, while we children were out playing in the yard, a woman came up screaming and tearing her hair: *"Ien amazà tot- ien amazà tot!"* (They've killed the lot). Mum ran after her and, together with aunt Egidia, dashed off to Pioppe di Salvaro while the woman kept telling the neighbours *"THEY'VE KILLED ALL THE MEN"*.

Afraid that I would be captured as well, my sister led me by the hand to the wood to hide me. When mum got home and found us gone, she hunted high and low until someone told her they'd heard our voices in the wood. She found us, though my sister kept telling me not to answer her call: Mum might have been forced to call us by Germans intending to kill all the males. She found us curled up inside a chestnut trunk. Her eyes bloodshot, foaming at the mouth, she didn't look like mum at all. In my fear I did it in my trousers.

We went back home. Mum gave Floriana a good ticking off and handed us over to aunts Angiolina and Annunziata, telling them to make sure we didn't run off again. Then she set off for Pioppe church again, where she got a ladder and, with the bell-ringer, went to the Botte to retrieve the bodies. She picked out my father at once on top of the rest, beside one of the two priests who were shot. Calisto was on one side with his stomach all open, and Ruffillo too, mangled by hand grenades. She asked one of the SS if she could take the bodies for proper burial, but the officer in charge had given orders that the bodies should stay there as a warning to the population. Many days later those forty-two corpses finished up in the river Reno which was in spate at that time, and all trace of our dear ones was lost for ever. Not content with that reply, Mum marched off to the SS command at Sperticano or Capriglia (I can't remember which, exactly), but the commandant put his foot down against retrieval of the bodies. At his side he had a man in German uniform who spoke Italian very well and had our own accent. He answered: *"Rauss or Kaputt, cool down and get along with you, you've got two children at home."* Mother took off a shoe and broke the cork heel on him. For that she was slapped and punched and beaten with a rubber tube.

Some years later when the war was over, mother recognized that person at a wedding reception held at Idice near Bologna. She also noted that the wife had an outfit on of a sugar-paper blue just like the one she wore at her wedding to my father. She asked the lady who made it and was told: *"A dressmaker from Vergato"*. This gave mum an idea who it might have been who robbed us of all our belongings. One day she was rung up by the Mayor at Vergato and told there was a man's body at the Pioppe station brake cabin. The corpse had been burnt and was unrecognizable; all that could be noted was a few teeth capped in tin, and a ring on one finger. Mum went back to Vergato and reported it was not her husband, to which the reply was: *"Convenient, eh, not recognizing your husband's body!"* She later learnt that it was a man who had lived at Carviano.

We stayed at home a few days longer to hide our ornaments and objects. Then we were forced to leave since the Germans wanted to put their military headquarters in the main house. They made us cross the river and told us to head for Savigno. But the grown-ups were all for going towards Grizzana which had been reached by the Allies. We pretended we were going to a farm of ours at Campedello above Tabina, but when

we got to Carbona we doubled back across the still swollen river, us children on the men's shoulders, and halted at a cowhouse. Pretty soon we realized there were Germans sleeping inside it. The men were in favour of striking on across the mountain, darkness or no. The German soldiers spotted us and said we had better stay, since they would be moving on at dawn. We reached Stanco di Grizzana, then grandpa's place at Montecuto Ragazza. The group was about twenty strong, what with adults and children. Aunt Albertina discovered that her three and a half year-old daughter Ida was very ill. She was advised to press on to Florence on foot, where she took the child to hospital, leaving her two year-old boy Tullio with us.

The bad thing was that grandpa was meanwhile robbed of all his food reserves by some partisans who had been smuggled in by the husband of one of his daughters, and not having food for so many people, he suggested we go to Stanco where we had relatives, so those who were fit upped and left.

With the Liberation, mum decided to go back home. We got as far as Cerviano where a survivor told of our house being destroyed. When we got there we found only one room intact, grandma's, so mum set about rebuilding. Vergato Town Hall lent her a mule. She loaded the cart with firewood to sell in Bologna and with the proceeds went on to a brickworks at Corticella. A man there helped her to load up with bricks which she brought back home to patch up the shell damage to the walls.

One day I asked to go down to Bologna with her. On our return it was nearly dark, last light (or as she recalled it, between "*il lum e scur*"), the hour of the Angelus. We'd just passed Camugnone when we heard groaning in the wood. It was a lad who'd smashed a leg when a mine went off. He was looking for copper wire brought down by shell fire from the light poles. This eighteen year-old from Prunarolo had stumbled over an unexploded mine.

Mum left me on the cart with instructions to keep talking to him, though first she got him to tear up his shirt and bind up the bleeding wound. She made her way swiftly back to Camugnone to alert some people she'd seen sitting outside a hostelry, and they came at the double. But when they got there, the lad was past answering. He was dead.

I remember mum had hidden some wheat with aunt Angiolina helping her bury it. One day she decided to take it to the mill at Molinello di Calvenzano. I wanted to go with her and threw a proper paddy, but she was talked out of taking me along since the Reno was running high and the boatman ferrying across wasn't working. Stubborn as always, mum left me at *i Serini* and tried to ford the river. But the mule took fright and the cart overturned. They found her below Calvenzano clinging to a rock. She was brought back on a handcart and laid on a wall of the house in the sun, while the doctor came and the priest to give her Extreme Unction. She was all swollen and vomiting water all the time. She was black and blue and puffed up beyond recognition. Mum came through.

For us children the days passed in playing and shouting, carefree like all kids. The only bad time was nights: mum would prepare toys for me and expected me to stay awake waiting for her *caicatrappel* to pass so she could get some rest. I never did understand what it meant: clearly it described a cat landing on her stomach and knocking the wind out of her. Then she would twine her arm in mine, shake me, and the "cat" would pass, and she would be sitting up in bed in a muck-sweat, breathing hard. From that time on, I've always been afraid of the dark. I still sleep with the shutters open and the light on.

It wasn't till I was sixteen and went to live on my own in Bologna that I began to

turn the light off; but I would keep all the blinds in the house open so the city lights would keep me company.

Once we left Casa Simoni, mum stopped having those nightmares. We went to live in Bologna and later on at Sasso Marconi. She married again and I had a new dad called Luciano.

We never did go back to Casa Simoni. To this day that stretch of the Porretta road gives me the jitters. It brings back sad memories of my infancy which I can't forget.

Mum left us in due course, with a strange remark that I still puzzle over:

"I'M OFF TO SEE YOUR DAD, DON'T KNOW IF HE'LL RECOGNIZE ME"



I used to live at Casa Simoni, a hamlet belonging to Vergato... After the days of the massacre we stayed at home a few days longer...then we were forced to leave since the Germans wanted to put their military headquarters in the main house...

GIAN DOMENICO (GIANNI) PASINI aged 4

I lived in Bologna with my father Giacomo and my mother Ebe Peri. Because of the constant bombing we decided to “evacuate” from Bologna and go up to Casalino, a farmhouse between Calvenzano and Pioppi Salvaro. We were taken in by the Venturi family, relatives of ours, who put us up in a chapel next to the house. There were four of us: daddy, mummy, granny Adalgisa Venturi, and me. A German headquarters was billeted there, granny had the soles of her feet in a bad way, and the medical officer gave her an ointment to put on them.

On 29th September 1944 the SS came with a number of blackshirts. They took all the menfolk and sent the rest of us packing up the mountainside.

Like all the other men, my father was taken to the Stables at Pioppe opposite the church, and kept prisoner there. On the days that followed, a selection was made between men classed as “fit” to work in a labour camp in Germany, and those considered “unfit”. The fit were shut up in the church. After a few days they were escorted to Pioppe station and packed onto a goods train, down to Caserme Rosse in Bologna for deportation to Germany. The “unfit” like my father were shot at the “Cistern” at Pioppe. It was about 6 p.m. on October 1st. The men were driven out of the Stables, marched through the village to a large water cistern – then empty – which we called la Botte (the “Tub”). After being stripped of all personal objects, the men were forced in file along a catwalk to the surrounding wall, and as they reached that point machine-guns already mounted on the railway embankment opened fire. The men fell into the slime at the bottom and when the “sluices” were opened up about ten days later, the water carried all the bodies away into the river Reno. There were three survivors and two of them, Gioacchino Piretti and Ansaloni Aldo, bore witness to my father’s death. What puzzles me to this day is that they classified father as “unfit”, when he was a strong man. I remember one day he cycled from Bologna to Venice. I suppose that, working as a waiter at the station restaurant, he was obviously less strong than lots of young farmhands.

I remember one day at Casalino where the German headquarters was. Some German soldiers came and lined us up against the wall, women and children, with machine-guns pointing. Then the medical officer came up and literally booted them out, and no-one was killed.

When I think of what happened, I still can’t imagine such a thing was possible.

On the day of the round-up I was in my father’s arms. When he was taken, he passed me over to mum who was beside my maternal grandmother, saying: “*Look after Gianni (as I was called), it’s up to you: I’ve got to be going*”. For a long time we had no news as we toiled across the mountains to Bazzano. It was cold and constantly raining. We spent roughly a month on the road. We stopped at tumbledown houses and in a cave. We ate the odd root and whatever we could find along the way in October. Before Bazzano a Wehrmacht truck gave us a lift. The driver stopped at every tavern to drink wine. With us were one or two Gestapo soldiers guarding two partisan prisoners. At Bazzano they set us down, a lady saw us from the window and invited us into a school. We spent that night there and then somehow made our way to Bologna. Our house we found occupied by other people. That’s how it was at the time, people moved into empty houses. We were housed provisionally in municipal accommodation in Via Galliera for about a year. Meanwhile none of us knew what had happened at la Botte. I kept hoping father had been deported to Germany and one day would come back. The newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* had a short column to say that “tenden-

tious rumours have been going round that lots of people have been killed at Marzabotto by SS, helped by blackshirts. This we are in a position to deny. It is all lies."

When we learnt the truth I wondered how we women and children saved our skins. It may have been thanks to that lieutenant, the medical officer.

It was our relations who told us all that happened. For many years we spent our summer holidays at *Le Piane*, a house below Casalino, by the Porretta highway. It was home to Ersilia, my granny's sister.

I had four cousins and whenever I saw them together with their dads, I couldn't help thinking of the father I no longer had.

Once back in Bologna, mum went to work at the telephone exchange, called first Timo, then SIP and finally Telecom. She put me through school. I did secondary and high school, then started to work at the Post Office and, studying at the weekends, I got my degree. A degree enabled me to sit selection exams and improve my career. Mum succumbed to a tumour at the age of fifty-five.

After finding a job, I married Gabriella, a girl from Bologna. We've had two daughters, Micaela and Maddalena, a granddaughter, Sara, aged 12 months, and little Alice who's just been born.

Unreliable rumours

The usual unverified rumours, typical of galloping fancy in time of war, assured us until yesterday that in the course of a police operation against a band of outlaws, some 150 women, old people and children had been shot by German troops in a round-up in the borough of Marzabotto.

We are in a position to deny these macabre rumours and the fact they are putting about. The official contradiction is backed up by the findings of a visit to the spot. It is true that a police operation took place in the Marzabotto area against a nucleus of rebels who suffered great losses including the dangerous ringleaders, but fortunately it is not true at all that a round-up led to the decimation and sacrifice of civilians in the order of 150.

What we have here is a new manoeuvre by the usual irresponsible individuals which is destined to collapse in ridicule: anyone prepared to ask an honest inhabitant of Marzabotto or someone returning from those parts would have learnt the proper version of the facts.

Voci inconsistenti

Le solite voci incontrollate, prodotto tipico di galloppanti fantasie in tempo di guerra, assicuravano fino a ieri che nel corso di una operazione di polizia contro una banda di fuori-legge, ben centocinquanta fra donne, vecchi e bambini erano stati fucilati da truppe germaniche di rastrellamento nel comune di Marzabotto.

Siamo in grado di smentire queste macabre voci e il fatto da esse propalato. Alla smentita ufficiale si aggiunge la constatazione compiuta durante un apposito sopralluogo. E' vero che nella zona di Marzabotto è stata eseguita una operazione di polizia contro un nucleo di ribelli il quale ha subito forti perdite anche nelle persone di pericolosi capibanda, ma fortunatamente non è affatto vero che il rastrellamento abbia prodotto la decimazione e il sacrificio nientemeno che di centocinquanta elementi civili.

Siamo, dunque, di fronte a una nuova manovra dei soliti incoscienti destinata a cadere nel ridicolo, perché chiunque avesse voluto interpellare un qualsiasi onesto abitante di Marzabotto o, quanto meno, qualche persona reduce da quei luoghi, avrebbe appreso l'autentica versione dei fatti.

PAOLINA BETTI aged 4

I lived at Monte San Pietro. Before the round-up, whenever we saw from the house door that there was a column of German soldiers on a road over Monte Vignola opposite, we used to take to the woods below our house and daddy would hide me under the raised roots of a large tree and tell me not to make a sound.

5th August. I was four years old, my sister Silvana two, and sister Marisanna had been born a few days before. Mummy was still in bed with the baby after giving birth on 27th July, which is why father wouldn't leave her by herself and run off when the other men told him the SS were coming. In the few minutes these men took to think of a hiding place, the SS were there rounding everyone up, men and women, with more added along the way. My father Francesco was twenty-nine, his brother Armando thirty-eight; at one farm where there weren't any menfolk, they took an old man of eighty-two as well as all the women and children. Wherever the SS went, they cleared out houses and we were all herded in file to Cà di Bue. All of us in the round-up were halted along the roadside overlooking the roofs of Cà di Bue.

We were all being guarded by the SS who shortly began singling out these men, first my father, then the old man, six men in all. Before leaving us, father hugged us, handed mum baby Marisanna from his arms and said: *"We may not see each other again"*. Then we were moved along towards Cà di Bue, about fifty of us left on the roadside, the men taken down into the courtyard. Flames could already be seen springing up, they may already have set fire to the cowhouse, and some shots were heard. My cousin standing beside me said *"You see your dad, he's there, see?"* But I couldn't see him. The house was burning and dad, who knew it well, went inside and out through a rear window. He ran down across the field but was shot three metres short of the brink where he might have got away. What I did see was the oldest of the men. He clung onto a German and when he saw they were lining them up for the kill, he wouldn't let go. The soldiers kept striking him with their rifles and shot him to finish it off. I saw the five bodies on the ground. The Germans came back up to us and began selecting six women, since six men was not enough for the killing of an SS the day before. My mother was one of the women, and amidst the screams of all the women and children, we three girls were held or carried by other women. The women had already been made ready for the firing squad down in Cà di Bue courtyard, when a person came along from the Medelana direction. A man on horseback, who spoke to the Germans, and all the women were set free. The person was the parish priest of Sperticano, Don Giovanni Fornasini. Then he stopped and spoke to the rest of us: *"Pour souls, I've only come now as I learned about this reprisal too late. If I'd known earlier, I'd have saved your menfolk too."*

Don Fornasini continued to help when we were evacuated. He would bring us bags of clothing. The first pack of undies was for us girls: we didn't even have those.

We set out under supervision by soldiers and got as far as Montasico. There we were put under a portico of one house, with a dung-heap beside it. After a bit a soldier ordered: *"Step out, the one with the three little girls"*. Mum stepped forward with us three, and when we turned the corner of the house, the SS fired some round in the air to frighten all the others who set up a cry of *"Heavens, they've killed them all"*. Instead, we were made to climb the dunghill; a sentry flung up a crate and signalled we should sit there. Another SS would go past every so often and say *"When to be ten, Kaputt!"* Then we were moved into a stall in the cowshed. We kept count of all the people who joined us, while the SS went on saying *"At ten, Kaputt"*. When the tenth person came, they

moved us all back under the portico where we stayed for three days.

After two days mum's sister who lived quite close peered through the shutters and saw us there under the portico. She went straight round to the headquarters and managed to get permission to bring us a cup of coffee.

"THAT'S ONE CUP OF COFFEE I SHALL NEVER FORGET".

From Montasico we set off as refugees towards Savigno, a place called Sancerel, a house where granny joined us. Soon afterwards the bombing started and the owner advised us to shelter in the cowhouse for greater safety. We were at the top end of the valley and down below we could see some logs that boys, probably, had arranged to look like miniature cannons, which was why the SS kept throwing hand-grenades.

One day a bomb landed directly on the cowhouse. We crept away into a cellar, while outside there was a great cloud of straw and all sorts of matter. Shortly after that, what with the fright and the cold, Marianna the baby died: she was six months old.

We got out of the cellar and a short way down the road came to a huge building which I found wonderful. It had a courtyard all hedged round with evergreens, and underneath the building was a shelter we could stay in. It was packed, lots of women with children, old women. I remember that, before leaving home, mum had snatched up a loaf of bread and a bottle of anisette. When dark fell, she told us to step outside for a breath of fresh air, and once outside she gave us a slice of bread and a sip of anisette. She couldn't let the others see: that loaf was reserved for us girls, not even for her. No-one set foot outside the shelter and the only ones who ate were those who'd managed to bring some food from home.

That building, taken over by the Germans for their headquarters, became the American command post, and has always held an important place with me. The Americans would give us all sorts of things which I would gather in a rolled up 'top' like a bundle. I remember they gave us tins of powdered milk and another powder we never tried, not knowing what it was. Only after the war did we learn it was freeze-dried coffee, as we recognized by the smell.

Next we stayed with grandpa at *Rabatla* near Medelana: there was hardly enough to go round and we had our share of humiliations. Two years later Mum married again: Celso Stefanelli, who had lost his entire family in the San Martino massacre.

It was tough, what with the house being damaged and not enough work for everybody, but we put together a new family and settled first at Prunaro di Sopra, then at La Quercia, where my sister Silvana lives to this day.

The house we four lived in at Prunaro di Sopra had a kitchen and one bedroom. I was so thoroughly disturbed, I couldn't sleep by myself, even though we were all in the same bedroom. I had to feel mummy near me, otherwise I felt insecure. I used to cry out at night and say the Germans were there; only mum's presence by me would calm me down. These night fears went on till I was twelve or thirteen; then I had to get used to being on my own since at fourteen I went to Bologna as a maid "in service" and had to learn to sleep alone.



...the men were taken down into the courtyard. Flames could already be seen springing up, they may already have set fire to the cowhouse, and some shots were heard... (Paolina Betti).

...My mother covered my eyes in her apron so I wouldn't see...we were along the bank, made to watch... (Ruggero Neri).

DON ATHOS RIGHI aged a few months
Monk of THE LITTLE FAMILY OF OUR LADY OF THE ANNUNCIATION
Superior General of the Community of Monte Sole.

I was born at Fagnano in the borough of Castello di Serravalle on 18 November 1943.

We lived in a big house belonging to the Vallona family, taken over by the Wehrmacht for its headquarters. All the soldiers behaved properly towards us, especially one called Athos who always took our side. In gratitude towards that soldier, my parents chose to call me by his name.

I was a baby in 1943 and 1944 and don't have any personal memories. I know my family's story through accounts by relatives, such as were told by my sister Matilde who was five at the time, and my aunt Francesca, who was fifteen.

What led me to speak up became clearer when I saw the film *L'uomo che verrà* (The Man to Come).

I could have been that baby and Martina my sister.

My whole childhood was lived in the malign shadow of the war and the horrors of Marzabotto and neighbourhood.

My home was a frequent port of call and every time we would hear tell of episodes round about or in nearby villages. They were always stories of atrocities, events too bad for repeating committed against farmers or partisans or masters who had behaved improperly. My mind and feeling were hence continually steeped in such details and distraught faces incapable of resignation.

For many years I was afraid to pass from the kitchen at home to our room for fear of something lurking. Wherever you looked, there was terror.

At the same time you could breathe the air of solidarity, and the search for a common good at all cost, and determination to build something good which brought peace to the new generation.

It is true there were people still branded with responsibility for crimes or complicity beyond explanation, who were eyed with a mixture of anger and pity.

One's mind and eyes were still filled with thoughts like: from that house the oxen were stolen, there they killed three people, there they burned down the house and barn, there the pig was stolen and everything else, two people live in that house who are invalids for life. Every morning on my way to kindergarten I walked past the massive bombed out ruins of Zappolino church: you still had a sensation of smoke and the din of the bombs.

Amidst the fear a clear hope was born in the end: if war were to return, my heart told me, I would seek refuge in the Church and ask the Lord's help for everybody.

It wasn't cut-and-dried in all the implications, but it was the only solution that brought me peace. Not just for me, not just for my family, but for our history, our country, our generation.

Shining amid the ruins and horrors of my early infancy, that light was my guide, and here I am having spent twenty-five years by the Cemetery of Casaglia which cries to heaven for justice.

Nor is that all: for over twenty years it caused me to live in the Middle East amid raging dramas and in contact with peoples and cultures that yearn for Peace and Justice. For them I pray and hope beyond all that is visible, aware that the Great Powers are not always capable of instilling peace and justice.



...I lived in a big house belonging to the Vallona family, taken over by the Wehrmacht for its headquarters...

MATILDE RIGHI aged 5

My family and I lived at Fagnano. Daddy worked for the Vallona family who had given us the house. He was a cheese-maker and the local authorities would come for part of the milk, butter and cheese to distribute to the poor of the parish. In his work daddy was always under supervision: everything had to be shared out just as arranged.

Daddy would work and work, but it wasn't his own business, we were left our share to live on. The master had also given orders that all the hungry poor who asked should be given half a litre of milk. The master lived in hiding, afraid of being taken in a round-up, though the Germans already living in our house were nice and always behaved properly. There was a big chimney flue in the building that couldn't be seen, and the master had been in hiding there for a long time. The Germans that lived with us knew about this and when the time came for the master to be taken his food, one German who covered for him had told mummy to call father "Rita". Father would understand, take the master up his food and bring away the bedpan. That's how we lived in those days.

The German headquarters had requisitioned the whole enormous building with the school and a huge cellar full of wine, while the soldiers stabled their horses under a great canopy. They had set up a large kitchen and would give us food from time to time.

We squashed into one small room. The soldiers would stay for a fortnight or so and then leave, and a new lot would arrive. Before going away, the Germans who had got to know us would report to the new intake that we had behaved well and they were to treat us properly in their turn.

One morning, I can't remember when, my brother Lucio and I were getting ready for school when we saw a patrol of Germans come up and make to take daddy away. We children set up a great howling. The good German appeared and told the soldiers in German to go away at once. I cried so hard, the teacher had to comfort me, but luckily when I got back home, daddy was still there.

Brother Lucio found life so scary those three months that he stopped talking altogether.

The nice German would hold me in his arms and sometimes cry for his dead mother. When I started school he began to teach me German: ein, zwei, drei.

In November 1943 our baby brother was born: mummy called him ATHOS after the soldier, in gratitude.

Those Germans never stole anything from us, though we did suffer some thefts from Italians. One day, owing to our friendship with those soldiers, daddy walked the whole way from Bersagliera to Fagnano with a pistol pointed at his head. It was some dishonest partisans who claimed we were on the Germans' side and we wouldn't tell where the master was hiding.

Terrible things were happening all around. I don't know if it was Germans or fighting among Italians. I do know about the parish of Fagnano, how often the priest was taken and so many boys with him, sons of farming folk. Their mothers let their sons go to church, thinking they would be safe there. One day they were bundled up the mountainside and then made to slide down with their hands all peeling and faces battered, no matter whether they died or not. Lads who weren't old enough to go to the front, so after roughing them up they took them up to Montuzzo and flung them down the scree of *Pir Clumben*.

While the boys were being frog-marched away with their mothers wailing, someone was heard shouting "*ADES AT PORT AL FRONT!*" (Off to the front with you!)

I still don't know who was responsible.

Every so often when I went to school I noted some schoolmates were missing. When I asked after them, I would be told: "*There's been a round-up*".

The priest I mentioned, Don Isidoro Ghedini, devoted his life to other people. He had a motorbike and was quite prepared to fetch medicines and anything else needed for anybody. They didn't kill him but they often said: "*We'll be back to get you!*" But he refused to budge, he wanted to die with his own people.

Violent episodes were the order of the day.

I remember the SS, the men being rounded up, women having their heads shaved, burns on their bodies. Some of our friends had their breasts cut. I remember the Castello di Serravalle atrocity, the parishioners all in church with the parish priest, and them all being killed.

During the bombing of Ponzano and Zappolino, we hid in the shelters. We'd dug them in the ravines of the scree-slopes and covered the holes with brushwood. One day mummy told us to be good and wait for her to come back. She wanted to fry up some dough. We were near a cherry orchard. We heard the planes overhead and still no sign of mummy. The people with us did their best to comfort us. An older couple, Alberto and Gemma, cheered us up while waiting for mummy and stopped cuddling their own son Giuseppe to do so. At long last mummy made it back, worn out. She'd taken refuge under a cherry tree, huddled behind some dead bodies, and managed to bring us a bite to eat. While waiting for her to come, we children were crying. *EVEN*

LITTLE ONES UNDERSTAND WHEN THINGS ARE WRONG.

They think that kids know nothing.

[.....]

*It is the kids that know it
all.*

*Their innocence is primary, you see,
and that is all.*

(Children according to Charles Peguy)

FRANCESCA CALIZZANI aged 15

8th September 1944. A date I shall never forget.

After forty days of imprisonment my sister Giorgia and I were released. On 1st April 1944 we were taken off in a German army lorry from our hostelry at Ponte di Samone. We were closing up as there was a danger they would bomb the bridge. Our father was in bed here at Castagneti where I still live and my sister and I went down to close the place up. Four days earlier four people we knew to be deserters came to the hostelry. A certain Biagini, a fascist troublemaker, cycling up to Missano to see his sister, stopped by at the hostelry, and two days later there was a raid. The Germans were sure the four men were partisans under our roof and ordered myself and my sister to get changed and go with them. That's when I started crying, and I didn't stop till I was back home again.

I was fifteen and in those days that meant still a girl. We climbed aboard the lorry and when we got up to Samone we were put on a truck with a lot of people. One was Don Talè, the priest of Castellino who would be killed there. The truck raced along, me crying my eyes out, and when we got to Mercatello a skinny little man caught my eye as though to say "*Heaven help you!*" Along the way they caught a partisan. Our destination was Villa Rosa near Mercatello, where they kept us for eight days in a room. I heard the shots when the Germans killed the partisan, down by the stream.

The Germans separated me from my sister and began questioning us. When they got to me they said: "*Your sister has already told us the names of the people at the hostelry, but you can tell us too*". All in a panic I answered: "*I don't know them*" – which is what my sister had said, so it ended well.

Then the HQ was moved to Calderino and we thought we would be allowed to go home, but oh no! They had spotted that my sister understood German and, to be on the safe side, took us with them. My sister was a schoolmistress and had learnt German properly. They were afraid she might tell the partisans. They didn't hurt us. They gave us a room full of mattresses: two mattresses for us, two blankets and a sheet or two. Overtures on our behalf were being made by a priest from Zocca and a certain Bortolini. From time to time they would send messages to say that the Germans were not to touch us and if that happened we were to be released at once. I never found out if that was true.

The one in charge was called Walter and another was called Armand who told me many a tale and would sometimes cry as he remembered his own children, "*Mein Klein*". He would tell me: "*Nicht lachen*", don't cry.

Georgia kept asking Armand: "*When are you setting us free?*" And Armand would reply: "*When we go away*". And so it was.

One morning we got up and there was no-one around, so we just came away. They didn't do anything to us, but being kept prisoner was a painful experience.

After we got back home on 8th September 1944, our house had a visit from the Stella Rossa partisan movement. They killed the pig. In the meantime two Germans had been killed so a great round-up started from Samone. We managed to cover all the traces, including two cases of documents, so the Germans didn't realize we'd had partisans in the house. Father made off up to Missano and hid in a cleft in the rock. The partisans took refuge on Monte Riva. Before taking to the hills, my brother Ventura had torn off a name tag with "Stella Rossa" on it and hidden it in the pocket of a jerkin hanging from a hook on the door. When the Germans came they found the name tag straight away. Our defence was that the partisans had passed by and must have left the jacket without us noticing.

A young German hunted high and low. He unearthed the entrails of the pig and was suspicious. At that moment I looked up on the roofs and saw a lot of firearms, so I tried to distract his attention by playing with a rabbit. We went indoors and mother offered the German an egg to drink. In raising his head to do so, he spotted a partisan coming up the path. He dashed the egg on the ground and began shouting "*Partisan, partisan!*"

A patrol of Germans then came down from Samone and began searching thoroughly. They took a few things, not much. We'd hidden everything with great care and they didn't find anything, but before they left they told my father to report to command headquarters or they would burn down the house. People were all very kind to us and, via Bortolini, father got away with not reporting, without them doing anything about it. Father wasn't a fascist, but I didn't realize until Mussolini fell from power. He took the picture off the wall and flung it on the floor. In my naïvety I said: "*Where's daddy putting the Duce?*" What did I know? We didn't have parties like nowadays, and I thought we were all fascists. When they sent us on young Italian girls' parades and I went off to Zocca dressed like all the rest, I was all pro-Duce: he made us do things we'd never done before. Besides, in uniform we all felt equal.

There was one raid when I was put against the wall with other women, but then the German soldiers let us off. Lucky they weren't Repubblicini (*Salò Republic supporters*) since those were hard-liners about obeying orders.

The SS were at Castelletto and never came our way.

I was upset for my brothers too. One of them had been away in Africa for nine years and I never saw him again; another, Bertino, was a prisoner in Germany; uncle Gualtierio had left the Carabinieri to avoid signing up to serve the Repubblicini; and Ventura, who was in the Bologna band, got out on 8th September 1943. They all found their way home here and came through alive.

I lived at San Nicolò. It had a church and my family was evacuated to the presbytery.

The Germans visited regularly, suspecting that partisans were hiding in the bell-tower. They would barge in and demand to know from mummy Costanza if there were any partisans in hiding and they would ask about her husband, my father. She used to answer that her husband was working for TODT and being used for repair work. Actually there were times when he, Mario, was hiding indoors, though she would lead the Germans up the bell-tower where there wasn't anybody. She would light the way with a torch in her hand, with the Germans behind her gripping their tommy-guns, so lucky for her they never found a partisan.

I remember one day the Germans lined us up in front of the church with other evacuees – people who thought they were safer in places like that. One of the group was my aunt, mum's sister, who had just given birth with a baby in her arms, screaming in fear; but that time the Germans didn't find those they were looking for and didn't kill anyone. I remember how frightened we all were when 'Pippo', an American plane, went overhead. That was scary: by night you would see those flares lighting up the sky before they dropped the bombs on the fields and houses.

There were about thirty of us: women, children, young and old in a shelter at Cà Nova near San Nicolò. In a great state of agitation, we would wait for some signal, an alarm or a curfew, and rush into the shelter. We would only come out to fetch something when all was quiet.

One night of pelting rain the Americans arrived, loaded us onto a lorry and took us to a Refugee Centre in Florence. Bread was rationed there, and everything else. My uncles and aunts, a group of about twenty of us, couldn't bear to stay there and resolved to go back home. So we set off homeward on foot. Not knowing anyone, mind you. People would put us up for the night in cowhouse mangers. We slept on those bags full of fleas and we were all louse-ridden. We met so many kind-hearted folk who helped us survive. Two of my uncles, Armando and Guerrino, were soldiers in Russia and came home to find us back at Cà Nova, grandpa's house, the church having been demolished. Granny didn't recognize her own sons, so gaunt and decrepit-looking were they. Armando caught consumption which was hard to treat, there being no penicillin at the time. It was also contagious so he had to have a room of his own. He would be brought his food by one particular aunt who'd learned the drill with that disease in hospital. A year later uncle died, from all the effects of the war.

At the war's end there were a score of us at grandpa's place, Cà Nova. There was too little land to live off, so my father left home to work as a labourer wherever he found a job. Unfortunately there wasn't work all the year round, and there were times when we starved.

One day daddy heard that children of poor families were being hosted by kind-hearted folk down in the plain, so about twenty of us children set off by coach down to Trebbo di Reno. In a huge room there were people expecting us and choosing. I started going to school straight away. A schoolmate who now lives at Vado told me that one day the teacher told the class: *"Tomorrow a mountain girl is joining us. So we must add on a desk."* The mountain girl was me.

My house, Torre Verde, was about a kilometre away from the school at Trebbo di Reno, so my family bought me a bicycle and a fine cardboard satchel. I was pleased

with life and fitted in well with the family and my school-friends. I was only to stay three months, but something unexpected occurred. I had got quite good at cycling and went to the mill to take some wheat. The miller saw me, asked me where I came from, and invited me to lunch with his family the following Sunday. I got home pleased as punch and told the story to my foster family who were poor people and were glad about the invitation. They said: "The miller's invited you, has he? That's a rich family!" On Sunday they spruced me up and I went to lunch at the miller's. I helped grate the cheese and tried to make myself useful to thank him and his wife for their hospitality. The miller was pleased with me and told me: *"Now that you've finished the foster period and all the children are going home, if you'd like to stay on with us, we'd be happy."*

I said goodbye to my family and began living with the new one: Lina and Giuseppe Miglioli. They had fitted out a nice room for me and only warned me not to go into the grinding room as it was dangerous – though I did go inside when no-one was looking. I stayed with them for two years, they got fond of me and nearly every Sunday took me to the Arena del Sole in Bologna, a posh cinema, and then to eat an icecream in via Corticella. I tried to be of use and sometimes rather slyly paid some big compliments. On Sunday they would take me to eat at relatives of theirs in Bologna. Every so often my father would come and see me.

One day the family sold the mill and bought a postcard factory in Milan, or Arcore to be exact. They said that if I wanted to stay on with them, they'd be prepared to adopt me, but I chose to return to Vado with my parents and brothers Armandino and Valter. I was attached to my own family and had my roots there. From home I went on with my schooling and began learning French and lots of vocabulary in the first year of secondary school. When Lina and Giuseppe invited me to Arcore for the Christmas period, I set off with my suitcase full of chestnuts which was something they lacked. Mummy wrote a postcard to say when I was arriving, but it never got there, so no-one was waiting for me at Milan. I had to go to Arcore, which meant catching another train. I was alarmed but, to steady myself, I started travelling up and down the escalator. The police saw me and asked where I needed to go. I told the whole story and they put me on the train for Bergamo which stopped at Arcore. On the train I heard some Bergamaschi saying: *La gà son, la gà son*, meaning "I'm sleepy". With my smattering of French I understood *"garçon"*, boy. Help! I was going to France. I went all the way down the train asking everyone: *"Does this train stop at Arcore?"* I didn't trust anyone but I did manage to get to the right house, where everybody was amazed at my independence.

They took me up a skyscraper on Lake Como to see an aquarium, and once again they asked if I wanted to stay on with them, but I chose to go back to my family. On the return journey some relatives of the family who lived at Corticella were obliged to take me up to Vado. In the back seat I pretended to be asleep and heard them grumbling: *"We're not relations or friends, and we've got to take her home"*. But all I could think of was the bliss of going home. Four years ago I got a letter from the deputy mayor of Arcore: she was the niece of Lina and Giuseppe and wanted to meet me. We met up and have phoned one another a lot since then.

ROMANA SERRA aged 6

I lived at the hamlet of Scalello, "Scalel" three kilometres from Vado.

We were evacuated, living in the wood, and on the 18th October, St Luke's Day, the grown-ups had the idea of roasting chestnuts. As soon as the Germans saw the smoke they started to drop mortar bombs. Many children were injured, two seriously injured, dying on the way to hospital. I was wounded in an arm which seemed at first sight to have been severed.

They took us first to an American field hospital at Monzuno, and then the Americans trucked us down to another field hospital at Castiglion Fiorentino where I received first aid. I was sure they would cut my arm off, but a doctor managed to medicate me and save the arm. I saw some horrible things there that a little girl oughtn't to see. Lots of very badly injured people.

From that camp we went to Florence and I spent a long time in hospital. I slept in the same bed as another little girl. They didn't feed us: I have this memory of them always giving us a pea porridge, a tasteless pap (I still hate peas today). Mummy managed to find a job with a hospital doctor and was able to bring me a little food. Every day mummy kept hoping we'd see my brothers and father appear, but it was only a lot later (after the Liberation) that we met up at Castiglione dei Pepoli where father had been hiding with my brothers, two of them very little. For a long time we stayed at a farmhouse, and then returned home. My cousin Mario went out begging to get something to eat.

I was little, and with all my hospital stays I don't recall much. I do remember that our house at Scalel was a wreck: it had had soldiers in it and they had bashed it about.

After our return home I kept going into Rizzoli hospital. A part of shattered bone would release a fragment every so often.

To get my cousin Guerrino a bit of pension, mother took him to Rome. He went into an office where the Commission sat. When they heard that he wasn't entitled to anything, Mother let rip: *"You should be ashamed of yourselves. Here's a boy of twenty, blind, no hands, the victim of a war you set up, and you refuse to help him."* Mum managed to get him a small pension.



I lived at Nuvoletto above Vado. From there we saw the first partisans on Monte Santa Barbara. One was called Remo, from Grizzana, the other from Casa Marsili at Bargadè was called Nerozzi and was my uncle's brother, the husband of mum's sister. Father put his foot down and told him to get lost: if the Germans came, they would kill us.

The Wehrmacht soldiers did come a fortnight later, maybe it was mid-April, and set up their headquarters in our house. They gave us all sorts of things to eat, good lads who treated us well. They told us not to go outside, as it was dangerous. But one day mum went out in the kitchen garden to pick some parsley, and a German did actually fire a shot, though he shot high. Mum took fright and ran indoors. The commanding officer had that soldier tied to a tree to punish him. Those Germans stayed for a week, then got their things together, giving us all their spare provisions, and before moving out they said: *"Look for a hiding place, the SS are coming."* Father set off straight away and headed for below Turen, a hidey-hole between Santa Babara and Nuvoletto.

There were twenty-five of us all in one room. At night time daddy used to come out of hiding and see how we were. Mum kept telling him in alarm: *"You'll get yourself shot, don't come out of the wood."* Someone, maybe a German, told us: *"Watch out, 'cos if the partisans in the wood shoot an SS, you're all dead."* In the night we heard shooting: it was German soldiers shooting the dog. They came indoors and then went on, first towards Santa Barbara, then towards Marzabotto.

From that point on we went into a shelter: a cave under a great rock slab. We stayed there nearly ten days, twenty-five of us. Daddy decided to go and see how the house had fared, and found it burnt down. From that shelter we moved to Collina, at la Palazza. Everything was on fire there. We met some German soldiers who said: *"Come with us"* and led us towards Ronzano di Sopra.

When grandpa saw the cows coming out of the burning shed and heading for the maize field, he tried to keep the maddened beasts from spoiling the crop. A really mean-looking soldier in glasses shot at his feet but without hitting him. He then went and grabbed him, brought him over amongst us and shot him through the head. The same soldier gave mum a shove that sent her flying down a ravine. It was 30th May. We stayed there for one night. The soldiers loaded their tommy-guns. They would make us take a step, aimed their guns, then made us take another step, all the way to Ronzano di Sotto. It was punishment for not telling where the partisans were. We kept on saying: *"We don't know, we don't know."*

None of us were killed, not even Giorgio who was twelve years old. Father was watching the whole scene from the wood; and when the SS arrived and moved towards Marzabotto, he went and retrieved the body of his father which had been thrown on the dung heap and covered in manure, and carried it to Marzabotto in front of Reder. I was beside daddy and remember that man with one arm missing and the face of an executioner, and how he said to daddy: *"Take that back where it was or I'll kill you too."* Guarded closely by a German, daddy took grandpa's body back to Ronzano. He had to dump the body and swore to give it a proper burial as soon as possible. There and then the SS used him as an ammunition bearer, and in that way he came through alive.

It wasn't until autumn that we all left Ronzano using a horse and cart. My sister was suffering from an infectious "itch" and was treated by an English soldier, a medical officer, who gave her a dark ointment with which she healed up perfectly.

That English soldier was a prisoner of the Germans.

At the end of November the Germans put us all on the cart and drove us down to the Porrettana highway where we met lots of people. We stopped at Montechiaro near Borgonuovo di Pontecchio. Lots of other people were arriving there and there was a fear we might all be killed. It occurred to us that uncle Alfonso lived there, so we set about tracking him down. On the way we saw a row of persimmon trees and, hungry as we were, picked bags of the fruit. Then we drove our cart on to uncle's house. As we got there, out poked a revolver barrel. The Germans were there too.

Someone told us that the Americans had already reached Bologna and were at the Palazzo del Gas in via Roma (now via Marconi). We stayed at uncle's for a month and then went to Palazzo del Gas where the Americans dished out chocolate and lots of nice things. On the way mum gave me her handbag to look after. It was brown with an orange handle and inside it was daddy's allowance. I fell asleep and lost it. Mum started crying and asking around if anyone had found it. A German found it and brought it straight to mum.

From the Palazzo del Gas every day we would take a cart along the railway towards Casalecchio picking up anything to heat ourselves with from among the rubble.

Next we moved to my aunt's house in via Sant'Apollonia, before returning to Vado since the house where we were planning to go, Casa Bocchino at Monzuno, had been razed to the ground. Mr Ghigi the lawyer arranged with daddy that we could stay on a farm of his at Casa Marsili if we worked the land.

Granddad, mum's father, lived at Caprara. His name was Giovanni Migliori, but people called him *Sassulein* since his tippie every morning at the hostelry of Caprara was a glass of "Sassolino" spirit. He had seen the Casaglia massacre from the vineyard where he was hiding. His daughter Norina was part of it with her two little girls, Giovanna Benini aged two and five year-old Maria, while his other daughter Fernanda was killed at Caprara. Granddad wanted to bury her at Casaglia along with her sister and her nieces. In that vineyard our uncle Dante got killed since he was lame in one foot and couldn't get away.

Granddad also witnessed the Cerpiano massacre which involved daddy's sister Paolina and her three children, Franco Oleandri (4 years old), Giuseppe (six) and Sirio (seven).

Granddad would tell the story exactly as he had seen it, including one dreadful fact. A baby being stuck through with a bayonet in a meadow below Caprara.

CESARE ADANI aged 8

I lived at San Lorenzo in Collina near Monte San Pietro, at a house called "Malcantone". I was at home with mum the day the SS came to round up dad. Nobody thought anything serious would happen: lots of men went into hiding, but he was afraid that if they didn't find him they would think he was a partisan and take it out on the family. Besides, he'd been in a round-up the month before; they took him to Calderino, checked his papers and let him go, which was why he didn't expect anything to happen to him.

My father Augusto was taken away on 7th October 1944. They took him to the Caserme Rosse in Bologna where he stayed for a day or two. Then he was put on a cattle truck bound for Germany. On the same day they took his brother Guerrino and the nephew of our landlord, Raffaele. When the train halted at Modena, a relative of Raffaele's had managed to get a release warrant, but he turned it down: "*I'll go with my destiny*," he said. We learnt from people who came back by escaping from work camps that my father got sick and died. We heard nothing more, so by way of a pension claim we had to do the "presumed dead" papers at the lawcourts. They only gave us an allowance. Many years later father's death was confirmed and mum got a pension.

On 8th September 1943 my brother Daniele (born in 1924) was doing a course to be a revenue worker at Predazzo (Trento) when he was captured by the Germans and taken to a concentration camp in Germany. We got postcards from that camp and at that time you could even send a food parcel. The last two parcels were returned. In his last letter he announced he had got out of the concentration camp but we got no more news. We did try and enquire via the Revenue, who said he may have been killed during bombing. Five or six years later a letter and photo arrived stating the presumable date of death, 4/11/44. Later we learnt he was buried at the Italian Cemetery in Hamburg. He was identified by the registration medallion he wore round his neck, like any soldier.

Uncle Guerrino made it back from Germany and always helped and looked after us. We had lost our jobs. Father had been managing some land and a vineyard. To help us out, though the landlords took away the land they did leave mum and me the possibility of cultivating the vines, which was a great help. We were also helped by my mother's brother.

I always stuck close to my mother. When I got home from school, I would help her hoe the vineyard. She would go and work on the land by the hour, whenever they needed her. It was a proper job, with benefits. Uncle Raffaele, mum's brother, did find me a place at the Salesians' boarding school where I would have learnt a trade, but I chose not to leave mum. I was fourteen years old when I began working as a carpenter; it's been my job the whole of my life.

Mother always expected my father and brother to come back, and every year she would put aside some wheat and grapes for the winter in case they came.

Under her bed she always kept a cardboard case of letters that Daniele sent her, with photos and other documents. She never showed anyone, it was something private of hers and the family always respected that. We didn't open the case until she died.

One day mum was summoned to the Monte San Pietro town hall. She was given a photo of her son and the official notification that Daniele was buried in the Hamburg cemetery. Up until then she'd kept hoping. She was crying when she came home to

Casalecchio, where we'd moved. She'd lived in the hope of seeing him again, and now she was in despair. Her idea was that maybe Daniele had lost his memory with all that he went through, but would one day come back.

When mother died I left room on the gravestone to add my brother's name, Adani Daniele. I kept hoping I would be sent my brother's bones or a medallion.

Kriegsgefangenenpost Corrispondenza dei prigionieri di guerra		Postkarte Cartolina postale	
An A		27.4.42	
Hella Signora Adani Maria			
Gebührenfrei! Franco di porto			
Absender: Mittente		Empfangsort: Monte S. Pietro	
Vor- und Zuname: Nome e cognome		Località di destinazione	
Adani Daniele		San Lorenzo	
Gefangenenummer: Numero del prigioniero		Straße: Via	
57356		Bologna	
Lager-Bezeichnung: Designazione del campo		Landesteil: Provincia	
siehe Rückseite vedi retro		Italia Centrale	
Deutschland (Germania)			

...Under her bed mum always kept a cardboard case of letters that Daniele sent her, with photos and other documents. She never showed anyone, it was something private of hers and the family always respected that. We didn't open the case until she died...

RUGGERO NERI aged 8

I lived at Casa Colegna, which was then in the borough of Savigno and that of Monte San Pietro.

There was an encampment of partisans on Monte Vignola with whom we were on good terms. They used to come and bake bread at people's houses, including our own. I often saw Il Lupo, and he it was who sent a partisan nicknamed Poldo to warn us and all the other families that round-ups were in the offing.

The order was to stay indoors with all the windows closed, so as not to make the Germans suspect someone was lurking behind the window with a rifle, since in that case they would shoot. We were told: *"Don't open up until they knock"*. So that's what we did. When the Germans came they herded us into a corner, saying *"Luce, luce"*. In fear and trembling my mum lit a candle, though what the Germans meant was *"Open the shutters"*. The soldier opened them himself, went up into the bedroom and rummaged everywhere, furniture, drawers and laundry, to see if there were any firearms, but they found nothing and went away.

One day a German was killed by a man we all knew very well, though none of us has ever lifted a finger against him since that kind of violence has got to stop. He was a hothead and what he did brought down a fierce reprisal.

We were farming folk and the Buganè family from Casa Vecchi would lend us a hand. From their place over across from ours you could see down to Montasico where the German command was stationed. It was arranged between our families that if ever the Buganès saw Germans on the track up from Montasico to our area, they would hang a white cloth out of the window.

On the morning of August 5th we heard some machine-gun fire, and mother kept looking out to see if the signal was out. Lo and behold, shortly before midday we saw the white cloth. Mum started saying: *"Let's get out of here. You never know what that firing was about we heard this morning."* We got our things together, mum, dad and I, while granny stayed at home with grandpa. He said he wasn't going to budge and leave the house abandoned. My father made a point of warning Francesco Betti from Corticelli straight away so we could all clear out together.

When we got there Francesco was out working in the field and his wife was still laid up, having given birth a few days before, so Francesco said to my father: *"I can't very well come away and leave my wife in bed."*

Dad then had the idea of leaving me and mother to look after Francesco's wife so that the men could hide. Francesco agreed to that but before taking to his heels, he took it into his head to go indoors and get a jacket, only to find that he was surrounded by another patrol that had come up another way via Vedegheto.

They didn't see father who managed to get away in time, but Francesco ended up being shot.

Meanwhile the Germans were going the rounds of all the houses, rounding everyone up. It was about noon when grandpa was taken from his dinner-table, leaving his fork sticking in his plate of tagliatelle. They took them all off to Tramonte above Cà di Bue, where some partisans had just struck camp.

They'd laid the dead German on a stretcher with a photo of his family on his chest, and we had to file past and see him. Nearby, tied to a pear-tree, was the wounded horse, its thigh shattered.

We were then all lined up between the field and the chestnut wood with Germans

on both sides. Up came the commanding officer to choose who should be shot. Francesco Betti, who'd just got back from Yugoslavia, realized what was going on. He quickly handed the newborn girl over to his wife, saying: "*Don't worry, we'll meet again,*" having made up his mind to make a break for it.

Francesco was across the field before they shot him, two yards before the brink where he could have got away. The other five men chosen were lined up below the bank of the road against the cowshed wall, with the rest of us along the bank, made to watch. It was getting on for evening when they gunned them down. Mum covered my eyes in her apron so I wouldn't see. Grandpa didn't die at the first bullet and had the strength to lunge at the German and grab him by the collar, saying "*Me a io fat gnint*" (I haven't done anything). The officer in charge shouted at the soldier for not killing him. The soldier had a gasmask container slung over his shoulder. Slipping this off, he struck grandpa over the head with it so that he fell back on the ground, and with a second round from his Tommy-gun he finished him off.

There were some other men from Luminasio, but I don't know why they weren't killed. They had caught a certain "Ughein", a candy-seller at markets, but he had a good defence. Possibly the other men who weren't shot to make up the number to ten belonged to another Commandant, coming from another village as they did. We were on the boundary between the boroughs of Marzabotto and Monte San Pietro (which Monte Pastore fell under).

My uncle Roberto Neri, the innkeeper of Montasico, told me that the commanding officer said he was bound by Hitler's law to kill thirteen: ten for the German, three for the horse. If there weren't enough men, they were to kill women and children. But the order had only come out recently and he didn't want to be the first to carry it out. He would record killing thirteen, but didn't do so.

Afterwards we set off towards Montasico where we were all kept at Casa Comastri under the porch. We arrived on a Saturday. The German command was billeted at my uncle the innkeeper's at Montasico. When uncle learnt that we were among the hostages, he managed to get granny, his mother, freed by order of the commanding officer on the Monday. He came over to us and said: "*Sa pos, a fag gri fora ench vueter*" (If I can, I'll get you out too). Sure enough, come Thursday afternoon my mother and I were freed at five o'clock. A German came and pointed to the clock, giving us to understand we would be released at five. There was a girl there from Luminasio with a watch and I kept asking her what time it was until they came and let us go.

We weren't ill-treated and every day we were fed.

Meanwhile the Germans started to interrogate us. They would take people out in turn and after questioning them briefly, escort them into the barn next door, separated from the porch by a wall. Then we would hear a burst of machine-gun fire. We all thought they had been shot. It wasn't till later we realized it was just to intimidate us. This dawned on us when the soldiers came to fetch Maria Betti for questioning, and then let her come back to get her three little girls. As soon as she was out of sight we heard three rounds and were all sure they'd been killed. After a while the 10 day-old baby started crying and we all began to hope against hope: perhaps the people hadn't been shot, the shooting was simply to give us a fright.

All the while, day by day, the Germans went on rounding people up. Before going home we stayed with relatives at Monte Pastore where dad joined us again. All together we returned to our house which had luckily not been destroyed. When we went in the kitchen there was the plateful of tagliatelle now growing mould and the

fork sticking where grandpa had left it.

We didn't stay more than a few days. Towards the end of September we were made to move out. The Germans said we were in range of "Monte Salvarone" where the Allies were already shelling the area. They kept saying "*Look, look, Monte Salvarone*"¹. Back we went to Monte Pastore where we remained until the Liberation.

Throughout the round-up, internment and after the Liberation I always managed to stick close to Mum.

¹ In English

ANNA LOLLI aged 9

29th September 1944

The Rosa family lived at Albergana, in the borough of Marzabotto. There were my grandparents Giuseppe and Vilelma Venturi, my uncle and aunt Cleto and Assunta Naldi with their young children Armando, Corrado, Fernando and Livia. There was uncle Alberto and uncle Ernesto who was in the army in Albania. Other guests of my family were: the Benassis, evacuees from la Famaticcia for fear of being bombed, since their house was close to the “Direttissima” (*straight railway line to Florence*), and the Chinnis who’d fled from La Quercia as they lived right underneath the railway bridge. There was also Luciana Galliani, a girl from Rioveggio, probably a refugee though no-one really knew.

Early on the morning of that 29th September the SS arrived. All the men took to the woods, except for uncle Cleto who dived under the bed in the first place and then joined the others in the wood. My grandfather Giuseppe Rosa and Sandro Chinni were shot at without being hit. My other uncle Alberto and Chinni’s son Gianni, aged 20, were captured, used to carry ammunition, and taken up towards Cadotto where they were shot.

That was the first SS patrol, with the task of rounding up men and setting fire to houses – though our house wasn’t burnt. Soon afterwards someone in the wood whose name I don’t know shot and wounded an SS soldier. The others forced two girls, Ada Chinni and Luciana Galliani, to accompany the wounded man to Rioveggio where there was a field hospital.

About two hours later the second SS platoon turned up and began a reprisal.

There were only women and children in the house: my grandmother Vilelma, aunt Assunta Naldi and her four children Armando, Corrado, Fernando and Livia; from the Benassi family there was Caterina with her nine month-old son Giorgio, Adelfa and her husband Luigi Fabbri. From the Chinni family there was Maria Naldi and her adoptive son Luciano. They were all taken out into the yard and shot against a bank on top of which was the chestnut drying shed. They were all buried at Albergana, and with them Sandro Benassi who was killed by an exploding shell while seeking refuge in a shelter at la Famaticcia where he lived.

From the wood grandpa Giuseppe and uncle Cleto saw them hauled out and shot. Caterina tried to get away and was gunned down in the field. Her son Giorgio was in aunt Adelfa’s arms.

That day I wasn’t there. My mother, when she married, had gone to live at Pontecchio Marconi in the porter’s lodge of the Altopiano at Cassa Nuova dei Campacci, and at that time we were evacuated to Preda, a house on the Marconi estate.

All those killed at Albergana would be exhumed and transferred to the Marzabotto Memorial Chapel once it was completed.

Giuseppe and Cleto Rosa stayed out in hiding with Chinni for a certain time. My grandfather Giuseppe told me how he hid in a hollow chestnut tree and one day saw the SS going by. One of them spoke a mountain dialect of Italian and he distinctly remembered this sentence: “*Par cavei fora da què, ai vol i chen da liver*” (To wrinkle them out you’d need beagle hounds).

They then crossed the river Setta, made their way to Elle and stayed with friends at a place called Cereta, near Rioveggio.

After the Liberation, about 20th May, my father drove to fetch them in his van. I was with him and I remember it was a heart-breaking reunion, the first get-together since the tragedy.

In summer uncle Ernesto made his way back to us from Germany, after being taken prisoner in Albania. He returned with tuberculosis and spent four years at the Montecatone sanatorium.

After the loss of his wife and four children, uncle Cleto got married again to a good woman, and they took in grandpa and uncle Ernesto.

In nigh on two years that I lived with them I learned directly from grandpa and uncle what the facts of the matter had been, what events led up to the extermination of my whole family: in all about thirty people, what with Albergana, Caprara and Colulla di Sopra.



...The Rosa family lived at Albergana, in the borough of Marzabotto along with evacuee families, the Benassis and Chinnis, and Luciana Galliani...

In his *La stagione dei bachi da seta* (The Season of the Silkworms) the author Alberto Rosa relates the years leading up to the atrocities of Monte Sole when the inhabitants, though uneasy at the winds of war, were leading a quiet life, all in all.

Mario, one of the youths of the community, lives at Albergana and spends six days a week in the fields, those fields that will see the start of his first great youthful love story.

IN 1943 MARIO IS A SOLDIER AT TIRANA. HIS FIANCEE CATERINA LETS HIM KNOW SHE IS PREGNANT. MARIO WRITES HER A LETTER EXPRESSING ALL HIS JOY AND HIS WISH TO MARRY HER AS SOON AS HE CAN RETURN HOME.

SEPTEMBER 1943

Tuesday 7th September 1943.

Dear Caterina, I got your letter and you can't imagine my joy. To learn that you're expecting a baby, the first of all we'll have together, caused me an emotion I can't describe.

I'm beside myself and would like to shout the news to the four winds, to my fellow soldiers, my superiors, the people in the streets of Tirana. But for good luck I keep it to myself and will only tell the lads the day we leave. For a few days now, what we call Radio Scarpa has been full of some important news in the offing. It looks as if the war is about to end and we'll be able to come home at last.

I can't wait to hug you to me and savour this great event with you. For the name I'd like you to decide, but I will say straight away that I too like Giorgio a lot. You say you're still uncertain in case it's a girl, but we've all the time to think about it. [...] It's a great relief to know you're well, and that your folk and mine are well too.

I'm easy in my mind for all of you: war can't possibly find its way to the woods of Monte Sole. And you too must be likewise, since I too am fine, and even more so after the news you've given me. [...] Bye for now and do remember me to everyone there. A big hug. Yours, Mario

8 SEPTEMBER 1943

WITH THE ARMISTICE, MARIO IS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE GERMANS AND DEPORTED TO GERMANY, ON THE BORDER WITH HOLLAND. FIRST IN A LABOUR CAMP, THEN FELLING WOOD IN THE FOREST. FROM THERE HE IS OUT OF TOUCH WITH CATERINA, BUT HE IS SPURRED ON BY FAITH THAT SOONER OR LATER HE'LL GET BACK HOME AND EMBRACE HIS DEAR ONES, WHATEVER HIS PHYSICAL STATE.

FRIDAY 17 AUGUST 1945

MARIO RETURNS HOME AND HEARS THE SAD NEWS FROM A FRIEND: HIS FAMILY WIPED OUT AT ALBERGANA, WHERE, HE THOUGHT, "WAR WOULD NEVER FIND ITS WAY".

[.....] the lorry laboured up the hairpins beginning the climb to Castiglione, but at long last chugged into Castelletto.

Mario set off down the slope to the fork for La Quercia.

In due course he reached Casone on the fringe of La Quercia, which seemed strangely deserted.

"Mario, Mario" called Cesare, "stop there, I'll come down and the drink's on me".

Mario: *"How come the pubs are closed?"*

Cesare: *"Since the war work's fallen off a lot. We only open on Sundays now".*

Mario: *"Since the war: why? The war never came up here on Monte Sole?"*

Cesare regained his breath and wiped back his tears: *"Mario, come and sit down with me a moment".*

Mario: *"Just a quick one, then, CesareI'd like to be getting home ... Since I left the labour camp I've had no news, and I'm dying to see Giorgio".*

Cesare: *"Here Mario let's drink a glass of negrettino".*

- Mario downed his glass...and made to rise.

- Cesare: *"Mario, where are you going?"*

- Mario: *"Where should I go, on past la Famaticcia and then straight for Albergana".*

- Cesare: *"It's pointless your going to Albergana".*

- Mario: *"So where are my folks then?"*

- Cesare: *"Your family's dead, only your father and Cleto came through".*

- Mario: *"WHAT ABOUT CATERINA? AND GIORGIO?"*

- Cesare: *"Dead!"*

The hostelry reeled before Mario's eyes, the colour drained and he slumped over the table like an empty sack.

Cesare and his wife tiptoed out, pushed the wooden door to, and stood in silence.

After a while the sobs started indoors, and went on all afternoon. To this day as you go by, you can hear those sobs. All you need is an old-fashioned heart of the kind the natives of Monte Sole used to have. That mountain where Mario was sure war would never find its way.

LUCIANO CONTI aged 9

My account comes late in the day: over sixty years have gone by. It bears witness, for all that, to a dramatic first-hand memory of that ill-omened period, one of the tragedies that form part of mankind.

My absence from Pioppe in the postwar years for reasons of education first, and then work kept me out of direct involvement in this reconstruction of memoirs and eye-witness accounts.

It was 29th September 1944, a gloomy rainy day about 4 o'clock in the morning when the German SS troops wound their way up to the cottages of Creda, Capossina di Salvaro. They were preceded by a squad of fascists, guided by a man with a rifle stuck in his back.

We later learned that the man forced to guide by a gun in his back was the father of my godmother Ida, wife to Guerino Fanti. The man was Giovanni (or Giuseppe) Sabbioni. They're all buried now in the tiny Salvaro cemetery. As for Sabbioni, catching his jailers off their guard, he got away by hurling himself into a gully before they got to Creda. In the dark and the rain he managed to hide out of sight of the peering militia.

I was nine and a bit more years old, being born on 2nd June 1935. We were evacuated to Pioppe di Salvaro; I and my mother Amedea Veggetti, had taken refuge with aunt Vittoria (called Anna) and uncle Dino at Serra di Sopra near Salvaro, once in the borough of Grizzana, now called Grizzana Morandi. My father Rinaldo Conti, known in the local patois as Checco, was in the army; the British took him prisoner in Libya, transferred him to Sardinia, and we got news of him towards the end of February or early March 1945, after we'd passed the front line and taken refuge first at Stanco Grizzana and later at Monteacuto Vallese until the end of hostilities.

At the time one slept in haylofts above the animals, the warmest places to shelter from the rigid winter temperatures.

Returning to my recollection of the tragedy: on the 29th September, I remember we heard the tramp of soldiers which sounded like the drumming of a storm. Looking out of the windows overlooking the road that wound up Monte Salvaro, we realized something bad was about to happen. It was our own good luck that Serra di Sopra was not in the SS plans.

Already in July 1944, though, we'd had a tragic foretaste with the killing of nine innocent people at Faggiolo near Malfolle, a village in the borough of Marzabotto.

I've always thought, and still believe, that an angel protected us at that moment. Otherwise I wouldn't be here relating what I saw and heard in the undying memories of my childhood.

On the days following the 29th September, with the extermination of all the inhabitants, the area was plunged in total silence. No-one descended from the houses on Monte Salvaro to visit the grocer's store at Serra di Sotto or go to Mass at the parish church of Salvaro where, that same morning, some forty or fifty people had flocked to the church seeking refuge and asylum.

Like the village of Pioppe di Salvaro further down, Salvaro falls under the borough of Grizzana, which today adds the name of the painter Giorgio Morandi. It is the last hamlet on the river Reno side and adjoins the boroughs of Marzabotto and Vergato.

The episodes that impressed me most, that 29th September (morning of human madness) were the tramp of the Nazi-Fascist troops going up to the houses on Monte Salvaro in the early hours of the morning; the people rushing towards Salvaro church

to seek comfort and sanctuary in God and the Saints (the 29th September is the feast of the patron saint, the Archangel Michael); the arrival of the SS in search of men for the round-up – at that moment jargon for what could only mean certain death – and the courage of one member of the community, Sister Innocenza² (if I remember right). Escorted by a soldier, she led the way into every nook and cranny of the church, managing to save a considerable number of men hiding, packed in the sacristy. A cupboard hid the door into it and there was a bench beside it on which I was sitting wrapped in a blanket next to my mother, as I was running a temperature.

Another memory, unforgettable in its tragic human content: that of the two priests, Don Elia Comini and Padre Martino Capelli, who gave their all to comfort those present and then decided to extend that comfort to those sheltering in houses up on Monte Salvaro. This sealed their destiny and their lips, since two days later they would meet their death in the ‘Botte’ of the hemp-mill at Pioppe. The two priests were captured as a result of their generous determination to succour those in distress. A number of women begged them not to go, but there was no dissuading them, and they set out to certain martyrdom.

Mother, aunty and I met them. It was about 3 o’clock on the afternoon of the 29th September and we were making our way back home to Serra di Sopra, after spending the morning and early afternoon in church where the SS came looking for men hiding. The two priests were coming down from the places of the atrocity where the SS had captured them as alleged partisan spies. It was a memorable meeting: the two priests laden like mules with weapons were standing still under an oak-tree in front of where we lived. They knew us as regular attenders at Salvaro church. Don Elia called to mummy and aunty: *“Go away, it’s looking pretty grim here”*. Bent under their loads as they were, they gave us the sign of the cross in blessing. I believe that was their last blessing to Salvaro parishioners, before the last of all to those killed at ‘la Botte’. Laden with firearms, they were led into the stables of a building near Pioppe church, called ‘la Scuderia’. From there with other prisoners of the 29th September round-up, they were taken out and shot on the 1st October in the Cistern of Pioppe hemp-mill.

The ‘Botte’ is a cistern fed by a channel receiving water, then and now, from the river Reno to run the turbines of an electric generator serving the former hemp works.

Forty-four men were shot there, of whom three survived.

Various memories subsequent to 29th September 1944 bear the same stamp of human folly. One morning towards the end of October mother, aunty and I were taken out and put against the courtyard wall with ten or so inhabitants of Serra di Sopra, machine-guns set up ready to fire. The cause was the disappearance of a Polish soldier, who had fallen for a local girl and gone to seek her out in a shelter where she and her family had moved. It was only my uncle Dino’s prompt intervention and knowledge of the place that saved us from execution. From his hiding-place behind the village oven he saw the scene, raced over to the shelter, found the “little Pole” as the Germans called him, and urged him to report to the local German headquarters. If he didn’t, they would kill her sisters, nephew and other villagers. The “little Pole” ran to do so straight away, and the episode, which might have formed an appendix to the massacre, turned out for the best.

As the front pushed forward in the months following the atrocities, Serra di Sopra became No-man’s Land, and hence more dangerous, untenable. Uncle Dino had already crossed the line of demarcation to evade capture by the Germans, so mother and

² One of the Handmaidens of the Sacred Heart community of Pioppe di Salvaro.

aunty Anna resolved to leave the house and themselves cross the front-line.

One morning towards the end of November or in early December, while it was still dark so as not to be seen by the Germans who were constantly checking movements up the mountainside with their binoculars, we embarked on that hazardous crossing.

When we got to the hamlet of Creda, first light was dawning and we had to halt. We stayed there for several hours before resuming our journey. The halt brought us face to face with the massacre: bodies fallen one on top of the other in the cowhouse which witnessed the bloodbath of 29th September.

From there on, history is the record and the memorial, until we returned home in May 1945. Only then, and with time, did I fully appreciate how far providence, or “an angel” must have protected my family, for we all emerged unscathed from the frightful tragedy that swept across our land.

Return home initially meant Serra di Sopra where the house bore traces of all kinds: a temporary headquarters, an arsenal in one room, another more secluded room turned into a soldiers’ convenience, for want of a better word.

Afterwards I returned to Pioppe di Salvaro and resumed my previous existence.

Primary school ended and, with the help of the parish priest Don Angelo Carboni, I sat the secondary admission test in Bologna at the Aldini School in Via delle Muratelle. Next I did the first two years of secondary privately with the Fathers of the Sacred Heart who ran the parish of Pioppe, Malfolle and Sibano. Then I entered seminary in Bologna where I stayed until I gained my classical school leaver’s diploma.

After that I attended Bologna University, graduating in chemistry, and on getting married, moved to Milan for reasons of employment: first at the State University, Faculty of Organic Chemistry as a Researcher into Industrial Processes, and then at the research laboratory of the company SIR in the municipality of Paderno Dugnano.

I stayed in Milan and neighbourhood for about fifteen years until June 1984 (my father died on 4th May 1984), then worked for other firms in the Venetia region, and ended up at Enichem, Ferrara, before retirement.

I now live at Lendinara in the province of Rovigo, a town steeped in history and its artistic past, famed worldwide for names such as the Canozio brothers, fine wood engravers whose works will be found in Ferrara, in Modena Cathedral and of course in the Town Hall of Lendinara; and the world famous Lendinarese was Domenico Montagnana, whose name rivals Stradivari as a stringed-instrument maker. In Risorgimento history there was Alberto Mario, lieutenant to Giuseppe Garibaldi.

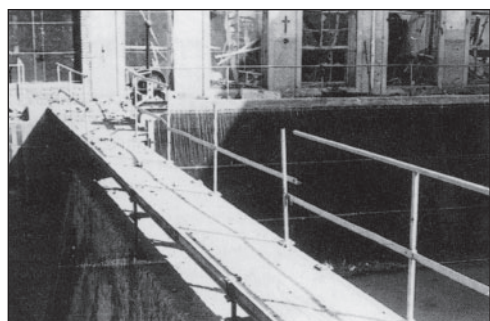
However, my heart still lies in our Apennines, where I have indelible memories of childhood and the dearest years linking me to so many happenings and my closest family who now lie buried in the cemetery of Salvaro.



1944: PIOPPE DI SALVARO

Foreground: the hemp mill after bombing.

Top right: the church and the Stables, also known as the carter's house. They were the two places of imprisonment for the men rounded up on September 29th at Pioppe and adjacent parts of the three boroughs of Grizzana, Marzabotto and Vergato. The men kept at the Stables were shot at "la Botte". Those detained in the church were deported to Germany.



1944 The cistern called "la Botte", PIOPPE DI SALVARO

Three days had passed and evening was falling. The prisoners emerged from the Stables and crossed the village in column of march, heading for the hemp mill cistern.

Opposite the cistern on the railway embankment the machine-guns were already in place. Stripped of all they had, the prisoners were ordered to remove their shoes and get up on the walkway along the cistern's edge.

Under the hail of bullets, the bodies fell into the slime at the bottom and were finished off by hand grenades. Three men survived, another three managed to crawl out of the cistern but died almost instantly. From that gaping tomb it proved impossible to retrieve the corpses. Many days later the sluices were re-opened on the canal bringing water to "la Botte" and all the rotting bodies were swept down a channel into the river Reno.

None were ever found.



DON RINO GERMANI S.D.B
Salesian Priest of Don Bosco

LOVE- SOLIDARITY-HOPE

I am well familiar with the area of Marzabotto, Monte Sole and Monte Salvaro and various people who lived there in the year 1944. I listened personally to their dreadfully sad tales and the family tragedies experienced at the end of the Second World War in the zone known as the Gothic Line. I did not see those parts in 1944 but a number of years later when I was Vice Postulator for the Cause of Canonization regarding the Salesian Priest of Don Bosco, Don Elia Comini, who was tragically shot for no reason except the strategy of war at Pioppe di Salvaro, where he and the Dehonian Father Martino Capelli met their end in the “Botte” of the local hemp-factory, along with another 44 victims, three of whom survived the ordeal.

In the years 1992-2001 I heard 130 witnesses who knew the events of 1944 from their own bitter experience. They included the Parish Priest of Salvaro, Don Anselmo Cavazza and the Parish Priest of Sasso Marconi, Don Dario Zanini.

I have before me the well-written account by Luciano Conti who was nine years old in 1944. It and others form part of the sequel to *I bambini del 44* (The Children of 1944) which Anna Rosa Nannetti is lovingly putting together.

Two things I admire and wonder at about these first-hand accounts: the first is the simplicity and candour with which those “children”, now adults, describe their memories, even the saddest. The “children” sound like outsiders, extraneous observers. It is child psychology: to suffer, but think it will pass, to trust one’s grown-ups, but also God and his Saints. Luciano recalls “the people rushing towards Salvaro Church to seek comfort and refuge in God and the Saints”.

The children relate terrible experiences, but a strong sense of hope is felt.

The second marvel and object of my admiration is that nearly all these children, when being looked after away from their homes and villages, said they were happy with the love they received from their new host families.

Someone is seeing to their needs and will bring things to a happy ending.

That certainty of a good near at hand, even if a future good, is a precious gift of God working through the loving charity of our people.

A third feature transpires from the “children’s” witness. Their memory of wonderful nuns and priests, filled with God and love for all. Those nuns and priests are likewise a sign of God’s mercy, accompanying His faithful in their greatest suffering.

Sister Alberta Taccini* was in the church of Salvaro on Friday 29th September and states: “When the 6 a.m. Mass was over, the celebrant Don Elia Comini, still robed in his holy vestments and prostrate before the altar, offered various prayers for everyone and called on the Sacred Heart for help, and the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, St John Bosco and the Archangel Michael, patron saint of the Parish. Then by a short examination of conscience and three acts of contrition, he prepared us for death.”

Don Elia and Father Martino were intending to go up to the farmstead of Creda (where more than 70 had been killed), but they never got there. As soon as they passed the boundary wall of Salvaro cemetery, they were arrested and used as pack-horses to

carry weapons and ammunition up and down Monte Salvaro. That evening they were shut up in the Pioppe “Stables”, where they were kept prisoner until the evening of October 1st. Around 7 p.m. in two groups they were all shot.

To the last the voice of Don Comini could be heard loud and clear: “*Pietà Pietà*” came the words of the Litany to the Madonna.

Padre Martino, though hit by machine-gun fire, was seen to haul himself up and give everyone a last blessing and a last absolution.

By their serene narration of events, the “Children of 1944” who witnessed the pain and tragedy inflicted on the land where they lived manage to convey their satisfaction at the charity and love dispensed by their foster (and in some cases adoptive) families and their hope for a better future. For this we give thanks to our Lord and the Madonna. Our thanks to those children and all who helped and supported them.

BRUNA SABBI aged 10

I lived at Cà di Serra in the Bolognina near Vado. There were eighteen of us in the Bolognina air-raid shelter; at least eight were children and some were old, including my great-grandfather. The Germans came, put us all in line and marched us into the gully of la Bolognina. One in front, one behind, both armed with tommy-guns. At a certain point there was no way up, just a rock face. We retraced our steps to the shelter. We thought they were going to kill us as they kept saying "*Raus Kaputt*". But they roared with laughter, seeing us dripping wet, and went away.

One time the Germans came with some cows which they left at the Bolognina for a day and a night. Without being seen, mum managed to milk a cow. We had milk to drink and to make bread with in the oven the partisans had built nearby. In one house on the roadside at the Bolognina there were six or seven Englishmen. They were unable to brew up their tea because the Germans would have noticed if they lit the fire, and begun shooting. So my brother went into the wood near the shelter, took some twigs and firewood, covered them in a tarpaulin so it couldn't be seen, and made charcoal. He gave the Englishmen the charcoal so they could make their tea without being seen. In exchange they gave us food. One day the Germans up on Monte Sole opened fire, the house was demolished and the Englishmen were all killed. The partisans were short of shoes, so they took the boots off the dead soldiers.

My nine year-old brother was injured and when we left the shelter Mum took him on her shoulders and with me carrying a bag of clothes we went up to Monzuno as refugees. Two families put us up in the cowhouse, until the Liberation. The Americans had got there and used to give us a bite to eat. When we got back home we found the house in ruins with nothing left. At night you could see the sky.

My father spent seven years in the war and when he got home, one day when out gathering chestnuts, he stepped on a mine. He lost a foot, but had the courage to tie his bootlaces round the wound to stop the bleeding. He kept shouting and a dog went and alerted its master who rushed to help dad. He hoisted him on his shoulders and put him on a lorry which took him to the Rizzoli hospital. My brother and I went to a children's camp at Castiglione dei Pepoli that winter for about three months.

My father was given a small pension in view of his war service. My sister went out to work as a maid, and in 1948 I left to be a rice-weeder. For six years I did the paddy-fields at Vercelli in Piemonte and then at Molinella. I was only fourteen and they didn't want to give me a social security card, I still had three months to go before I turned fifteen. But the Mayor put in a good word: "*For three months, let her through*". So I managed to work. You only worked forty days a year. My brother went and worked with uncle at a gentleman's house.

My brother and I were both among the Vado children who were bussed down to be fostered. I went to San Pietro in Casale for three months, staying with the Vecchi family, and my brother had a different family. He wanted to come with me, but the rule was one child per family, and unfortunately brothers and sisters got split up. However, we both have fond memories of our foster families.

I lived at Pioppe di Salvaro in the Casona, a large tenement built for their workers by the Turrus who owned the Hemp-mill. Both father and mother worked there. I went to nursery and primary school with the nuns at Pioppe, and in summertime I went to *Colonia* (*children's camp*) at Miramare near Rimini. That was a scheme introduced by the Duce. After the Liberation us poor children were sent to the seaside by the Bologna authorities; we slept in American tents in bunk-beds, as the *Colonie* had been bombed flat.

As soon as the bombing raids started, we evacuated to Malfolle and stayed with the Saporì family.

I remember the 23rd July 1944. People were saying the SS had killed nine people, including Aldo Melega, my dad. Mum began to do her nut.

That morning dad had gone to Pioppe to get a bicycle and various things. When he got to Faggiolo he saw the Germans were there so he went on climbing towards Malfolle and didn't stop, but they began calling *Komm, Komm*. Dad had the TODT card issued by the German command to those working for them. It was like a pass, meaning the person wasn't a partisan. For that reason Dad felt his papers were in order, so he went up to the soldiers to ask what they wanted. He showed an SS his card, but the man looked at it, tore it up and tossed it in his face. By then there were already ten men in file, my father was added to the number, and they set up the machine-gun. Among the group were the two brothers, Medardo and Fermo Franchi, who wrenched free of the soldier on guard and took refuge in the wood. Later on they told what happened: "*After the shooting they got some bales of straw, dragged them on top of the bodies and set fire, while some of them may even have been alive still*". The bodies were under the portico alongside the cowhouse, so that caught fire as well.

You could see the smoke from Malfolle. My brother Gino, sister Ornella and I dashed down to Faggiolo and saw the whole thing. There was a stink of human flesh burning, a heap of bodies which had shrunk in the fire, legs and heads lying this way and that. Gino said: "*How are we going to recognise our dad?*"

As soon as we could, we began turning over those bits of body with our hands. We did recognise dad because his watch, all bloody, was still there and his identity card too. I remember the SS were all drunk in the cellar. An old woman told us to clear out or they would kill us too.

Gino began to collect the corpses in those crates they pick the grapes in and after the Liberation they were buried at Malfolle. A few bones in a little niche and on it a number: nine digits. Later on some were taken to the memorial chapel in Marzabotto.

After a few days of refuge up at Malfolle the SS arrived.

Women began shrieking. They took my mother, two sisters, old people, babies and children. My brother Filippo was in the partisans, while Gino was an invalid and hadn't joined. Fear came over me and I hid in an empty pigsty behind some brushwood. The gate was open; I could hear the boots of the SS as they hunted for people in hiding. One of them looked inside but didn't see me. My mum knew the SS drank heavily, so she stepped out of the file and took them down to the cellar. They got drunk, and the people managed to run off and saved their skins. After a while the SS took a pig and cut it up; they took some other animals and let people alone. Another evening we heard a knock at the door. Mum went to open up and there were two partisans propping up brother Filippo who had taken a bullet in one leg and couldn't stand. Mother let them in, but once they'd deposited my brother, the partisans made

off at once. After the death of Il Lupo they were on the retreat.

To hide Filippo, Mum's idea was to lay him on a *gradez*, a broad grill on which the chestnuts dried.

Another day a German patrol turned up and Mum opened the door. They looked high and low and kept saying *Drinken, drinken*, so Mum gave them wine and they went away content. My brother was safe.

Gino, who was hiding up at Monte Radicchio, also escaped with his life. When the SS came, he dashed into the wood, and though they shot after him, they didn't hit him. Come November, my brothers succeeded in crossing the river and climbing Monte Salvaro, the first stage on the way to Florence, while the rest of the family left Malfolle and came down to Sibano. I remember Mum had put a pot on the stove to make broth from half a goose, and she took it with her, the lid tied on with string. On the road we met some regular German troops marching in a column, tired out and by now on the retreat. They called out "*Raus, Bologna, Raus*". Mum replied: "*How can we go down to Bologna empty-handed?*" I remember a German saying to her: *Komm, komm*, that is, come with me. She followed him and he gave her a pair of cows hitched to a small cart. We piled some bedding and pots and pans on that, and towards five o'clock in the afternoon set off on foot. My mother and I walked in front of the cows, and my sisters rode behind with Gino's wife and her six month-old baby. And so that the baby should have its milk, we took along a dairy cow as well.

At Pontecchio we slept in a cowhouse, being pretty exhausted. Then we went on to Bologna, where we stayed first at Porta Saragozza, and then found a man who would put us up in his detached villa in via Masi in exchange for half of our cow's milk every day. We turned the garage into a stall for the cow and had the whole villa to ourselves. Each day we gave half of the milk to the landlord, and the other half went to women who had babies or other people in need, and in return they would give us things to eat: salt, bread, sugar.

We stayed at that villa until the end of the war. It belonged to a fascist who had decamped to Switzerland. After the Liberation my brother found a small flat in Via Parisio. Mother, my sisters and I all slept in the double bed. We never split up. All of us, sisters and brothers, found jobs in factories or 'in service', and we only moved away from home when we set up families of our own.

REPRISAL

Elena Bono

Ten lie dead in the road outside.
The priest is not to bless them,
their mothers are not to wash them.
Tonight we all pray for them indoors,
the mothers all weep as for their own
(from *Opera Omnia*, Genoa: *Le mani*, 2007)



... tonight we all pray for them indoors, the mothers all weep as for their own...

BRUNA SAMMARCHI aged 12

I lived at Saligastro, with my family – daddy, mummy and seven brothers and sisters – in the parish of Casaglia, in the borough of Marzabotto.

It was early on the morning of the 29th September 1944 that the SS came. They appeared, unchecked, from all directions, one group coming from Casoncello across our fields. They were great strapping blokes, laden with weapons. As they entered our yard they found daddy leading out the oxen to couple up to the cart and take us off towards Ginepri on the other side of the Setta, since from very early on that morning we'd realised something was going on. Mummy was baking an ovenful of bread to take with us. The Germans came up to daddy threateningly; I don't quite remember what happened, but my father wasn't having any, so the Germans grabbed the billhook he always had on him and flung it in the grass on one side. Meanwhile other Germans approached, one gave him a kick in the belly, and as he doubled up they plonked a load on his shoulders and made him set off round the cowhouse and down the screes leading to the Rivabella road. In the meantime we were rounded up in front of machine-guns set up on the ground with a soldier kneeling down ready to fire. Mummy had my baby sister in her arms, there was me, my sister and my brother. He made to go and pick up daddy's billhook so it didn't get lost, but mummy called him back straight away. Not far away lived the Sabbi family who owned our farm. I could see them talking on the doorstep to an officer. The officer turned and signalled to the soldier about to shoot us to stop. I remember the hands of those Germans because my sister said one had a hand missing and I kept looking. Well, I didn't see the one without a hand, but to my sister that was Walter Reder.

The soldiers went off with my father towards Rivabella and Serana. In the meantime other German SS came up from La Quercia, dressed in black. When father passed Serana he saw all the women in the hideout, among them the mother of Rossi, second-in-command to Il Lupo. If the Germans had realised she was there, it could have been a disaster. My father picked up a cheese from a basket full of them.

That evening all the SS went by below our house, heading for La Quercia. We saw daddy. We hid behind an oak-tree and called to him, though he didn't turn round. But he did hear us, as he checked his step. Then the Germans clustered round him; he couldn't see us, but he knew we were alive. We never saw him again, but he was probably shot pretty soon. Those who saw him, shot in the back beneath the bridge at La Quercia, and then buried, said daddy was clutching the cheese with one slice missing. At this point I can only hope he was killed more or less straight away, and that as he went about carrying ammunition he didn't see his relatives being killed or the Leoni family tragedy.

Mummy heard the screams of her sister, Martina Sassi, being killed at Cà di Piede. She tried to get closer but only got as far as Rivabella; it was too risky.

I tried to forget. I knew my relatives were dead but didn't think about it – not like I do today, after remembering it all at the La Spezia trial.

WHEN I GAVE EVIDENCE AT LA SPEZIA IN THE SILENCE OF THE COURTROOM, WHAT WITH BEING BLIND, I COULD HEAR NOTHING BUT MY OWN VOICE AND I SEEMED TO BE TELLING IT ALL TO MYSELF, NOT TO THE JUDGE.

It was a real trauma, because everything and everybody came back into my mind, not because I was remembering them, but I was seeing everybody and viewing all the scenes over again.

When I came out, other things came to mind, but I lacked the strength to say them. I remembered how mummy used to chat to grandpa Leoni and Aunt Maria would recall when Franco and granny helped Martina to the hideout to give birth. Just as I now remember the Sassi family at Prunaro: I saw them all lying dead in their house. Only Aunt Adele survived.

Those Germans were divided in groups and each platoon followed the orders of an officer. I've always wondered what went through the heads of those young men, doing such awful things.

I met Don Ferdinando Casagrande, who lived in the presbytery of San Martino and came to say Mass at La Quercia, where his family lived. He was shot beside a *battocchio*³ of red clay, called the "red pit". After the first killings a group of SS under a very young lieutenant were billeted in our house at Saligastro for nineteen days. They did nothing to harm us. We all moved into the cellar. To have a fire to cook on, the soldiers burnt all the furniture in the house. We children had to go and forage for firewood down Rivabella way, and coming back we had to keep out of the way of bullets which came overhead every now and then. They ate all our potatoes. We had one bit of bread and that was all. They killed all the animals to eat them.

One day we were told to stay down in the cellar and not come out. They bolted us in. We learned that on that day the General who was at San Martino was meant to be coming to Saligastro, but a shell killed him where he was at San Martino. No doubt the soldiers needed to show there were no civilians in the house. Around 20th November they left, by night, without a word. We were still No Man's Land and had no food. Meanwhile Aunt Adele turned up, badly wounded in one hand. At the Prunaro shooting she had tried to support her little niece Annarosa who was whimpering, but the baby was killed by a second round of machine-gun fire and Adele got hit. The SS went in the cellar and lit a fire. Aunt nipped upstairs and let herself down on a rope. She spent all those days in the woods and turned up at our house in her petticoat. When she appeared, she and my sister Bice set out towards San Martino intending to go to Marzabotto and find someone to treat the wound, but they heard German voices so they turned back straight away. They saw lots of bodies at San Martino and pigs snuffling among the corpses. We decided to go to La Quercia which the American or British had reached, and they drove Aunt Adele over to Florence hospital.

I made my way home, looking out for markers where there were mines. Grandpa Cesare, Bice and I set off for Palazzo in search of food, hoping to find flour. Between Palazzo and Cà di Piede we met a German with two revolvers. He didn't shoot, but grandpa Leoni was ready to stop him with the blowpipe used to blow up the fire embers. Once again we came through alive. We went to i Prunari, hoping to find a ham that grandpa had hidden. I looked inside and saw all the Sassi family lying dead: Graziella holding Annarosa, Gianna clutching onto her apron in the act of falling, and her hair gathered in plaits. They formed a circle on the ground: next was the mother and beside the hearth a young bride, wife to a partisan. She had been killed by a revolver bullet through the temple; you could tell, since she had lost her hair. In my mind's eye the whole massacre is grey, the fireplace and the people were all grey-coloured.

One day the Americans told us to head for La Quercia. They gave us a lift in a truck to Castiglione dei Pepoli, and then the Refugee Centre in Florence, where we slept on the ground or curled up on the odd heap of straw. It was some time before they found us a few camp-beds. At mealtime I queued up for the pasta course served

³ Dialect word for a communal washing-trough; probably not used as such in this case.

in one of those mess-tins with a wire handle, a drop of milk in the morning and one roll per day. To clean off the dirt, the Americans would occasionally spray us with DDT. We stayed there till the Liberation; then we were driven to the Caserme Rosse in Bologna, and made our way back to La Quercia.

There we found the seed-drill that daddy had got ready before the SS took him away. My brother took the tow-bar and I took my place behind. What we didn't notice was a hand-grenade lodged in the cog-wheels. When the drill moved, the grenade exploded in my face. That was 26th June 1945. My brother received some shrapnel in his back. I was rushed to Sant'Orsola hospital in a lorry belonging to the South Africans. After various blood transfusions I went into the eye ward and stayed until 15th August. My sister kept me company and periodically a nun would slip her a bit of dry bread. We used to dip it in the fountain before eating it.

When they finally took off the bandages, my sister fainted: in the wounds I still had scraps of clothing.

On 15th August I returned home. All the women in the ward had a whip-round to buy me a pair of shoes, but the money didn't stretch very far and my sister bought me a pair of clogs. In my blind state it was hard going on the mountain roads.

In spring 1946 I went to an Institute for the Blind at Reggio Emilia to do the primary and secondary schooling, and there I learned to write in braille.

Then I went to Florence, again at an Institute for the Blind, where I learned to knit.

Meanwhile sister Gisella was fostered by the Dal Fiume family in Bologna, my brother Leandro by the Orsis at Castel d'Argile, while sister Gina went to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Bologna, where she was ill-treated.

I never got over the deep humiliation of having to pick up fragments of bomb casing strewn on the ground with which to buy a bit of bread – the very same bombs that had destroyed our home. We would put them in emplacement bags. Every day a lorry would come round to pick them up. They were weighed and we were paid a pittance for them. The humiliation I never could digest was that of *having sold the shrapnel that demolished our house, in exchange for bread.*

In 1950, luckily, my invalidity pension came through. It enabled me to take Gina out of boarding school and look after her – and she certainly needed looking after.

I got married, had five children, and today I have ten grandchildren.



When I gave evidence at La Spezia in the silence of the courtroom, what with being blind, I could hear nothing but my own voice and I seemed to be telling it all to myself, not to the judge.

LINA MARZADORI aged 12

I lived at Cà di Serra near Vado. My two brothers were partisans. They were called up for the army, but deserted and joined the partisans. Father was a go-between. He worked with mules, hauling wood and coal.

I was too young to realise; all I saw was Mum unpicking father's jacket at night, slipping documents inside and sewing it up again. She also used to bake bread to take to the partisans. He was always going up to Monte Sole. So many times I saw Mum crying and saying: "*What if they catch you?*"

On 29th September Mum was taking the bread out of the oven ready to go up to Monte Sole when she realised there was a lot of firing all around and later learned that lots of people had been killed. My father and brothers took to the woods. They crossed the river in spate and came back home. We went to a hideout in the gully under Cà di Serra, while my brothers went to our grandparents who lived below Monzuno. Once father had crossed the river Setta, he took refuge in an isolated house called *Curè* along with a whole lot of other refugees from Vado and Cà di Serra.

One day two Germans turned up, wanting to know where *Curè* was, and would we guide them to make sure they found the way. My ten year-old friend Bruna, my younger brother and I accompanied them. Before we set out Mum said to us: "*Don't take them to Curè, take them a different way.*" When we got onto the mountain, shells started falling everywhere and the Germans said: "*Tornare indietro*" (go back).

When father joined us again we got out – mum, me, sister and younger brothers – and hid in the ravine of the Bolognina. In the night the Germans came. I was fast asleep, I remember; Mum woke me up saying: "*Lina, Lina, we're moving out, the Germans are here.*" I hoisted my sister on my shoulders, Mum took the boys and we climbed up as far as a house where there's now a quarry. We were on the Gothic Line: on one side, the Germans; on the other, the Americans. We stayed there for four or five days and one afternoon, while my brothers were playing, two or three shells landed. They were of the type called *straten* (whizzbangs) because they exploded in the air. By bad luck my kid brother of four got a fragment in the guts.

I went to pick him up as best I could, and father set off with his child in his arms, down onto the road to see if a passing vehicle could take him to hospital in Bologna. Nobody came by and that evening my little brother died. A few hours later, around 10 o'clock, the Americans came through.

Our family made its way through the woods to La Bosca delle Selve, a farm below Monzuno where my grandparents lived. When our friends were driven over to the Refugee centre in Florence, father wouldn't hear of it: he hitched a cow to a cart and headed for Montefredente where our other granny lived and my two grown-up brothers were already staying. From there we moved to Pian del Voglio, where we had other relations, and that's where we stayed until the Liberation.

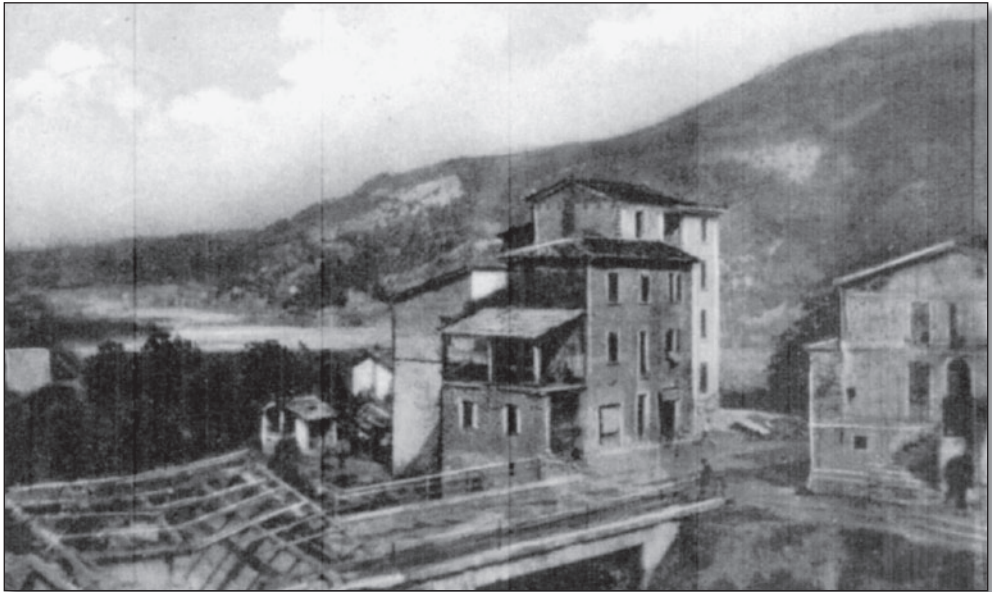
Along with some other men, my father was involved in one round-up, but just when he and his friends had agreed on a plan of escape, a truck drove up with orders to let them go. A strange thing, whatever the reason.

After the Liberation we returned to Cà di Serra; father did lots of odd jobs, the bigger boys went to work, we younger ones looked after the sheep and Mum scrimped and saved. I was never sent away from home.

Near us lived a friend called Franco Fontana, now all on his own, and pretty soon we started "going out". On 22nd August 1948 we got married, Franco 19 to my 15, with

a son already born. We hadn't got two beans to rub together, but Franco managed to find a job. The priest of Vado, Don Eolo Cattani, was a good friend to him and got him a job as a driver at il Mulino. Two more children came along.

We now have five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. A fine family, ours is today.



I lived at Cà di Serra near Vado. We were on the Gothic Line: on one side, the Germans; on the other, the Americans.

MARISA TOMESANI aged 12

It was 30th September 1944. For nearly two years I'd been an evacuee from Bologna up at Roncadelli, since on 8th September my father had been called up with the 1907 generation. He went to France and was then deported to a concentration camp in Germany. At Bologna we were fairly comfortable, living at home with daddy's brother, wife and two children, as well as my grandparents on father's side. Then my mummy with two young children had the idea of evacuating to Sperticano where we knew everyone. We used to go as little children and always lodged at the postman's house, Angiolino Bertuzzi. We were related to the Amici family.

Uncle took his family to Finale Emilia, while we settled at Sperticano. We knew the farming people, we possessed a corn card and, since father was a soldier, they gave us a voucher to spend. Mummy would trade this and buy some ham. We evacuees were given 100 kilos of wheat each.

We made ourselves at home in the loft of a farmhouse at Roncadelli. We put in furniture and made it comfortable.

Three days before 30th September one could hear a lot of commotion on the mountainside above: *Colulla di sopra, Colulla di sotto*. One day we were eating when we heard the SS coming up the stairs. They took us downstairs into a large room. There were two elderly members of the Negri family and a daughter-in-law, as well as ourselves, me, Mummy, my brother and a girl cousin.

Opposite Roncadelli stood Tagliadazza where the Amicis lived, while lower down were the Zagnonis. All these were brought in: there were twenty-six of us. Till then we had only seen regular German soldiers but that day it was the SS who came, along with some fascists, since some spoke perfect Italian. They asked us where the partisans were: either that or *Tutti Kaputt*. They went away and there we all were in that room. The men had taken refuge in air-raid shelters. Vittoria Negri said: "*Let's get out ourselves.*" I said: "*But they've counted us; if they come back and we're missing, they'll hunt us down and it'll be Kaputt*". Among the Negris were two old persons and a daughter-in-law who was unwell. From my place at the window I suddenly saw the SS marching our way in single file. My first idea was to get into the cowhouse. Then I said "*Let's keep quiet, maybe they won't notice we're here*". In no time at all they bashed down the cowhouse door, tossed in a burning bale of hay and called out "*Raus, raus*", that is, outside, outside.

A girl of sixteen from the Negri family realised they were going to kill us all, so I, mummy, my brother and cousin and all the rest took to our heels towards Sperticano. The SS started shooting after us. I could hear voices; I turned round and saw the two old folk fall. We charged towards Sperticano all in a bunch, but the SS headed us off in front and in the rear: we were surrounded. There was a broad stream with vats full of water in preparation for the wine. I was holding my three year-old cousin, Marta Stefani, but she wriggled out of my grasp onto the ground. I tried to grab her, but she was hit by a hand-grenade and fell down dead. Mummy shouted at the SS: "*Why are you doing this? We've done nothing.*" I shouted: "*Mummy, get down, get down!*" But she went on saying "*Stop it, we've done nothing*". The SS cut her down with a burst of their tommy-guns. Her name was Egle Stefani and she was 35 years old. I looked around for my brother Anselmo, hardly knowing what I was doing. I sat down in the water with my hands out in front. Sereno Zagnoni's granny climbed into a vat and the SS opened fire.

By now it was evening. I heard the SS laughing and sniggering like madmen, as they found all the purses where the gold and money were kept. They opened them up and took everything away. They chucked the empty purses down in the blood which was trickling into the stream water.

I could see Maria Negri who had lost an eye, and I myself was wounded. Fernando and Feo Negri who had rented us the apartment called from the upstairs floor that we should go inside. They bandaged us a bit, and then decided to fetch a doctor to dress our wounds. They crossed the stream and went to Marzabotto to call a doctor. When he came he gave me a sedative and I was put to bed. That was 30th September: when I woke up it was October 2nd. During the night fifteen year-old Iris Amici died, as did her sisters Anna Maria, nine years old, Marisa, three years old, and their mother Livia. At night time they gathered up all the dead and buried them in Sperticano graveyard. They dug a big pit and divided the bodies off from each other with boards. As they heaped earth on top, they marked the names straight away so as to be able to identify them. Halfway through October the Marzabotto doctor sent an ambulance to take us to Bologna for treatment. Unfortunately there wasn't room for both of us so they took Maria who was worse injured. I stayed at home. The next day while I was cooking, 'out of the blue' we saw some Germans coming. We dashed into the wood while they took over the house. It kept on raining, so we plucked up courage to go and ask them to make room for us. They gave us the little kitchen and one bedroom. What with my wounds and the fear, I was trembling all over. On one side the Americans were bombarding the area, on the other side the Germans. Later the Germans brought me some gauze to dress my wounds. We remained for three months with them, and they never did us any harm.

In December I went back to Via Capo di Lucca in Bologna, after being put up by a family at Borgo Panigale. Once home, thanks to two cousins of my father's who got in touch with Uncle and Aunt at Finale Emilia, I met up with them again. They came to Bologna and would have liked to take me with them, but I was against following them: Bologna had been declared "Città Bianca" (an open city), meaning a free for all, like occupying untenanted houses. I didn't want to lose my house.

In the end I decided to put in my cousins so as not to lose it, and joined my uncle and aunt at Finale Emilia.

... my mummy with two young children had the idea of evacuating to Sperticano... We always lodged at the house of the postman, Angiolino Bertuzzi. It was he who created the monument to the priests killed at San Martino. Every year a memorial "Postman's Round" is held. The walk winds along the route taken by the Marzabotto postman to deliver the mail every day. On 29th September 1944 the postman climbed Monte Sole as usual, only to find pain and death everywhere...



I lived at Le Murazze and was evacuated to Cà Zermino after the May bombing. There were also my younger brothers, aged ten and twelve. My parents came up shortly before the 29th September round-up, because the shelling started. I remember my granddad holding the chopping-board on his head to keep off falling shells, but then he left it in the middle of the wood because he found it heavy going up a steep hill. The date of September 29th was drawing near. There was a house, a cowhouse and a shed where the farmers stored stuff, and that got burned. The Germans went by and found revolvers and hand grenades. Dad tore his hair, as we knew that the father of Alfonso Ventura, the partisan, was in the farmers' house as well as another family of refugees. We were frightened.

I remember that on the morning of the 29th September father was in the midst of shaving with soap on his face. He told the other men there: "*Ste be attenti chi'n vegnen so i tedeschi*" (watch out the Germans don't come up), but they went on talking. The dog began to bark and by the time they noticed, the Germans were almost at the top. Everyone bolted into the wood, my brothers close behind father. We women didn't think we would be harmed and not granddad either, who was getting on in years. Towards evening Loredana from Le Murazze and the farmer's daughter went to fetch milk from a farm called Le Scope, where there were also some partisans. Before reaching Le Scope they saw nine babies and two women lying on the ground, people from those parts, one was the farmer's wife, the other was a refugee from Le Murazze, and the smallest one, Lucia, was about 43 days old.

They came back scared out of their wits and we thought: "*It must have been a mistake.*" We stayed on for two or three days as it was raining all the time. Then one day a man called Ceri came from Gardelletta, and when he saw us he said: "*Be', a si ancora al mond, ma savì che so par dl'è ien mazzà tot*" (What, you still alive? You know up there they've killed the lot). At that we too ran down into the wood, though we would come back home to sleep, with it raining all the time. Ceri stayed with us. The men, too, who'd run off began to come back home in the morning.

I remember one morning two Germans came asking to drink. I've always been a bold spirit. Well, there was a bench with a bucket standing on it and a ladle. Mum was behind the Germans who looked my way and said "*Dare bere*" (Give to drink). And I let them drink out of the ladle as we used to. The Germans saw that all the others had sat down on bedsprings in a nearby room and said: "*Non avere paura*" (don't be afraid) and pressed the safety catch on their tommy-guns. Then they added: "*I don't understand how Italians be devils of people, kill nine babies and two women. Go and dig hole and bury.*" They made out it had been Italians.

Granddad and some other old men from Le Murazze who were living down at Mazzanti the innkeeper's went and buried the bodies. Meanwhile other people came along: as we had survived they thought they were safe. We went in the cellar. In the first place we'd been using the cowhouse when the shelling started, thinking it was the safest place, but the Germans moved in there. We moved into part of the house where there was a drying-room for chestnuts over the cellar. The Americans were getting closer, and their first shells killed the Germans, while we escaped unhurt.

In that cellar, which was our air-raid shelter, there were over thirty people, huddled around the demijohn, sitting on the barrel rack or leaning against the side of the demijohn, there being no room to stretch out. The Germans were all around, but they

didn't kill us. The front was getting close and my aunt Imelde, who survived Casaglia, got killed on 5th October at Casa Beguzzi, over La Quercia way.

Halfway through October I'm going into the kitchen when I see a German with a telescope standing near the window. I get a bit nearer, being curious, and see this German has an arm missing: it was Walter Reder. I recognised him after the war from the photos. I go even closer to look at him and he says to me: "*A San Nicolò già gli americani*" (at San Nicolò already the Americans). San Nicolò was a church on a hill across the river Setta. As pleased as pleased, I go down in the cellar and tell everyone the Americans are on their way to liberate us. We thought we were safe. My father and the other menfolk came indoors out of the wood, but they got roped in to carry ammunition down to Sperticano, they were loaded up like mules using tape. Father travelled as far as the Brenner Pass before managing to escape. As for us women and children, one night the partisans came for us, and told us not to bring anything as we'd be coming back. We got to Ponte Bianco near Gardelletta, where the English let us through. From there to Cà Nova, then Castiglione dei Pepoli, where we halted three days, and from there lorries drove us down to Florence.

I remember we reached the Ponte Vecchio but couldn't go across, the Arno was in spate. They took us to a barracks where all the refugees were. I stayed for ten days in Florence and left for Rome. I remember in that barracks to entertain us refugees they sang the song by Odoardo Spadaro: "*Porta un bacione a FIRENZE*" (Take a kiss to Florence)

[.....]

*I'll take your kiss to Florence
and never forget you more,
daughter of an emigrant,
that keeps you far away,
but rest assured, homeward one day
you'll come.
I'll take a kiss to Florence:
from Florence kisses you shall have.*

The food was barracks stuff and there were those who hunted for a saucepan to cook for themselves. We slept on the floor, all tiny tiles that were printed on your back when you got up in the morning. Soon we were taken to Castiglione Fiorentino where the Americans had pitched tents. We were all given clothing and smothered in DDT against the lice. I remember the cold and the frost in the morning. Another two days and they put us on a goods train truck riddled with holes from shell fire, and off to Rome we went. It was pouring with rain and I spent the whole train journey under an umbrella.

At Rome some lorries took us to Cinecittà. Pavilion 5 was very large and they'd rigged up lots of rooms with reed-matting. Mum and a friend went to hunt up an uncle. A woman from Mulino Donino near Loiano heard them talking in dialect and volunteered to help. We got to Rome on 22nd November and mum and the boys stayed with uncle, whereas I stayed the whole winter at that lady's. She was the wife of a clerk at the Chamber of Deputies. The lady had two daughters who took me to see Frascati and the Acqua Acetosa on Easter Monday. That's where I first tasted broad beans and olives.

Loredana, who'd been wounded, got worse and died in hospital in Rome.

I remember in April, three days before the Liberation, I heard all the planes coming and going, and it meant the final offensive was on.

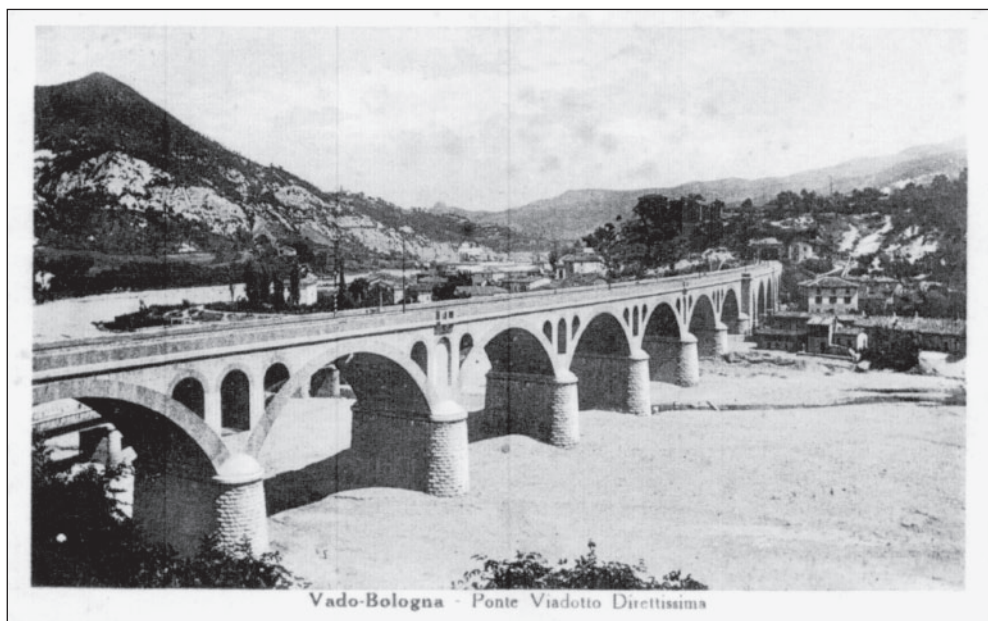
A Polish lieutenant told me Bologna had been liberated.

In May, I remember, they took us to Cinecittà for departure. Many people left on board a lorry which later overturned and fell into the river at San Quirico d'Orcia. There had been no room for us latecomers. Sometimes I say "*Me dal volt aiò avò Crist dala mi*" (There are times I've had Christ on my side).

We didn't leave until a fortnight later in three lorries sent by the Vatican. I was set down at Rio Bacchio. My father was a builder who got straight to work and fixed the house. We were under Marzabotto who used to give us meat every now and then. We would set off and when we got to Caprara where the land-mines were, we had to pass down a narrow pathway between strips of gauze stretched on the ground by the Americans to let us know where it was free of mines. On either side you could see the mines. Coming home we would stop a military truck full of black soldiers.

The English were at Gardelletta. Of an evening an English cook would come to see us bringing a cake, and father would offer him some wine he'd managed to save. One English soldier had a nice white cat and one evening my brothers and friends of theirs fastened a parachute round its body and made it fly. They wanted to see how the parachute opened. The poor cat broke a paw.

We all came through, except Aunt Imelde.



The original bridge at Vado before the war.

MARIA MINELLI aged 14

I lived at La Quercia. Our house and the family mill were joined onto the Presbytery where the Casagrandes from Castel Franco Emilia lived. There was the parish priest Don Ferdinando, his mother, father, three sisters and a brother. One brother and one sister stayed on at Castel Franco Emilia. We were on the best of terms.

It was September when the Wehrmacht soldiers came and burned down the mill and all the wheat it contained. We had the apartment upstairs and it collapsed. All around there were partisans and a group of Germans found them and destroyed the whole place in revenge. The men were short but really nasty, worse than the SS.

Every so often a plane would fly overhead to bomb the bridge at La Quercia. That day when we saw planes coming we dashed into a tunnel of the little railway, as we called it before they built the fast line, called the *Direttissima*.

When our house was demolished we moved to Rivabella and stayed in a villa belonging to a man from Bologna. It was full of locals and also people evacuated from Bologna.

My granny Elena was 85 years old and didn't feel like leaving the place she'd always lived in. She moved into a cubbyhole that hadn't been damaged and slept on bedsprings. She was killed by the SS and found a few hours later by my cousin Gigina Minelli. Granny was shot through the heart and bled a lot.

On the 29th September the SS came and cordoned off the area. They forced us all out of the villa and lined us up along a ravine that came down from San Martino. Two SS stood with Tommy-guns aimed against us. One lady, Iones Giacomazzi, knew German. She was a representative for the Bologna firm of Buriani which sold its cloth at home and abroad, and the lady could handle a lot of languages. The officer in charge had already been given the order to mow us down, when she called out to him in German "*Why are you so keen on killing us when we've got nothing to do with it. We're folk from Bologna, poor refugees up here.*" They argued quite a bit. We saw her change colour occasionally, and realised things weren't going so well, but in the end we saw the lady bowing her head to thank him. We went back into the villa, women and children. Father was hiding in a hole on the far side of a stream. He stayed there for four days and four nights without eating, and saw everything.

From inside the villa we could hear the shooting and screaming from places round about. A few days later four or five SS came in and picked me, my sister Anna who was three years older than me, two younger girls from Bologna and two boys of my age. They put rifles on our shoulders and told us to follow them. Lying on a mattress draped over a wooden ladder was a wounded soldier. We all trooped to Gardelletta laden with weapons; two SS carried the wounded soldier and others took up the rear. When we got near Gardelletta we saw army lorries driving up the road to Castiglione dei Pepoli. The SS flagged them down and asked them to take the wounded man on board, which they did. Then they let us go and we set off home. We were all in a state and our parents were saying: "*We'll never see our children again.*"

The worst was to come.

We were on the receiving end of the English and the SS. The English over on the Setta side were shelling San Martino and they all fell where we were. Part of the villa caved in, killing Signora Giacomazzi's daughter and injuring my mother in the shoulder. We all moved down into the cellars. We weren't shot because we were needed. The SS came down from San Martino with hens and chickens and our mums had to cook.

At night we would hear rifle butts banging on the door and have to open. One time it was the SS, a bit later the English, and we were afraid they would bump into one another. One night two drunken SS came and took my sister who was twenty. They held her tight and took her up a staircase. My uncle, the girl's father, struck one of them who rolled down the stairs. I can still hear uncle's shouts in my ears. The SS took fright and went away. Mrs Giacomazzi went and told the commanding officer who said he would punish the two soldiers if he learned such a thing had happened.

We couldn't live like that. The English came and took us away. All in single file from Rivabella to La Quercia, two soldiers in front guiding us along tracks that hadn't been mined. They put us on trucks and drove us to a Refugee Centre at Castiglion Fiorentino, then to Cinecittà outside Rome, and finally with a group of refugees from Bologna we got as far as Sicily, where we had a great time.

We were at Scicli in the province of Ragusa. Dr Giuseppe Ferraro, the son of Carmela, a dear friend who helped us so much, still phones me up and sends Sicilian produce. When he comes to Bologna on business, he always comes to see me.

We were put up at a school with all mod cons, and everyone rallied round. Carmela was a dressmaker and made an overcoat for me and my sister Anna out of army cloth. They were dark grey material with a red stripe, intended for refugees.

Dr Guglielmo Magro, consultant at Modica, used to come and see us, bringing oil, bread and all sorts of things. He had studied at Bologna and worked at the Bologna Sant'Orsola Hospital. He had fond memories of the Bologna folk and was remembered with esteem and affection by all who met him. When Dr Magro died, our local newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* printed his obituary, of which I still have a copy.

When we returned to Bologna after the Liberation, we went to the Giordani barracks in Via Santa Margherita. Every day, once a day, we would go and fetch food in our billycans from the Cialdini barracks. A few months later the Marzabotto authorities gave us accommodation in Via Risorgimento, Marzabotto.

With war damages we gradually restored our house. Then I began to work at a goldsmith's laboratory from Monday to Saturday evening and on Sunday I was in the box office at Marzabotto cinema. Then I got married and had a daughter, Elena.

DON FERDINANDO CASAGRANDE

On the days of the massacre, only the old father survived. I remember that, when he came back from San Martino, wounded in the leg and accompanied by two Germans, he couldn't talk but moved a hand in greeting, while his tears ran down. Don Ferdinando and his sister Giulia were shot at the Pozza Rossa where they were found clinging together. The youngest, Lina, lay in a hollow below San Martino, wounded by a grenade fragment in her forehead; two partisans heard her groans and tended to her. The mother and sister Gabriella were killed together near the church of San Martino.

When the six coffins got to Castelfranco Emilia, the whole town was there waiting, a scene of indescribable poignancy and grief.

For me too it was a tremendous loss; we were one big family. Don Ferdinando used to say: "*Ragazoli andegna ca iè la festa in cla parochia*" (Let's go, lads, there's a party in the parish). We would chorus: "We've only got one bicycle." And, never at a loss: "*Ai ave nu, al biziclet!*" (We've got bicycles) he would say. Down in the plain at Castelfranco everyone went by bicycle. And so he got bicycles for us.

With Don Ferdinando's sisters and other girlfriends we used to walk to Cerpiano

for “spiritual exercises”. The housekeeper cooked fritters and sweetmeats. I’ve kept a holy picture with a prayer written in Sister Benni’s hand. I’ve kept it with Don Ferdinando’s funeral photo as a relic. When we were on the run from the SS, I wore it against my chest and felt protected. Whenever I go to church, my first prayer is for Don Ferdinando.

Don Ferdinando asked us to teach the children their catechism and to keep the church tidy. He used to spend Sunday afternoon with us. ALL THOSE GAMES OF BINGO! Once all the bicycles arrived, at long last we went on a pilgrimage to San Luca. We left the bikes down below at the Meloncello, and walked up to the Sanctuary.

A LONG FRIENDSHIP.....65 YEARS

The meeting between my mother, Carmela Ferraro, and the Minelli family was an important event. From my earliest years I used to hear tell of Maria, her sister and their mother. What struck me, and charmed my child’s soul, was the gentle respect and love that formed between these people going through the tragedy of war. I hoped the story would never end, such was the warmth I felt around me at those moments, I felt a sense of immense wellbeing. Mother and the Bolognese ladies were the best of friends, they would help and comfort one another. Those ladies’ beauty, their gentle civilized ways made me imagine them as marvels, people quite out of the ordinary. Through her stories mother impressed on me sublime values like friendship, solidarity and love of neighbour – an inestimable legacy for which I am eternally grateful.

Giuseppe Ferraro

...I’ve kept a holy picture with a prayer written in Sister Benni’s hand. I’ve always kept it as a relic. When we were on the run from the SS, I wore it against my chest and felt protected...



PAOLINA CALZOLARI aged 14

I lived at Villa D'Ignano, known as "the Villa". One day in May 1944 the Germans came on a round-up, searching for partisans. Two Germans came to our house to fetch milk, sent by the other farmer who hadn't got any. Our house sometimes had partisans passing through, and that day they captured those Germans and took them away to Tura. The next day the Germans came looking for their comrades. They launched an attack on the partisans who'd taken a quartermaster and another two Germans and I don't know if they'd killed them. I remember the quartermaster was wounded; his comrades put him on a ladder for a stretcher. He was staring at my mother, and she gave him a cushion to put under his head. After that there was the offensive.

Casa Bocchino had an anti-aircraft emplacement so they used to shoot at us. Early one morning we heard shellfire and our house was the one hit. The whole place was topsy-turvy. Various families were living there and we all took shelter in the cellars. Shortly afterwards the Germans came and put us all against the wall. They took father who said: *"This is goodbye, children: we won't see each other again"*. Father expected to be killed, whereas what the Germans wanted was to go into the cellar and get drunk on wine. Next morning when we heard an exchange of fire between partisans and Germans, we went into the villa lodge; father was taken away by the Germans and then released.

On the 29th September all hell was let loose. We'd all gone to Tura, as the partisans had told us to go up there for safety, but that night I remember they told us to go away since they were no longer able to hold out. We scarpered down the bottom of a ravine under pouring rain. There was a 20 day-old baby called Roberto Iubini who was killed not much later at Caprara. The baby was crying, I was ravenous, and I ran off into the wood because I didn't want to go into a hideout: I always feared it would cave in and I was afraid of being buried alive. My sister and brother were with me.

Mum headed for Caprara where her sister lived. Alda Rosa, my mum, my 22 year-old sister Nella and my two brothers Pierino and Natalino aged five and seven, were killed there. Aunt Cleonice Rosa also died, along with the three Lanzarini children, Lucia, Gino and a tiny baby.

From the wood father could see them: one lost his head, one his legs, his arms, with mum holding a hand over both of them. A friend of mine, Paola, got away by hiding in a kitchen chest from where she heard my mother saying to Salvina Astrali's mum, *"Still in this world?" "But not for long"*, came the answer.

The SS lobbed a hand-grenade onto Roberto, the 20 day-old baby, and all that was left of him was the feathers of his carry-cushion, floating in the air.

The morning after the 29th Maria Astrali and her sister Paola turned up at Tura. We were in the hayloft and didn't recognise them, they were so covered in blood. Maria had her sister Anna's brains clinging to her clothing, while Paola was a mass of shrapnel holes in her legs. Up in the hayloft we didn't see my father Armando for a fortnight. When we did find him, he was all torn and tattered and hurt. Afterwards we went back to the Villa. I'd hidden in a fox den and was afraid, as I told my father: *"What happens if the fox comes out?"* To eat we made *tigelle* (waffles) while the flour lasted. The only thing there was plenty of, was chestnuts, so every day we ate them boiled. Meanwhile the SS came; they seized and killed a whole lot of civilians at Canovetta. Then they took my father hostage and used him to take the soldiers their rations from Casalecchio up to Casa Bocchino. He had two horses, and if he arrived late they beat

him. I remember when he went into hospital in Via Cesare Battisti, his back was a mass of welts. As for my brother, they carted him off with them to Alfonsine near the Po. When the SS got out, they let him go. They crossed the Po using planks and my brother nearly drowned.

Towards the middle of October the Germans sent us away and we stopped at San Silvestro, an isolated house before Marzabotto. There was me, my sister and a lady with her daughters. Father asked Corrada, who owned the house, if she would take us in. She agreed, though she kept saying she couldn't be held responsible if the Germans took us away. While we were coming down on the way to San Silvestro I nearly lost my shoes in the mud. They were officer's boots given me by the Germans. At a certain point we met some Germans who grabbed my sister and Corrada's daughter. I started crying, wanting to stay with my sister, so the Germans took me along. That evening they gave us a rope to tie the handles of our bedroom door. One of them said: *"I give this rope to tie handle so comrade from front not enter to make tric e trac"* We were terrified; we understood what that word meant. A few days later the Germans came to fetch my sister and me. The river was in spate and in wading across they carried us on their shoulders. We were taken to a building at la Fontana near Sasso Marconi. My sister and I spent two or three days there. They made us sleep in a cubbyhole below stairs right inside the commanding officer's room. We had to crawl in on all fours. One morning while my sister continued peeling potatoes, I was taken by the Germans down a road lined with fir-trees to a villa where there were lots of civilian prisoners being used for odd jobs. I was to stay with them. I spent two or three days there; then "Pippo" the bomber aircraft flew overhead and a German grabbed me by the arm. I crumpled up on the ground and he carried me to a shelter for my own safety and told me to stay there and not come out.

That evening - it was already dark - a different pair of Germans came for me. We went up the mountain through a wood and came to a farmhouse, whereabouts I don't know. We were called to eat; I remember I ate lots of medlars. Some of the Germans started laughing and saying to us: *"Fare tric e trac"*, and we were scared. All night long I wandered about. I came to a farmer's house where there were always just ordinary civilians who offered me food, but I never felt like eating. The evening comes and we have to go to bed. I open the bedroom door and see three beds. One for me and the others for the officers. I cling to the door not wanting to go inside as I was afraid. Then one of the officers said: *"No tric e trac: you come here with us, you protected"*. I slept on the bedsprings between the two officers and nothing happened.

Meanwhile Corrada went to the German Command in Bologna and reported what had been going on, giving our names. Later on the Germans with us received a letter containing what Corrada had reported, so they let us go. I was told I must go to Modena. I made my way to la Fontana where I met my sister Veglia and my friend Lina who rode up behind a German on a motorbike. They put us aboard a lorry which was meant to go to Modena, but we were dumped at Casalecchio. The Germans went on, and we made our way to Bologna. I'd never been to Bologna and my sister Veglia says to me: *"Make sure you don't start saying EEEEE, especially when you see women with red lips"* - which was weird to me, living at the front line as we did. We didn't possess lipstick. My sisters Veglia and Nella had been to Bologna to stand in for servants at the town house of our Villa D'Ignano landlord. His house was in Via Saragozza, which is precisely where we went. The owners gave us a mattress, later some acquaintances offered us their flat at Number 1, Via Indipendenza above the Bar Centrale. I always

tell my granddaughters: when I got to Via Indipendenza wearing officer's boots, I said to myself: *"How am I supposed to turn in this space? I'll have to get ready half an hour beforehand"*.

Then Corrada turned up with my brother and father. We had a little bit of money and could buy food. My sister found a few hours as a maid.

When the war ended my sister, brother Fernando and I moved out of Via Indipendenza and set off home. We walked all the way along the railway track to Vado, and finally got back to the Villa.

The house and everything around it was in ruins; for two days my brother and I had nothing to eat. When my granddaughters chuck stuff away, I always say *"If the ration-book came back, it would be no bad thing."*

Down in an air-raid shelter I found a parcel of corks and suggested my brother Fernando should try and sell them to Bruno, Corrada's son who had a store at Lama di Setta. In exchange for the corks, my brother got a bit of bread, 100 grams of mortadella and a fennel.

One day father turned up with a piece of inedible rancid stockfish, but we ate it all the same; it was all there was.

Bit by bit work picked up, if only the odd hour or the odd day. We stayed at the Villa in its few rooms left, though they were in a terrible state and the landlord never did up the house. It rained in, and at night mice ran over our heads as we slept. They nibbled my brother and sister's toes and fingers, mice being silent creatures.

Afterwards we moved to Allocco. I was sixteen. I found a job as a cook at Zola Predosa. I married Leopoldo Bonfiglioli, a partisan with the "Stella Rossa" brigade, and moved to Bologna for good.



Caprara di Sopra (Fantini section – Carisbo Collection).

LINA VENTURA aged 15

I lived at Elle di Rioveggio, in the borough of Monzuno. My parish church was actually at Montorio, but it was more convenient to go to church at La Quercia, where the priest, Don Ferdinando Casagrande, would be one of the 29th September massacre at the "red pit". I remember him as such a nice, gentle man, a favourite with everyone. When the war was over, after years and years of silence, my husband Corrado, brother-in-law Giuseppe, Gino Calzolari and Don Ilario Macchiavelli put up a memorial stone at the "red pit", in memory of Don Ferdinando. We got evacuated to Tudiano in the borough of Grizzana.

I've always been told that at Elle there were weapons hidden in a straw-stack. This we didn't know. When the SS came and burned the straw, the weapons exploded. If we women had been there, they would have shot the lot of us, that's for sure.

In the house where we were staying at Tudiano there were thirty or thirty-five people. We had a machine-gun pointing at us all the time. The women were set to work in the kitchen. Mum showed the Germans a postcard from father who'd emigrated to Germany for work, and they left us alone. When the SS left the house, to be on the safe side they would take some girls as hostages. At night crossing a wood they felt safer having the girls in tow. There were ten girls in the group, including a sister of mine, Anna. Mum told Anna to keep the postcard in her pocket; if she got taken to Germany, she might find her dad. This was on the Sunday and no-one yet knew about the three girls who lived up on Monte Salvaro at a house called "Il Monte", a charming place with a view of the whole Reno valley and Monte Venero. Those three girls lived with the SS. When they moved out, the girls were loaded up with ammunition. They were killed at Sibano on 1st October. Everyone remembers them as "the ones from Il Monte".

When our girls got taken on the evening of Sunday 1st October, our hearts were in our mouths thinking they might suffer the same fate. I remember the despair in the women's voices: "*They took the Monte girls, what'll they do to ours?*" A soldier came up to mum and said: "*Mamma, calm*". The same soldier also went up to my sister with the baby in her arms, to tranquillize her. After a long and tiring march, when they got to the top of the Poggio del Veggio climb the SS said *Rauss!* and let them go. On the way the girls would often hear "*stay here with us five minutes*". A very religious girl, a pious schoolmistress, Tommasina Taglioli, told the girls "*We must let them kill us, but not go with them*". Luckily for them, they were freed. They ran off, saw a door open at a friend of the family's and rushed inside, afraid they might be shot in the back. I still remember we women were sitting round the fire with our heads in our hands when we heard footsteps. It was the girls returning.

From Tudiano, which comes under Grizzana Morandi, we went back down to our home at Elle, only to find it occupied by the Allies who weren't all that welcoming. After a few days they took us to the Refugee Camp in Florence and we were dumped in a large room in Via della Scala, right on the courtyard with its comings and goings of refugees. The courtyard was the sunniest spot so it was a favourite meeting place. And so it was for us. We all slept on the floor, covered in a louse-ridden blanket, and to disinfest us they would spray us down in the sick-room using DDT – a poison that removed the lice but peeled all the skin behind my ear. To us it was a treat to be able to take a shower once in a while. On a set day we women would be shown into a great long room with showers separated by concrete walls; only your head could be seen. Up on top of a railing a woman would turn the water tap on and off. "Hurry up and

soap yourselves”, she would order. Then she’d turn off the water, so hurry up and rinse off. What more could we ask? Shortly afterwards we were taken to Monte Oliveto Maggiore in the province of Siena, where we remained until 1946, as mum needed an operation and had six small children. Father was still in Germany and we didn’t know if he was alive. My eldest sister stayed with a sister-in-law in Florence.

When we did get back to Elle, our house was a shambles and stripped of everything, but we found our dad there, back from Germany safe and sound.



Massimo Ruggiano

We are all too prone to forget war from the woman’s perspective. They were used as human shields to protect soldiers, used as war booty, used ... Just a few years ago rape was recognised as a “wartime weapon” and banned. What took us so long?

In Lina’s story there was clearly no ranking-list among victims; all women were terrified of being raped, some managing to escape, others not. Some younger ones lacked the strength to work through the outrage, while the more grown-up found resources inside them by which to get over the invasive trauma and go on to help other people, as did Antonietta Benni.

The difference between the three from “Il Monte” who got killed and the other ten who were let go was just a matter of luck, luck that protected their bodies and souls from violation. The women’s strength in wartime lay precisely in the fact that, despite undergoing such violence, they never allowed evil to outweigh love, even if their souls will bear for ever the marks of men’s bloodstained nails, men who thirsted only for power, and turned the rite of life into an instrument of death.

FRANCO FONTANA aged 15

I lived at Cà di Serra near Vado, under Monzuno.

One day the Carabinieri came with two letters for my brothers Sergio and Walter, ordering them to report for armed service. Mussolini had been set free and had set up the Salò Republic. Anyone who failed to report would be court-martialled or imprisoned. Sergio was sent to the Veneto and Walter somewhere unknown. A few months later Sergio managed to escape and on returning home decided to join the "Stella Rossa" brigade under Mario, known as Il Lupo.

I knew all the footpaths leading to the partisans' hideout. I took the food and clean clothing. Their clothes were always full of lice and needed boiling to disinfect them. One day the "Colonel", as one of them was called, invited me to act as a go-between, that is, to carry information in secret to other partisans who had to remain in hiding.

I was working on the Monument to Carducci in Bologna, and was free to move about, possessing the railwayman's pass. My father and I built an air-raid shelter underneath the Monument. Then I worked for the TODT, a German organization which was repairing roads and bridges up at Roncobilaccio near Baragazza, and that gave me a permit to circulate. I had the card and could go where I pleased.

Colonel Alfonso Ventura commanded the Third Battalion to which I belonged. The messages were all verbal, I rarely had any written documents and if I did, I would hide them in the heel of my shoe and under the bicycle saddle. The 'Colonel' always felt responsible for my welfare and even after the war would always come and see me and show affection. I was young but, like all my peers in those days, we had to shoulder our responsibilities.

After the massacre on the 29th September and up to the 5th October, the Germans went on rounding up men on the side towards the river Setta and towards the river Reno. One day they caught thirty-six people between Riveggio and Vado, and killed them all at Canovetta near Marzabotto. I ought to have been in that group, but was saved by my mother. A great burly man in an overcoat grabbed hold of me. He was brandishing a revolver and covering me with it. I tried to slip away into the shelter, and when he noticed he started bawling. Frightened out of her wits, mum came out of the shelter, grasped the soldier by a leg and begged him on her knees to let me go. As



Vado. Bridge demolished and being built.

if it irked him, he kicked free of mum's grasp and shouted at us to be off.

I took part in sabotage action. The biggest sabotage our battalion was involved in was to prevent the Germans from shipping out of Italy salt, sheet metal, spare parts, aircraft engines, all packed in goods trucks. A hundred or so of these were standing on the line between Vado and Grizzana, waiting for the Vado bridge to be repaired after it had been bombed on 18th May 1944. One day we took the brake off the trucks which gradually started to roll and gathered speed at a point where the line slopes steeply. Some of them got across, but others where the bridge was down fell onto the main road and into the town.

On 9th October 1944 the Americans got through to Cà di Serra. They were preparing their offensive against the Germans and all of us who lived on the "Gothic Line" had to quit the village. The whole of my family set off for Florence: mum, dad, sister Giglia and baby brother Dario. My brother Sergio had had his arm nearly severed on 29th September and was already in hospital in Florence. From Florence to Castiglion Fiorentino, to Santa Maria degli Angeli at Assisi in an American barracks, and finally to the refugee camp at Cinecittà, where they shot films before the war. There were about 5,000 of us: Italian refugees from Libya and Dalmatia, foreign refugees, Austrian Slavs, Poles, Chinese. So many populations with the same weariness in their eyes.

The war ended and people went home. I managed to train as far as Rimini, but the journey stopped there: the railway line to Bologna had been bombed. A friend and I managed to get a lift on an American lorry and made it back home.

When I got home, I found brother Sergio and two days later came brother Walter. Walter told me how, after being captured by Slav partisans (all of them killed by the Germans), he and the other Italians were deported to Dachau concentration camp for eighteen months. When Walter tells me what he went through, I feel like hugging him.

Up to that moment I can say I was lucky: we were all alive. We'd started out as seven and that day, 13th May 1945, there were still seven of us. On that day my whole family left Cinecittà, bound for home. The Fontana family climbed aboard an army lorry with lots of others, about forty people. The American driver got in behind the wheel, feeling tired but needing to get a move on if he was to arrive before nightfall. At San Quirico d'Orcia (Siena) the lorry suddenly swerved, tumbled into the river, and all the refugees were killed. Some died straight away, like little Dario; others after being taken to various local hospitals. Only my sister Giglia survived; the news was brought by the Monzuno Carabinieri.

On top of all the sorrow at losing his family, my brother stepped on a mine, and when he saw the mess made of his legs, he took his life. War, bloody war.

From the book *La staffetta* by Franco Fontana

If anyone says the dead are all the same, I reply: that's true, but it's how they die that distinguishes them.

There are those who wanted the war, and those forced to take part.

Who are the partisans?

FIRST WE WERE REBELS
THEN PATRIOTS
IN THE END FREE MEN

ROSANNA CARBONI aged 15

In September 1944 I was living at Camugnone near Pioppe di Salvaro and when the bombing started, we decided to move up to Piè di Castagneto, a house on the hill above Camugnone. From up there I saw Sanguineta villa, Creda and other nearby houses burning as part of the raid where they killed everybody. When there was an explosion inside the Camugnone tunnel, we heard it all. A carriage full of ammunition was booby-trapped and we heard the deafening explosions.

Then we heard about the massacre at la Botte down at Pioppe di Salvaro. It was a survivor who told the tale. Ansaloni dragged himself on hands and knees up to our place at Piè di Castagneto. He told how they'd been shot in batches, and how he'd managed to crawl out from the dead. As a worker at the hemp-mill, he knew the place backwards and how to hide. He saw Guido Nannetti manage to crawl out, but die almost at once from his wounds. Ansaloni had a wooden leg and kept repeating: *"trust them to shoot the other leg"*. We went to let his wife know, and she stayed a while with us, but then they made us decamp at night for fear of the SS.

On the morning of 5th October, the last day of the raid, the SS came up to Piè di Castagneto at a moment when we had just popped out of hiding. They surrounded the house, trained their machine-guns and began shooting into the wood where the partisans were. At that moment we were indoors; they forced us out against the wall. Mum and us children ran off to Casalino, while my father Mario Carboni, the son of the farmer Bruno Bonantino and his cousin Pietro Bonantino were killed on the Porrettana roadside near Sibano, whereas the other men were deported to Germany. Then the front fell back and even the Wehrmacht soldiers told us to beware of the SS. The few houses left unburned, like ours, were used to quarter soldiers.

I learned that my father had been killed three days later: no-one wanted to tell us. We went back to Piè di Castagneto for a few days, and then the Germans told us to go away. We left by night and walked to Malfolle where we took refuge in the church. Before we started up to Malfolle, mum managed to move dad's body into a ditch and cover it with a cloth. The morning after, the soldiers told us we were free to leave and to head for the Bazzano road. My relatives stopped at a school in Savigno where they were friends with a schoolmistress.

Aunt Peppina, 35 years old, died of typhus in the space of three days. Her daughter and my sister Lina caught it as well, and on the doctor's advice they were taken straight off to Bazzano hospital. Mum went with them, so I was left on my own. A farmer took me in and wanted to keep me as a daughter. I stayed there for about a month and when the two girls recovered, we all went off to Bologna and stayed with an aunt in Via Saragozza. Mum cycled over to Savigno from Bologna to pick me up. When my sister was fully recovered, we all moved into a flat near aunty's house. I applied straight away to the Timo (today's Telecom) as dad was an employee. He was a trunk-line operative, meaning that he serviced the line from Marzabotto to Riola di Vergato. He worked continuous shifts and only pedalled back to Piè di Castagneto in the evening. They took me on at once and gave me a generous amount of money. They wanted to give us a house, as the offices were being turned into accommodation, but mum managed to buy a house with the help of a lady.

Dad had buried two trunks of best linen, and inside he'd hidden a really smart telephone, which we handed over to the manager at Timo. He came over all emotional at the sight of it and blurted out: *"Poor devil: you saved the phone but didn't save yourself"*.

We were told by the Tonellis who lived at the Camugnone roadman's house that when the manager heard about the raids, he sent a van to fetch us, but we'd already moved to Piè di Castagneto and the drivers didn't dare to drive up the hill in case they were trapped between SS and partisans.

In May after the Liberation uncle Ernesto, who'd emigrated to France, hitch-hiked home to Camugnone. He hunted up the bodies of dad, Bruno and Pietro and had them buried in the Calvenzano cemetery. Uncle Ernesto was a great help to us. He returned in August with all his family, and every year used to come and stay.



Camugnone
Hostelry and
Roadman's House.

Granny Adele and aunty Pia came back to Camugnone and were welcomed by the Nannetti family who were extremely generous to everyone.

My (future) husband, Pietro Mattioli, who was 17, was rounded up at Pontecchio behind Marconi's villa. He was taken to Colle Ameno and held there for three or four days. He witnessed prisoners being forced to dig a pit for their own graves, just because one of them got away. The SS major, Walter Reder, came round. My husband wouldn't eat his food, a fear reaction. At his refusal, Reder told him he would kill him if he repeated the gesture. A prisoner friend told him to watch out for Reder, who'd just killed a farmer, Ferruccio Caselli.

When my husband did move on from Colle Ameno, he was accompanied by an SS lieutenant towards Sasso Marconi, and stopped inside the waterworks where the Setta joins the river Reno. About a month later the prisoners set out towards Monte Adone where they remained for another month. Certain Italians stooped to teaching the Germans where we'd all hidden our belongings. There was someone dressed in a fascist fez who even volunteered to do the plundering. From there my husband and all the rest of the prisoners were taken to Stella, where the SS headquarters was, and where thirty carts of plundered goods were gathered ready to be sent to Germany. In the late evening, about midnight, the prisoners moved off in column, hauling those carts full of booty towards Bologna. On reaching the Funicular, my husband made his getaway just as all the stuff, which hadn't been wrapped, started to roll onto the ground.

SALVINA ASTRALI aged 16

I lived at Caprara under the parish of San Martino, from which we were moved to Villa d'Ignano, a farmhouse belonging to the priest. Living with us were a family of evacuees from Bologna. He was a real fascist but his two daughters were extremely fond of me. When the rounding up began, my mum decided to go back to Caprara where all her friends were, so she felt more secure. Meanwhile my father had got injured in the shelling of Villa d'Ignano. Our area, too, began to be bombarded and we all abandoned our house to take refuge under the bell-tower, thinking we would be better protected. As it happened, it was the bell-tower they shelled and destroyed because it was a radio station.

A piece of stonework fell off the tower onto the ceiling of the Sacristy and the priest, who in his haste had run outside in his underwear, asked father to go and get something for him to put on. While dad was looking for clothing, a shell landed and he was under that stone. He kept shouting *"Help me!"* The question was, how? I plucked up courage to go into the church forecourt despite the continuous shells and machine-gun fire to get a pickaxe, a crowbar, and lever off the stone. We gradually worked him free, but his trapped foot was squashed and swollen.

Mum no longer felt safe so she decided to go to Caprara, and with us came all the folk in the area. They all died. The only survivor was an elderly woman with a heart condition who never left her house. It was only that day she did so, and what did she see but her two sons killed. That evening I went back to Villa d'Ignano with some other people to fetch the cows. The next morning we set off back to Caprara and on the way I met father who said: *"For God's sake, turn back, they're burning down all the houses. Your mum told me to hide in the woods since the SS are looking for men to send to Germany, though they're leaving the women alone"*.

We went back towards the Villa and came to a place called Tura, where some partisans made us stay, but after a bit we went on towards the house. The following morning we heard shouts of *"Paola, Salvina, where are you?"* My two sisters were plastered in blood; one had part of little sister Anna Rosa's brains clinging to her head. They kept screaming *"They've killed them all"*, standing there in front of our house.

My sisters survived beneath the dead bodies. Maria was blinded but could walk, Paola couldn't walk but could see. So Maria hoisted Paola on her shoulders and was told by her which way to go. They took to cover and made their way along the track in our direction as well as they could. Whenever they heard Germans coming they would stand still in the ditch with water up to their knees.

Four members of the Astrali family died, and eight from the Iubinis. The SS placed machine-guns at the windows and lobbed hand-grenades inside as long as they could hear crying. When my future father-in-law went to Caprara to bury the dead, he found his wife straddling the window-sill and a pig eating her face. All that we found of the tiny 20 day-old baby, Giorgio Iubini, was the feathers from his cushion. When the husband of the old lady who was saved saw that his whole family had been wiped out, he went and hanged himself in a chestnut wood.

Afterwards we went back to our home, but the Germans had given orders to go away. We took shelter in the priest's cellar and wouldn't go to Bologna. The Americans were already at Monzuno and we hoped to see them arrive at any moment.

There was wine and corn in the cellar. We ground what we could with grinders rustled up from various houses, and so had flour to bake bread in the oven. When the

Germans saw smoke coming out of the chimney, they came and sent us away. They put us in single file and we crossed the mountain until we got to a building at la Fontana, near Sasso Marconi, supervised all the way by Germans. For fear of being raped, we women all wore headscarves to appear old, but those Germans didn't harm us. They accompanied us all the way to the Giordani barracks in Bologna. The fascist who was evacuated to our house had said before leaving: *"I'm going back to Bologna. If you need me, I live in Via Castiglione, come and see me."* I looked him up and he immediately asked after my family. I told him they had all been killed: there was just dad left, and two sisters badly hurt. Unluckily he'd just taken in another family the day before and had no room, but to me personally he did say: *"There's room for you"*. He fitted me out like a lady in smart clothes, new shoes, and even bought me a hat. Every evening we would go to the Giordani with his wife and daughters to take a bit of everything, food and stuff. We all returned home after the Liberation. I met the daughters in a supermarket after the war and talked about their dad. During the three days of "free for all" he'd been killed, and grief had driven their mother crazy.

When we got back home to Villa d'Ignano, we found the house demolished. The coach-house was intact, where the carts were kept. We cleared it out and put down straw to sleep on, and rigged up an awning in front of the door.

One night we heard cries of *"Mamma e papà"*. It was my brother, back from the army. A short while later back came Augusto Iubini who wasn't yet my husband. He had a German woman with him who had rescued him when he was a prisoner in Germany. When Augusto learnt what had happened, he wouldn't have anything more to do with that woman.

In next to no time, Augusto and I got married. We didn't have two beans to rub together, but slept all in one room together with Augusto's dad at Pian di Venola.

In the space of three years, three children were born and I was widowed.

It was on 19th March and we had a party for San Giuseppe. Augusto made a big thing of it, and then the next day, together with uncle and a friend, he took some cake and set off to pay his respects to the family dead at Caprara, buried in a common grave: about 80 of them. He was always going there, once a week. One of his friends was a mine-hunter, though not my husband. When that friend picked up a mine, uncle retreated to a safe distance, but my husband was sitting facing him; both he and the friend were blown up and died. They carried them on a ladder to the graveyard of Sperticano, though the funeral set out from Pian di Venola where both of them lived. Lots of people attended. There was no priest since we hadn't got married in church and there were lots of red flags to be seen. Clearing mines was forbidden, so I never got a pension, even though my husband's death was accidental.

I was forced to put my daughters in boarding school, though I kept the smallest one, the boy, at home. Maria and Lucia went to the Orphan Girls of St Luke. When the nuns brought Lucia home because she kept running away, Maria went to another institute until she was fifteen.

For six months I cooked school meals. There was no salary and I got the odd few lire, but my son and I got by and I did get heating out of it, as the Town Hall gave me firewood. I also used to take the TODT workers their drink.

At long last, in 1960 I got a stable job. Every day I went and asked at the Town Hall if there was any work going, and one day a man working at the Registry Office said: *"I'm sick and tired of seeing you here. I'll get this sorted out straight away."* Within a month he'd found me a job at "Giordani". The man was a fascist: that made the second time

I'd received a favour from a fascist.

The family reunited in 1963; all my children have gone to work.



...Every month after the massacre my aunt and her husband would go up to granny's house at Caprara. She built a memorial ... on top she placed a cross made out of the house window-bars, and below the memorial stone she buried the brain of my aunt Anna Rosa...

ACCOUNT by Salvina's daughter, MARIA IUBINI

When I was boarding at the Orfanelle di San Luca I had a rotten time. Being the youngest, I was sent out under the porticoes with the oldest nun to beg for charity.

I sat on a low stool and whenever people came up I would hide under the nun's robes and bite her legs, because I couldn't bring myself to beg. For punishment they used to lock me in a cubbyhole full of bugs. My sister hated the place too, which is why she kept running away.

One day the nuns took her home, fearing a scandal as lots of girls were running away.

As a relative, mum was allowed one visit a month, but all the nice things she brought us were used for the charity lottery.

In the other municipal institute I was moved to, they made us embroider sheets and other linen, again for the charity lottery. When I finally returned home, I learned they'd closed the Institute down on grounds of cruelty. That's how I lived until I was fifteen. To help mum out, I went straight out to work, and did all sorts of jobs.

What makes me most sad is to remember how mum was treated. The State wouldn't give her a pension because they considered father responsible for the explosion that killed him. For the same reason the Air Force cut off a monthly bonus he used to receive for bravery as an airman. The Town Hall too: first they offered her a few temporary jobs, but then they wouldn't recognise any of her claims and didn't even give her popular housing.

When little brother Bruno (Sanzio) was born it was January and mum gave birth in a room with no ceiling. She was covered by an awning, but you could see the stars. With the cold she couldn't give birth. Someone gave her a "Parisian" stove and the warmth enabled her to deliver the baby.

DANIELE PALMIERI aged 17

5th August 1944

I lived at Ronco Pertugio. For over a month, twice a week, German soldiers would go by. It was a patrol on horseback all the way from Pian di Venola to Medelana. They just looked and didn't do anything – until 5th August 1944. One poor boy from the village who'd been a fascist only the week before, took off his black shirt and belt when he saw the partisans move in, and changed his uniform. He'd always been a fanatic and to show what he was worth he killed a German, knowing full well what the consequences would be. We knew that for every German killed, ten Italians would be shot, just as we knew that the Germans mustn't find weapons when they searched, or they would burn down the houses and shoot the people living there. My parents, who owned Cà del Bue, put in Enrico Venturi to live there so the partisans wouldn't make a base of the place, and they didn't. Though when the partisans asked to bake bread, we would do so, you couldn't do otherwise.

The round-up took place on 5th August around three o'clock. My father and I ran off but forty-five people - men, women, boys and girls, old people and babies - finished up at Cà del Bue. Francesco Venturi was holding a baby daughter whom he quickly slipped into his wife's arms. He'd already been a prisoner in Croatia and knew that the worst was about to happen. They actually only shot men, and not ten but only six, chosen from those they considered partisan sympathisers. All the rest caught in the round-up were taken to Montasico, and my family didn't come back till a week later. Grandpa was sick and in an armchair; they didn't take him.

After the execution they burnt everything: the house, fields, wheat. The bodies didn't get burned as they lay in the courtyard away from the flames of the house. I went there with some others and we buried them on the spot, using makeshift coffins. A friar came to bless the bodies, Fra Samuele Saporì from Monte Pastore.

That was the only episode, and all because of that cretin. He's still alive and nobody likes him. At the time I wanted to beat him up, but father put his foot down and I didn't. We all know him, but no-body likes him.

Aunt Nella Palmieri who was present, adds:

"At Montasico there was my mum, aunt, fourteen year-old brother and five year-old niece (the daughter of my sister). Before sending us home, they sent me into a cowhouse to question me. Outside stood Don Lino Pelati from Luminasio who wasn't involved but joined the group to give moral support. He told me: *"Go inside, don't be afraid to speak, they won't hurt you."* The Germans asked me if I'd seen any partisans. I said I hadn't and they let me go. I was next to Francesco's wife and her baby girl. After a few days we all went home."

Daniele resumes his story.

When the Americans reached Monte Salvaro the Germans evacuated us. I went to Ronca over towards Calderino where my aunt lived. The Germans occupied our house.

At aunty's house we slept in a bed, after ages sleeping in hideouts. It was about midnight when the Germans came, with a heavy field kitchen pulled by horses. They'll murder us all, I thought. But all they said was get dressed quick, we need the place.

They made us clear all the implements from under the portico, which is where they put the kitchen.

I spent six months with the Germans until the Liberation. A German sergeant took me on as a batman. We would go shopping at Vignola where there was a German army store. I was treated well. The Germans had one field gun and one carbine which they took turns with when on sentry duty. Five hours before the Americans came through Monte Pastore, the Germans left on foot. They had nothing left.



...Five hours before the Americans came through Monte Pastore, the Germans left on foot. They had nothing left...

ERSILIO (ARSENO) GABUSI aged 17

Salvaro 29th September 1944.

My family and I lived at the "Lock", Pioppe di Salvaro, near the railway, a most dangerous place under bombardment. We decided to move to a farm at Salvaro where the farmer gave us a room to put our stuff even though he had no more room. In July the front was coming our way. The Americans were advancing and that was a point where a German Wehrmacht contingent halted to recuperate. But nothing happened; the partisans left everyone in peace, too. The decision to burn and kill hadn't been taken yet.

On 29th September before first light we heard shooting. We all went into the church where Don Elia Comini and Father Martino Capelli were praying amid the people. When Panzetta and Casturein came to warn us the SS had killed lots of people at Creda, the men were advised by the nuns to hide: some in the sacristy where the door was closed and hidden by a cupboard, and the rest in the cellar (shut in under a trap door. I was one of the men in the cellar, along with my father, while my brother Leo sat and ground wheat on top of the trap-door covered over by some sacking. The youngest ones climbed the bell-tower. There were over forty men.

Meanwhile Don Elia and Fr Martino set off for Creda to tend the wounded. Near Salvaro cemetery they ran into the SS who captured them and used them all day long to carry ammunition. In the evening they were shut in the Pioppe "stables" along with other prisoners rounded-up from Grizzana to Sibano, and they were shot there on 1st October at "la Botte", after a spy told the SS the deliberate lie that Fr Martino was a partisan. Don Elia and Fr Martino stuck together and died together. With them died another 42 men. That great water cistern which we called "la Botte" served to run the electric generator. At that moment there was no water, the executed men fell into the slimy bottom of the cistern, and when the sluices were opened eight or ten days later, all the corpses were washed into the river Reno and vanished.

When the SS entered Salvaro church they hunted everywhere but found no-one. If they'd found a single man, they'd have killed us all. They asked my brother why he was grinding corn by hand and he answered: "*Because there's a power cut.*" The SS accepted that explanation.

I remember those two priests, fine men. I knew Don Elia better as he was born at Madonna del Bosco, a hamlet in the parish of Calvenzano, in the very bedroom occupied by my wife Edera's family. When he was still a schoolboy, Don Elia used to come and see mum every summer and help Monsignor Mellini, the parish priest of Salvaro. I was an altar-boy to Monsignor Mellini. Don Elia was always with us children, playing football. When I started work I only met him in the evenings. It was he who taught me to play rummy. He was a good man; they don't come any better. He could have saved his skin, but when they told him he could leave the Stables, he answered, "*Either everybody or nobody!*"

After the massacre we held out for a few months, but there were always engagements between Americans and Germans and it became impossible to stay. In early December we got out. We climbed Monte Salvaro, up from Pampano, with a few things in a rucksack: a change of clothing. At the top of the mountain we met the Allies. A patrol took us to Tudiano, then Grizzana, and hours later we reached the Refugee Centre in Via della Scala, Florence.

We were put up in great long rooms, given a camp bed, a sheet and a blanket. All

the rooms gave onto a terrace. On the ground floor were offices, an infirmary, and a first-aid room where we were called to be sprayed with DDT when we had lice.

At mealtimes we had to line up in two columns outside the canteen. Each of us had a ration card with little coupons you tore off every time you got your food. To begin with, people turned up with a jar or tin or whatever they could find to hold food; later they gave us mess-tins.

We were always given a kind of bean porridge. It was filling but nasty, though we gradually got used to it. My brother, Dad and I went out to work and managed to buy better food outside. My brother cleaned the Americans' boots at the railway station of Santa Maria Novella; father and I unloaded material shipped to Livorno from America, which we carted into a field near the Refugee Centre. There was flour, oil, tins, cigarettes, clothing and whatever we needed. I was lucky because the morning the Americans came to Via della Scala looking for workers and knowing there were refugees there, I, my father and lots of men from Pioppe and Vergato were taken on. It was a piece of luck as they paid us in "hamlire" every week and we could buy things. Often I went to the cinema in the evening.

Nearly everyone found some job, the women went as maids. We all went home with the Americans.

My father did some bricklaying for a lieutenant, and jokingly asked him for a lift when they decided to leave Florence, knowing Bologna had been liberated.

One day father heard the lieutenant shouting for him: "*Gigi, we're off*". That's how all my family came home.

On my return I went to work as a turner for the firm of Carpigiani at Casalecchio.



... When the SS entered Salvator church they hunted everywhere but found no-one. If they'd found a single man, they'd have killed us all...

I live at le Murazze, which belongs to Marzabotto municipality. My family have lived in that house since 1st May 1795. They came from Rioveggio and bought the house there as the land was good. They brought a statue of the Madonna in terracotta and called it the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows. In 1820 a chapel was built and the statue is now inside the chapel. Near our house there is a niche where I wanted to put up a similar one, but I couldn't find one with seven swords. So I was given a photograph and we found someone who could copy it. Don Athos took a hand and presented me with an identical little figure.

Two families lived in the house at le Murazze: my father Olindo's and uncle Filippo's. We were parishioners of Casaglia church, where we went every Sunday. It was your duty to go to Mass in the parish church, so we all did. One person would stay at home to look after the animals; and when the rest of us came back from Mass, whoever had stayed at home went to Mass at Vado.

On 18th May 1944, the feast of the Ascension, father went off to Mass at Vado as soon as he saw us come back. While he and his friend were getting on their bikes to come home, the Americans bombed the bridge. Both of them were hurled against the embankment and died on the spot.

From that point on it became dangerous to linger in the valley bottom, so people began moving up the mountainside. My aunt Margherita, whom everyone called Antenisca, had been housekeeper to a priest at Cerpiano, Don Lodovico Serra who built the Palazzo, as they called the building that housed the Ursuline nuns. They brought with them a primary school (one did the first three years in those days) and a nursery school. When Don Serra died, by way of thanking aunty he left her a house and a plot of land. Aunty lived on her own, the house was big enough to hold us all, so we moved up from le Murazze to Cerpiano. I was the first to get to Cerpiano since, when the Germans started moving people out of le Murazze, mum chose me to go up and look after the animals, while bit by bit the family moved up to Cerpiano with all our belongings.

One day when two mates of mine and I were on the way down to le Murazze, out from the wood jumped a German with a revolver who called "*Alt!*" and whistled. Two more soldiers came out. They took me by the arm and led me to a knoll on which some days later the Daini family were killed. There they put up a pole with boards nailed across, two painted white, two painted black (an artillery signal). Then they let me go, having asked the name of the hills and whether Monte Sole was a partisan spot. I said no, and they let me go.

I beat a retreat and hid in the Palazzo, from a window of which I could see the same NCO carrying dealwood joists needed up on Monte Sole. The soldier told the people there: "*we go Monte Sole, when come back, want eat. We pay*". There were a score of them, but when they saw the partisans they took to their heels and fled. That night Umberto Borelli, a partisan, came out of his hideout and saw they were putting up another pole. Then he saw a German. They both drew their revolvers but didn't shoot at once, and Umberto managed to get away in the wood. After that I got out of Cerpiano. I had the frightening sensation someone was following me; it was that German NCO who caught me up, grabbed me by the jacket and bawled. "*You not partisan Monte Sole, huh*".

I managed to wriggle away into the wood.

At Cerpiano I was there to look after the animals. I was always in contact with a

partisan called Mignani. He often lent me his telescope and I enjoyed watching the Germans. On the afternoon of 28th September from in front of Cerpiano church I and some others saw artillery fire on Monte Venere, and everything pointed to the Americans coming. On the night of the 28th-29th September I slept, four to a double bed, with my cousins Giorgio, Martino and Damiano (two at the head end, two at the foot end). Mum came in and said it looked like rain, so we should hurry up and cut the rabbits' grass, as wet grass is bad for them. I crawl out of bed and when I'm out in the meadow getting grass I see there are five houses on fire down in the valley: Casone, Riomoneta, Casa Bavellino and another two houses down at le Murazze. I go straight back, passing in front of the house where mum, realising I would be hiding up in the woods, says: "*Take a jacket with you, it looks like rain*". Those were her last words.

I hurry off and fall in with the partisans who are retreating towards Dizzola. I meet one of the Stella Rossa commanders, Tito Comellini, going up a rocky track to Monte Sole. The Germans open fire and I decide to go back on my tracks to Cerpiano. I hide behind some large oaks in the wood and see a group of SS marching up in Indian file. I was able to count them, fourteen of them. All the women and children they found, they herded into the Oratory of the church. They shut the door and told Sister Benni: "In five minutes, everybody Kaputt." Sister Benni told everyone to say the Act of Contrition. A hand grenade was lobbed in from a side window. I heard screaming which gradually died down. A soldier remained on guard.

Three things happen. The cries of the people, the rain beginning to fall, and a soldier striking up on the harmonium inside the nursery teaching room.

Of the thirty-nine people there, about half were dead; the others, hurt more or less badly, were left there throughout the 29th September, and the night of the 29th-30th. Only the following afternoon did they go in to finish off those still alive with a bullet in the neck and rob them of all they possessed: gold and suchlike.

The only survivors were Fernando Piretti under his mother's body, Sister Benni wounded in an arm and a hip, and a little baby, Paola Rossi, wrapped in a shawl. Thirty-nine people were killed inside the Oratory, and others outside, above Cà Zermino.

When the SS reached the forecourt in front of the church, they set up a machine-gun covering the wood, but didn't shoot.

My sister Lidia and fifteen year-old cousin Giorgio were both together at Casaglia. My cousin stood in a corner of the graveyard as he needed to pee, and was killed outright; my sister was hit in the hip and lay under the corpses until 30th September, when she was freed by a farmer looking for his own family. She made her way to Cerpiano and met SS twice. The first time they laughed in her face at the state she was in; when she met the second patrol, she managed to hobble down a vineyard and into a hideout where some other women hiding looked after her and taught her how to disinfect the wound with her urine, which is all they had, and my sister pulled through. One soldier at Cerpiano in a short space of time shot a sheep for bleating and a cat for miaowing, and then went off to Dizzola with two other soldiers to set fire to all the houses. On their way back they were heading for the chestnut wood where I was hiding, and my heart was in my mouth, I don't mind saying! We realised later why they didn't set fire to Cerpiano: it was part of a plan, intended for Walter Reder's headquarters. All the women who hid in the cellar there were raped. My uncle Filippo was just in time to hide my sister Lidia and her friend Paolina in an upturned vat where they nearly suffocated. The SS came and went and took turns. At one point a farmer, Pietro Oleandri, heard the cows moving; afraid they would get into the field and eat the Lucerne grass,

he came out of the chapel and was shot by an SS. Another woman sneaked out of a side door of the chapel to go home, and was killed: she looked like an upside-down crucifix.

The children killed in my family were: Damiano, Giuseppina, Marta, Martino, Olimpia and Rosanna. The gravestone also includes Giorgio who was killed at Casaglia. Then there was my mother, Alfonsina Comellini, my aunts Antenisca, Alda, Maria and Annunziata with her children Antonietta and Mario. Lastly my father who was killed during the bombing of Vado. Fifteen family members in all.

After all the atrocities two women and I got away and crossed the bridge to La Quercia, making for Casa Barbieri, but no-one wanted me in the house: they were afraid the SS would take me for a partisan and there would be a reprisal. So I went on to Boschi di Sotto, inhabited by a farming woman called Margherita Iannelli. For the same reason she too wouldn't have me in the house, though in her book she wrote that she did, but it isn't true. I went to a shelter.

When we crossed the bridge leading to La Quercia there were four of us: the two women, Anna and Valentina, stopped at le Piane, while I made my way back to the shelter at Casa Barbieri.

At first we were brought food, but then the Germans came and nobody fed us, so in our hunger we crept out at night to pick grapes. I met two SS and fell over, I was so afraid. A friend called Beccaccia told me not to worry: the Americans were on their way and the SS weren't doing anything but surrendering. I took to my heels, I wasn't trusting that. When the Americans did come, they shot three SS, one while he was washing.

Margherita Iannelli said it was the partisans, but that isn't true. I think it was the 4th or 5th October. On 5th October the Americans reached Monzuno.

My companions and I climbed the mountain and saw the Americans with their sleeping bags. When they saw us they said something in English, and one who knew some Italian asked me *"Tu sapere dov'è acqua?"* I said I did and led him to the well at the farmhouse. While I was filling the flasks, I saw there were still some SS at Casa Barbieri in the San Nicolò area, but they didn't do anything. To thank me, the Americans gave me a nice box of "goodies". They gave me a lift up to Monzuno where I met a captain who wanted to know my story. He asked *"You have family at Monzuno?"* When I said no, the captain decided he would get a farmer to take me in. He may have thought I would stay there for a day or so, but I spent seven months at that house. The Americans had food for everyone; I worked in their kitchens and warehouses.

I left home with no documents or wallet. I came back with 67,000 lire, various pairs of shoes, milk and lots else. I have fond memories of them.

I FORGIVE and happy I am to have done so.

There's a story behind my pardon. When Walter Reder was serving his sentence at Gaeta prison, he asked the Marzabotto population for their pardon. They were called to give their opinion in a referendum. When I was asked to express my opinion, I said that if Reder really repented, he ought to serve out the sentence they'd given him in silence. Sister Antonietta Benni forgave him.

Some time later I was going to church at Gardelletta (in those days I still attended, now I've stopped) when I met Antonietta Benni who said to me: *"Francesco, you should be ashamed: a Christian who won't forgive!"* That remark has always weighed on me.

One day when I was taking a group to Poggiolo, a German journalist called Udo

Gumpel told me he'd done some research and found who was in command at the Cerpiano atrocities where all my family died. He took me to Cerpiano with a cine-camera and told me the man's name was Albert Meyer, an NCO who threw just the one grenade, boasting to his soldiers: "Just one grenade, so they suffer more." Brought up a Catholic, Meyer enrolled in the SS very young, saw wartime action in many places and at an interview when he was a sick old man in a wheelchair, said he'd do it all over again if he was ordered to. Udo Gumpel told me to stand over the stone and point out the names of my relatives who died. He asked me: "*Francesco, if you came face to face with Meyer, what would you do?*" I replied: "*I think I would forgive him.*" Gumpel didn't expect that answer. I went on to say: "*Too long has passed, WE'VE GOT TO PUT AN END TO IT*". I am still positive it's right to pardon. I said as much to an army colonel at La Spezia when he came to interview me before the trial.

That day when we were talking, the phone rang and the colonel told me Meyer was dead. My comment was: "*Now he'll be settling the score with **SOMEONE ELSE**.*"

At La Spezia I repeated that I wished to forgive everyone.

JUSTICE MUST TAKE ITS COURSE BUT A CHRISTIAN MUST FORGIVE.

One day at Poggiolo I met Meyer's son who came out with all the shame he felt at what his father did. I answered: "The sins of the fathers mustn't be visited on the children".

WE'VE MADE EUROPE; NOW LET'S TRY AND MAKE THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE TOGETHER.

EUROPE I (the battle's for everyone- Aeschylus)

Backs to the wall, we fight this battle
For dead and living and those still to be born.
We fight for all, including the foe.
If ours to fall, let's fall like men
We who told the world what makes a man.

EUROPE II

Europe, Europe, don't let the bull abduct you,
look it in the eyes, Europe
don't falter.
No animal can stand the human gaze.
Your eyes shine with sunlight, Europe
Though you have wept. (Elena Bono)
(from *Opera Omnia, Genoa: Le mani*, 2007)



Our Lady of Sorrows.



Le Murazze.



The Oratory of Cerpiano.

I worked in Bologna as a waitress for the Pappagallo restaurant in Via Nazario Sauro, and I was there when it was bombed on 23rd July 1943. I was in the cellar with other people and the UNPAS firemen came to get us out, since the stairs had vanished. I returned home to Vado. Only on September 25th did I go back and see if any of my things were among the rubble. That day I first went to Viale Milazzo to draw my father's sickness benefit, then to Via Roma (now Via Marconi), and just as I got to the Job Centre, a passing bomber plane swooped down with machine-guns blazing. My first thought was: "*Stavolta l'è la volta bona ca mor*" (My number's up this time).

The plane soared up so as not to hit the building. I dashed under the portico of Via Polese and took refuge in a cellar where I didn't know any of the people. Some were quiet, some were crying, some were screaming. A girl plunged in, a shop-girl from UPIM. Her black apron was all bloody and spattered with her colleague's brains. She was laughing and crying and we slapped her to bring her round. We'd been through an American bombing raid that caused over 4,000 deaths in Bologna. They came without warning, the streets were full of people and it was a bloodbath.

I met a man from Vado and we decided to make for San Ruffillo on foot and from there go home. You couldn't go to the station as there was a train full of explosives and one couldn't go near. I had two brothers who were prisoners in Africa, and one in Russia, and that man, a fascist, said: "*Tell your brother in Russia that when he comes home there's a war on here too.*" I answered back: "*That's right, there's a war for the likes of me, a girl, and that old man and that kid; you go and fight at the front, you don't stay here.*" He didn't like that.

On 19th May 1944 they began to bomb Vado. We cleared out up to a shelter below Monzuno, called "Buca". My father who was a miner hollowed out the earth in a ravine and made two caves. One was for eating in, the other for sleeping, there being fifteen of us. Meanwhile the bombing of Vado went on: it was a nightmare.

On 25th October father thought he would go up to the "Buca" and see if we had any flour left. Mum told him: "*Don't go, if the Germans are around they'll kill you.*" Father tried to calm her fears: "*By now the Germans have gone, can't you hear?*"

Up he went and we heard five revolver shots. We rushed there and found him covered in blood, with a basket in his hand. We laid him down and cleaned him up. He wanted to speak, but only blood came out. He had been shot through the heart and he died. The rain kept pelting down, and since he couldn't be carried, we decided to bury him there at the shelter. My brother-in-law and another man began to dig the grave. It was afternoon and, all of a sudden, two Germans came down. They lined us up and I said to one of them through my tears: "*Why did you kill my father this morning? Haven't you got a father back home?*"

He had the rounds for the machine-gun and he'd put them down. The other one who'd lined us up began rummaging around but couldn't find them, and the two of them started quarrelling. The German had a grenade as well and began shouting: "*All Kaputt!*" We cowered inside the shelter, thinking: "*They're going to kill us*". The German threw the grenade, the only one he had, but it lodged on a projection of the hideout. All went silent. We crawled out one by one and saw the Germans had vanished. We wrapped father in a cloth and buried him. We crept down the ravine in fear and trembling that the Germans might see us and rape us. The Americans were on the other side of the ravine and had seen everything. They couldn't intervene or it would have

been a bloodbath, but they gradually set up their mortars and the Germans made off. We got as far as the Bolognina gulch, fifteen of us, but with the constant rain the water was rising and we didn't know which way to go. A certain Amilcare Ventura said: "*Hereabouts there's a splinter-guard.*" We went in underneath and shooed out a cow which had been hurt, but then we let it back in with us, feeling sorry for it.

There and then we were in a shelter where you couldn't stand upright. So we took the decision to make our way up to the Americans. Someone said: "*Oh, remember to call them Paisà and not Camerati!*" We climbed in single file. As I went past father's grave, I said to him: "*Daddy, help us out, if the Germans see us, they'll gun us down and we'll die.*"

A thick mist got up inside the wood: "*if miracles exist, that was one.*"

We came to a house which the Americans had already occupied. An American recognised us and explained how they couldn't intervene when the Germans lined us up or else they'd have killed us as well. They led us to Monzuno on foot and put us up in a Carabinieri barracks. Inside there were Badoglio supporters, partisans and Americans. They asked us all questions with maps laid out and wanted to know where the Germans were, house by house.

Mum was against going to Florence as she'd been told people went hungry there. So we decided to stay at Trasasso inside the school where there were some Americans and two families from Vado. We divided up a large cellar and stayed for six or seven months.

Then my family – but only us – moved to Villa Cedrecchia.

At long last, the Liberation.

I wanted to go straight back to Vado. On the way via Curè I entered a cottage and saw a black American dead, and two more dead Americans aboard a tank at Vallà; then via la Bolognina to Vado which had been bombed flat. We wept. The only house standing was Villa Elvira, which is where we stayed, until we managed to do up our house. Later I went to work at the Job Centre for three years. I used to take *La voce dei lavoratori* to the men working along the railway tracks. I didn't get a salary from the Job Centre, but we were given a bit of money stopped from the workers' pay packets. The firms rebuilding bridges were called *Provera e Carassi*. We used to go to their offices and they would pay us.

Then I got married and had two children. I remember my brother before he left for Russia, how he came and said goodbye where I was working at the Pappagallo restaurant. "*I don't want to see you crying*", he said. He was 23 years old, tall and dark, and he waved to me in the distance at the bottom of Via Nazario Sauro. He was reported missing in Russia. The other two brothers came back from Africa having spent ten years on wartime service. I was the first Vado woman to wear mimosa for Women's Day. I would give bunches to local women, and when they said: "*Well, we've never had that!*" I would answer: "*Everything's changed now!*"

I lived at the Cà Veneziani railwayman's cottage near Gardelletta, my father being a railwayman. Two years earlier we'd moved from our old home at Gardelletta where I went to nursery school under Sister Antonietta Benni. On finishing primary school, I went to Bologna to learn to be a dressmaker, but when the bombing started, dad kept me at home. Once the Allies began bombing Vado, especially the railway on 26th September 1944, we couldn't stay on in the house. First we slept in a damp wet tunnel, then father decided we should evacuate to Cerpiano until the Allies came through. He'd already arranged that Sister Antonietta would put us up.

On September 26th we set off for Cerpiano. Before leaving, dad had already moved certain belongings to Cà Bavellino: some wheat and a lamb we were keeping for its wool. It had become a mascot for our family, especially my twin brothers who were always playing with it.

We were pretty downcast as we trudged up to Cerpiano. Up there we found lots of families from Gardelletta, we knew everyone. We took a case of belongings with us. I took the case I had when I went to work in Bologna. Inside I had a pouch with some souvenir photos. I also brought away a coat I was making for myself, thinking I would finish it by hand at Cerpiano.

The next day mum sent me to Caprara for some apples, and there I met the partisans. Il Lupo was there, whom I knew well: he and his family lived near us at Cà Veneziani. When he saw me he said we'd done well to move there, it was a safe place. Very early on the morning of the 29th my father heard shooting; he came into the bedroom and told us to be off straight away and take refuge in Casaglia church. They were burning down houses, but they wouldn't harm us in church, it was a place of worship and we'd be safe. I took my case and we set off hot foot. It was raining, and when we got to the church there were already lots of people, relatives and acquaintances.

After a while Don Ubaldo Marchioni, the parish priest, came along, looking drawn and frightened. *"Everyone come inside; we'll say the Rosary. This is dangerous."* No-one was able to pray. The suspense was horrible, nerve-racking. Lucia Sabbioni, a friend, kept popping outside to see what was going on. She came in gasping and said the SS were on their way there, and our fears grew. A short while later they arrived at the double, kicked open the church door and ordered us all out onto the forecourt. I kept close by the priest. An SS speaking half in German, half in Italian, told Don Ubaldo to take the people to Dizzola above Cerpiano. I thought: *"If they take us there, it's to kill us all and set fire to the house."* We set off with the parish priest and my intention was to dive into the wood as soon as it was possible. Unfortunately, when we got to the cross-roads by the cemetery two hundred yards from the church, we heard a squad of SS shouting as they came over from Casetta where the friars now live. An officer shouted *"Alt, Alt."* We all halted and he gave orders for the cemetery gate to be knocked down. When I saw the scene I said to mum: *"Look, this is where we end up! They're putting us in there to mow us down."* Everyone started crying and screaming. The officer detailed a soldier to advance on us with a machine-gun. He set it up pointing at us and stopped, while the officer talked to Don Ubaldo. Don Ubaldo told him we were meant to go to Dizzola. They kept us standing there another twenty minutes, and then an SS said: *"Raus, Raus"*, get moving, pointing the way into the cemetery. The priest was taken into the church and next day we learned that he was shot, along with a paralysed woman who'd stayed there.

I realised I'd lost my chance of getting away, and thought I might be protected in the middle of the group, but when I entered the graveyard they began pushing us here and there and I ended up against the wall to the left of the entrance with a soldier standing next to me.

One lady asked if she could go over to her daughter and moved towards the exit. She was the first to be shot. My mother Angiolina, with the ten year-old twins Gigi and Maria and my fifteen year-old sister Giuseppina, were on the other side of the cemetery. Mum called out to us: *"You see, there's no getting out of it, this is where we die."* Meanwhile I saw a soldier loading the machine-gun. I could hear that ominous sound. Soon I heard the first shots and saw the plaster flying off the chapel. Then a tremendous blast sucked me head-over-heels from the wall into the middle where I'd meant to go. I had my head stuck on the ground and my legs in the air, upside down, and heard my mother say: *"They're killing her before her time"*. People were screaming and crying. I felt blood running down me and couldn't tell if it was mine or one of the wounded. Then I passed out. When I came round, I heard distant voices, whispering *"Cornelia, are you still alive?"* It was mum calling me. I hissed: *"Mum, shut up, there are still Germans around!"* She said: *"Gigi and Maria have copped it."*

Giuseppina was screaming and after a loud report she felt the explosion in the head of the person next to her; she kept screaming but didn't die. I wanted to help my sister and my mother whose legs were mangled, but I couldn't stand up, I was beneath the dead. I heard Lucia Sabbioni telling us to get away; she and some others were the first to do so. I summoned up my strength and managed to crawl out from the bodies. I went over to mum and hauled her near the chapel wall so she might shelter from the rain a bit, but I couldn't do any more as her legs were a mess and bleeding. I still had my bag with my coat in, so I used the sleeves as a tourniquet on her thighs, as I'd been told, but they were no use. I consoled her by saying I was going to Cerpiano to get help and then we'd take her to the Putti hospital in Bologna (now the Rizzoli) where they make new legs. I set off through the wood towards Cerpiano. I ran across a never-ending ploughed field below the cemetery. By now I wasn't afraid of anything. Shortly after I heard the shouting and realised the same thing had happened at Cerpiano as happened to us. I also saw a sentry on duty at the door of Cerpiano Oratory.

I walked and walked through brambles and prickles as there was no path and I felt no pain even though my legs were bleeding. On coming down from Casaglia I saw a little gully that came out at Gardelletta. I followed the gully and came to Gardelletta where there was a little bridge to cross, and there I saw an SS. I didn't know what to do. Luckily he didn't see me, so I turned round and skirted along the railway line till our own railway cottage. I looked at our house from a distance; there was no-one around, so I decided to go to the people at Casa Bavellino and when I walked into the yard, I found two farmers lying dead. It was getting on for evening and I was desperate. I thought: *"Everything's destroyed, there's nothing left, where can I get away?"* Looking round, I saw the lamb with its throat cut and understood that everything had been wiped out. The world crashed in on me. It was only at that moment I started to cry my eyes out.

I decided to go to Cà Veneziani, though I was beyond all hope of finding anyone. There I came upon another tragedy. The people were all lying dead. I took to my heels and thought I would cross the river Setta, which was dangerous, being in spate. While I was starting across I heard machine-gun fire zipping past my legs. On the other bank were some SS who'd seen me. I raised my hands and said: *"MUM, HELP ME."* Hear-

ing no more shooting, I turned round and began calling Sara, a woman evacuated to those parts. Then I heard a man, a friend of my father's, saying *"Keep quiet, for God's sake. Come along up"*. I made my way towards him and he carried me into a shed where I found Sara and a newly dead baby. The first thing I asked was if someone could help me carry mum away, but they refused to go up to Casaglia cemetery with the whole area surrounded by SS. They consoled me, saying *"Maybe we'll go tomorrow"*. The next day, 30th September, they still tried to string me along and console me, since going was out of the question. I went to Casaglia two days later. A young lad went with me, who'd been hiding in a shelter. First we went via Cerpiano.

I met a country woman who took me to the shelter where my sister Giuseppina was. This young bloke, Tristano, an evacuee from Bologna, looked inside the Oratory to see what had happened. When he came out he told me not to go and see. He was pale and shaken. He went off and, I learned later, let himself be killed.

I went to the shelter and found my sister who told me that the day after the massacre our Ruggieri relatives went to the cemetery to fetch cousin Elide and my mother, who was still alive, and they took her to *"la Pudella"* where the nuns are now. My sister walked, and mum was carried on a ladder. Elide was wounded and survived because, after shooting a baby girl that was screaming, an SS looked at my cousin and said: *"You no Kaputt. You look like fiancée who live in Germany."* He couldn't bring himself to kill her. That soldier later returned to Pudella to tend to Elide, and that way she survived.

Giuseppina went back to Cerpiano looking for me because I said I would go there to seek help.

My sister looked after mum until she died. Elide told me that, though she was in great pain as her legs had now got gangrene, mum kept calling for me and saying: *"They'll have killed her. They'll have killed her. My Cornelia'll have been killed."*

When we all hid in the church, my father went in the woods. He had all his papers in order, he wasn't a partisan. We knew lots of partisans because they lived near us. We went to the same primary school. Gianni Rossi was at school with me and Gastone Rossi was at school with Lucia Sabbioni and my sister Giuseppina, so father felt safe in the woods with the partisans. I remember once dad met Il Lupo who said: *"Paslein, you haven't seen me, right?"* For answer Dad said he never saw anyone. From the woods they heard everything, the screaming, but they couldn't do anything.

When father went to the cemetery by night and saw the tragedy, he was stunned. He went off down to a sister of my mother's at Lama di Setta and stayed there a week in a stupor of despair. One day he made up his mind to return to the spot to see us, at least our bodies. A few hours before, mum had told my sister: *"I dreamt of Dad. He said he's coming to fetch us."* But when dad got to the cemetery gate, the pain was more than he could bear, and off he went. On the way back somehow he wasn't killed.

My sister and I and another girl hid up in a cave for a week. From one shelter to another, we remained in hiding for a month and a half. We had no food and planned to make for San Mamante on the side towards the Setta valley. A farming woman gave us some wheat and a little grinder to make the odd bit of unleavened bread (*piadina*), though lighting a fire was a problem: it could give you away.

Father heard where we were and joined us. When I saw him turn up all haggard with a long beard, I hardly recognised him. He was in a state that felt worse to look at than what I'd been through. A father reduced to that condition, when he was meant to support us all. All he could say was *"How did you manage to survive?"* He didn't ask

after mum, he didn't have the courage to ask. When father saw we had nothing to eat, he went to see the farmer at Cà Bavellino and fetch some wheat. There he met some mates of his and they tried to console one another. But not for long: the SS came and rounded them up, and we heard not a word for a week. We thought he'd been killed, but a woman at a farm told us he and the others had been seen carrying ammunition. Dad managed to get word that we were to wait for him. That took us to about 15th November. The Wehrmacht Germans told us to clear out. We left by night under a full moon as bright as day, with all the people coming out of hiding and running away. I was scared and thought they'd kill the lot of us. My sister and I and Sara decided to make our way to aunty's at Lama di Setta. We crossed a field which, we only learned a week later, was mined. We got away with it that time too. Aunty herself was in a shelter and after a few days they sent us away to Bologna as refugees. After days on the road we got to Casalecchio. There was a tram which took us to Via Andrea Costa where we knew someone who put us up. At Casalecchio I saw women with lipstick on, people in nice clothes, and realised we came from another world. We stayed with that family till the Liberation. No-one came to ask after us, not the State, nobody.

My father did get away from the SS, but not finding us he went back to his job at the Marzabotto front, and we didn't know where he'd got to. I kept going the rounds of the hospitals to see if there were people from Marzabotto. In Via Castelfidardo in Bologna there was a military hospital that took in the wounded coming from the front. There I learnt that father, and a German, had been wounded by shrapnel. They'd dressed his wounds at Sasso Marconi and taken him back to the front at Marzabotto. Via some relations who lived at Casa Marsili near Rioveggio, I knew a "freulein" who was governess to lawyer Ghigi's children. She concocted a pass for me to get to Sasso Marconi where the wounded were. When I got there, dad was gone. That was 15th January. I looked high and low for him. Come March, some instinct reminded me that we had some cousins over towards Crespellano and Bazzano, and maybe he was with them. One morning I set off from Via Andrea Costa with a greengrocer who was going that way to buy fruit, in order to enquire after father at Bazzano hospital, but the very day before, it was bombed. The nuns told me that Villa Stella at Castelfranco had been turned into a hospital, and there was a German interpreter who would give out information. I told him I was looking for my father, wounded in the thigh at the front, along with a German. Afraid as I was, I told him I'd lost all my family in a bombing raid and only father was left. That was to defend myself. If I'd told him they'd been wiped out by the Germans, he might have taken it badly. The interpreter began to phone round helpfully. He kept saying: "*Ja, Ja, Paselli Virginio on the 15th?*" Then he went all serious and told me not to go in; on the other side was another interpreter who knew the whole story. The second interpreter took me into the Villa and went into the office with two officials, while I waited in the lobby. The two officials came out to me, holding a file but not saying a word. So I peeped into the file and saw printed in the middle PASELLI VIRGINIO. "That's my father, that's the one!" I blurted. The interpreter said it was indeed my father, he'd had an operation but hadn't come through. All his documents and a few objects had been received by the Crespellano cousins when they buried him there in their village. My cousins handed me everything, including the jersey he was wearing, knitted from the wool of our lamb.

I met two nurses who'd looked after him, and it was a scene I'd already dreamt of.

Sister Antonietta Benni taught me and everyone else to forgive. My mother, too,

would remind us: "THE LORD FORGAVE FROM THE CROSS, *so we mustn't hate*". I'VE NEVER HATED. We were all religious and went to church on Sundays. As a Christian I forgive, but the SS must atone for what they did in the eyes of the law.

On the day of the Liberation I was in Sant'Orsola Hospital with pneumonia. I remember they took me there on a wheelbarrow from Via Andrea Costa. I heard people saying "Bologna's been liberated". I dashed up Via San Vitale to the two towers, and when I saw the tanks come with the Allies and their bands, I burst into tears, thinking of my family.

Whenever we told the story of what happened to us, no-one would believe it. People are only prepared to listen to heroic deeds, and not to us POOR FOLK.

Personally, I've never stopped talking about what I saw. To me, remembering is like praying and going to the church of Casaglia is like going to a Sanctuary.



...To me, remembering is like praying and going to the church of Casaglia is like going to a Sanctuary...

Sister Agnese Maura, member of the Little Family of Our Lady of the Annunciation.

This account calls for careful reading, to catch the finer shades of feeling, the little observations: in short, Cornelia's sensitivity. In her story two planes intersect, or rather interpenetrate the tragic drama of events in all their depth, and the inside experience, what that eighteen year-old girl "saw", and how she imbibed the ties of family, home life, solidarity, which those events carved across.

When reading, one should not let oneself be engrossed in the description of facts, terrible though these were, but keep one's attention – I was going to say heart – open to hints, remarks, certain inconsistencies that run through Cornelia's narrative and tell so much about her and the culture around her, where she was born and brought up.

On that score there are many things to note, two of which I mention as being threads that run throughout, each separate but, I feel, interlinked by the same meaning, like a symbol for service and self-sacrifice on behalf of others to the point of self-annihilation.

One is Cornelia's "coat" by which she sets such store. She is reluctant to stop working on it, even though she won't be going back to Bologna where she's learning the trade of dressmaker. She thinks she may go on sewing by hand, she keeps it carefully in a bag and takes this with her when her father advises the family to run and take asylum in church as houses are burning in the neighbourhood and shots are ringing out. When the bloodbath inside the cemetery is over, Cornelia recounts: *"I still had my bag with my coat in, so I used the sleeves as a tourniquet on her thighs, as I'd been told, but they were no use."*

The other reference is to a lamb that *"we were keeping for its wool. It had become a mascot for our family, especially my twin brothers who were always playing with it."* Later, as she flees the massacre in the graveyard in search of help for her mother, she finds nothing but death at every homestead: *"I looked at our house from a distance; there was no-one around ... Looking round, I saw the lamb with its throat cut and understood that everything had been wiped out."* In the end, after she has hunted in hospitals and found her father has died, a few personal belongings will be returned to her by the cousins who had received them, "including the jersey he was wearing, knitted from the wool of our lamb".

At the end Cornelia draws her moral: "Whenever we told the story of what happened to us, no-one would believe it. People are only prepared to listen to heroic deeds, and not to us poor folk." It is a moral one could imagine prompting a work of "minor history" – which reconstructs the needs and aspirations of a community from inside and which tells a truer story than major history.

One image I think of is the birch tree planted just over twenty years ago in the tiny cemetery of Casaglia: its roots have grown in the course of the years, partly tunnelling and at times breaking the surface so you can see where they run. These roots always attract me, and whenever we go up to the church of Casaglia in the long evenings, and stop at the cemetery to recite the Rosary (I am one of the nuns living in the convent built on the site of la Podella), I never fail to note any changes, whether bark has broken through, whether a section has lengthened or altered course. It has the appearance of a web supporting the tree and enabling it to grow. That is just the impression I get from reading these accounts which support and stabilise the reasons for our sojourn here.

ERIO CANTELLI aged 19

Partisan with the Stella Rossa ranging across Grizzana, Marzabotto and Monzuno

I was in charge of ten members of the Stella Rossa Brigade. It could fairly be called an international brigade, with men converging from all over the hemisphere: Indians, New Zealanders, British, French and to a considerable extent Russians. They belonged to a group that succeeded in getting away from the train taking them to Germany. They were on the Direttissima stretch at a point where the train slowed down because of the bombing. They made their getaway near Vado, and were enrolled at once in the Brigade. Halfway through May 1944 a group from the Stella Rossa Brigade went to Creda di Salvaro in broad daylight, entered the fascist anti-aircraft command, and demanded they hand over their weapons. Not a shot was fired, and the militiamen were politely asked, without suffering a scratch, to go to their homes. At the time we were guests of the Baccolini family at 'Cà del Mont' from which an SS patrol on October 1st would seize two sisters, Anita aged 20 and Claudia aged 22, as well as their 19 year-old cousin Sestilia. They were kept prisoner and later that same day killed at Sibano. Anyone talking of those three girls would call then "the ones from il Mont".

I kept in touch with Il Lupo, but from mid-September we were fairly far apart, as I was in the area of Villa D'Ignano. For a fortnight we holed up at "Possadur", near Casetta and Podella over Val di Setta way. Among that numerous family was a five year-old girl who was very attached to me. Whenever she saw me leave, she started to cry: she wanted to come with me. I went my way and the girl died in the Casaglia massacre.

On 28th September a farmer came up from the hamlet of Canovella to let us know there was a German. I and one other were detailed by the Company Commandant to go and kidnap him. It was pouring with rain, and the track was deep in mud. We got to a farmhouse where the fire was lit and found the German warming himself with his rifle on one side and his pack on the other. We were a bit nonplussed: here was an unarmed soldier. We warmed ourselves in our turn and we all made our way back to our detachment. On our arrival our Commander asked him to show his papers and, to his astonishment, the man turned out to be a Pole. *"How come one of the SS is a Pole? I can't very well take a decision on this, I'll have to send him to Battalion headquarters; I can only decide if the soldier is a German."* The two of us who had brought him in were detailed to escort him. On the morning of the 29th a messenger-girl came through alarming us with news of a round-up and how they were burning everything down. So we cleared all trace of our presence in the area in order to avoid trouble for the civilians, and moved up onto high ground. There were thirty of us, one part on the Setta side, one on the Reno side: too few of us, really.

We waited for dawn and saw a column of SS crossing the footbridge at Lame di Setta, coming from San Silvestro, and another column coming from Canovella. Faced with such heavy forces we decided to retreat to a stronghold at Santa Barbara, a chapel damaged by the Germans who had shelled us there for three days from 28th May on.

Santa Barbara was a necessary step on the way to Monte Sole, so we waited for them there. We had orders to open fire at fifty metres, no more. One small volley sent them haring back, while a soldier ran down the track to seek reinforcements. I could see them from above. I had my own tommy-gun and the German's Mauser, the latest model. That day at Santa Barbara we kept the Germans pinned down the whole day. They couldn't come up and only moved if they were sure they wouldn't die. They

lacked courage. We had one man wounded, Bentivogli from Castiglion dei Pepoli.

Towards sundown we got orders from Monte Sole to retreat. We were also reinforced by two tommy-guns and two squads of partisans, and in that way found it fairly easy to keep them under control. Then the order came to move on to the fields of Caprara. From a dilapidated farmhouse we procured a chair, sat our wounded man on that, and two of us carried him to the fields of Caprara where partisan doctors attended to him. The bulk of the Brigade were concentrated there, two battalions out of four. That evening it was decided we should shift towards Grizzana. We went in single file, a group of about 300 men. From a house called Termine one patrol was sent up Monte Salvaro. All by night, we could see like cats. At one point someone advised us to turn back, as there was nothing but dead bodies.

Our information service was generally good, but not in that area: we were caught off our guard. It was also raining so heavily the patrols couldn't stay outside; all they did was reinforce the sentries. Helped by local guides, the SS managed to take the partisans by surprise; some were caught napping and it was a shambles. When we got there we saw homesteads on fire from San Martino to Villa D'Ignano. Some serious fighting took place there, though further off on Monte Sole the partisans found it difficult to fight back. As certain comrades told me, some civilians had been herded out of Casaglia church and down to the cemetery to be killed, and the partisans were in a cleft stick. If they opened fire on the SS, the civilians were bound to get killed; if the partisans lay low, there was just the hope they might be spared. As it was, the SS had already received barbaric orders to cleanse the whole area. When I got to the fields of Caprara, I heard whispering but couldn't see anything, so I went on up Monte Sole and when I saw what had happened, I all but fainted. It was appalling. Flames everywhere. We moved into the Termine area and a patrol came along with bad news. They told us to hide up in the Orsaroli gullies in the area from Volta going down to Elle near Rioveglio. The wood was thick there and the SS were unlikely to risk it. On the afternoon of the 30th I and one other reached the area of Tudiano near Veggio di Grizzana. Our group had the problem of food and, knowing a few families, we managed to pick up two bags of freshly baked bread, but when it came to sharing it out, there was little more than a slice each. While we were returning we met two farm girls all out of breath with the SS on their tail. We didn't let them rest but urged them on towards the houses at Tudiano, while we moved off in our turn. I later learnt that the SS pursuing those women had been stopped by a group of Russians in German uniform and strangled to death in order not to make a noise. The Russians were used for security patrolling. They came from German-occupied parts of Ukraine and were patrolling the Direttissima railway line. Later on they joined up with us.

The next day there were two remaining battalion commanders. They were unable to contact headquarters where Saliva the Carabinieri warrant officer was, so they were given a free hand. Part of us headed for Monzuno, part of the Russians and Italian partisans made for Bologna to join up with the GAP⁴ and another GAP group commanded by the Mongolian captain "Karaton". Tagging along with us all this time like a lamb was that German prisoner. He'd turned docile. I ought to have taken him to headquarters: he may have been a Pole, but he still wore SS uniform. I know he was called Toni, but after the Liberation I didn't feel like hunting him up as I was afraid something might happen to him. I got him across the front at "Cantine". We kept in the chestnut woods, with only water to drink, a fair-sized group of us, keeping well

⁴ Gruppo di azione patriottica

away from habitation.

Under my command I had about thirty Russians. Not far off lived a farmer, Virgilio Gemmi, a deserter from the 1914-1918 war who got off on an amnesty. He had no sympathy with fascism and grew potatoes. He boiled us up two cauldrons of them, about 50 kilos; each of us managed to eat a couple, and good they were!

The Allies had advanced to above Montecatino. The Germans were putting up a good defence, shielded by some high ground. It was hard to manoeuvre armoured vehicles; the roads were so muddy, they got bogged down. There were crack troops in that area. I asked all my lads if they wanted to pass the front line. They were in favour so, by night from Cantina, maybe on 2nd October, the lads began the descent towards Farnè, a wood near Castiglione dei Pepoli. The hamlet nearest there is Montecatino and Burzanella. I gave the German his rifle so he could defend himself, and told him to head for Castiglione, while I and another man who had seen them on their way turned back across the supply line area around Veggio. We ate chestnuts. From there I crossed the front line at Cattari, together with my dad who had worked in America and knew English. A South African HQ was billeted in our house and they were amazed how well he spoke English. Dad had worked all over and spoke all the dialects.

For me, Dad was an asset. As I told him, *"When we meet the Allies, you know English, you can introduce yourself better"*. And so it was that we met an American patrol at Rioveggio and my father began talking. They took us to a place called Belvedere di Montorio belonging to a vet. That was the Allied High Command, where they set about interrogating us to know where the German big-wigs might be. Father explained everything and translated for me. Then they took us on a circuit from Montorio to Monzuno opposite Grizzana and Monte Salvaro where the Germans were still ensconced. I got drafted with a Scots Guard regiment and went out on night patrol. I had canvas shoes on to avoid noise, and in the gullies running with water we got drenched. One night we ended up at the Oratory of Todiano. There was a tongue of land and the Scots Guard halted, afraid to go on. I upped and said: *"Andare io"*. I approached along the roadside embankment, crouching so as not to be seen. Near the façade of the church I made out a shape that looked like a man. I paused to think: *"Is that a man or not? If it's a man, he's bound to move."* The others were afraid, but we realised it was a tree-trunk and breathed again. We went back to our unit at Nadia near Veggio. Next morning we set off towards my parents' place at Murazza di Veggio taking in Casa Veggetti, Montalcino and Monte Salvaro. Then the Germans started shelling. We took cover and lay up at my home, which was free of Germans, but to get there we had to cross a field and came under more bombardment.

After a great exchange of shellfire between the Allies and Germans, the Scots took Casa Veggetti Montalcino and the Indians took Monte Salvaro.

The revival of fascism which created the Salò Republic wanted to force all young men into military service, so anyone refusing to go opted to take part in the Resistance. Unfortunately some people joined the Resistance to stir up trouble and discredit the partisan movement. We couldn't control everyone, more's the pity, spread out as we were over a huge area. No telephone and no chance of communicating except for the messengers. Some signalling by bonfires or sheets hung out to warn the population and partisans that there was the danger of a round-up.

Our fires also served to mark out spots for Allied ammunition drops.

If the powers that be had had the wit to say: "Young Italians, if you'd like to go

on fighting alongside the Germans as part of the Salò Republic, you're welcome", no doubt some would have joined. But the Allies gave us the weapons to fight the Germans. They needed people to harry the Germans behind the front-line, though before 29th September we needed another ammunition drop by parachute since ours was running out. The ammunition didn't arrive. It was a great blow. That's why the Germans caught us unprepared.

From Grizzana where I lived to Sibano they began to round up men to send to Germany. These were imprisoned at Pioppe di Salvaro and then selected. The fit were packed off on trains down to the Bologna Caserme Rosse where they underwent another selection and were deported to labour camps in Germany. Those classified as 'unfit' were shot at the Pioppe "Botte" on the evening of 1st October 1944.



Map used by the German command to plan their attack on the whole partisan area, involving five columns belonging to various corps of the 16th Panzergrenadier Division Reichsführer SS.

LUISA (GIGINA) MINELLI aged 19

My family was composed of my mother, Maria Simoncini, father Enea Minelli and five children. Brother Giuseppe was away in the navy, my sister Lucia and brothers Aldo and Mario were at La Quercia. It was 1943 after the bombing from the air and from the sea when I came back to our grandparents' house at La Quercia after living at Savona where father was working in railway construction. We had little to eat and received constant help from uncle Dante and aunt Ersila Simoncini from Termine, where I often used to go and visit them. Termine is so called because it was the boundary for all the parishes of Marzabotto and Grizzana districts. Next door to the main house stood a chapel.

Uncle Dante was steward to a large estate and got killed by a bunch of partisans. Maybe because one day he called them brigands for stealing, or perhaps out of jealousy because on the farm he was boss and was envied.

On the evening of the 28th September partisan messengers came through from Pioppe, La Quercia and Grizzana, to say we were surrounded by SS but not to fear, they would defend us. On the morning of the round-up there wasn't one to be seen.

That morning, the 29th, I was asleep in the double bed with aunty and her youngest daughter, Lucia. That night I dreamed the Germans were coming. There was no sound to be heard, and anyway we were surrounded by partisans, so I went back to bed. A bit later I heard shouting coming from la Cà on Monte Salvaro where the woman Mingardina lived. She began calling out "*The Germans are burning Creda, the Germans are here*". I opened the window and from up there at Termine I could see down below that Creda was on fire. We all sprang into action. Uncle Augusto took the horse and went and hid in the pine-wood. Aunty decided to stay there as there were only women and children in the house and she was sure the Germans wouldn't do anything. Meanwhile the partisans cleared out, including the wounded ones who'd taken refuge in the Chapel. There was a mad scramble. One threw away his revolver and then went back for it when I said "*Going to defend yourself against the Germans without a revolver?*" Some partisans were untrained.

As for me, I remembered how a fortnight earlier the Germans had burned some houses at La Quercia in reprisal, including the mill since they said the corn was to feed the partisans, and then they threatened to destroy the whole place if it happened again. So I took Lucia with me and set off for a hideout in Quarzè gully. Before I left, cousin Vittoria gave me some money which I stowed in my bra. Later Vittoria came along with Carla, her sister Nives's two month-old baby girl.

Gianni Rossi, Il Lupo's number two, came by badly wounded, supported by two of them. He was coming up from Cadotto and they asked us to help them. Vittoria helped them dress the wound; then, learning that everyone at Cadotto had been killed, aunty and the cousins joined the getaway. Vittoria and baby Carla was leading the group and suddenly realised all the others had fallen behind. As she got to the shelter, she handed me Carla and set off back to see where her party had got to.

Carla was crying so I knotted a handkerchief, dipped it in rainwater and gave it to the little thing. The locals wanted to send me away as the SS would kill us all if they heard the baby crying. They kept saying "*Buzz off, buzz off*". A woman took some sugar out of a bundle she had. I put some sugar on the knotted handkerchief, Carla started

sucking and calmed down.

Meanwhile Termine was burnt down too, and the SS shot uncle Augusto. He'd buried some gold in the pine-wood which was never found.

In the evening aunty, Nives and the others came back. They'd lost the way and gone to Elle. Someone told them the right way and they came back to our hideout at Quarzè.

Two kids from Cadotto found their way to the shelter: Cioni and Gamberini, aged about ten or eleven. They told me that when the SS came the sentry was in the cowshed sheltering from the rain. He never saw them coming and was killed. Gianni Rossi and Il Lupo jumped out of the window. Gianni was wounded while Il Lupo got away through the wood and wasn't found. There was a reward on his head; a lot of money to be earned for catching him.

On 30th September the sun came out a bit and the two kids and I went in search of my family. Aunty Rufina didn't realise what had happened. She wanted me to go to San Martino and ring the church bells to let everyone know uncle was dead; then I was to go to the Bolognina at Vado and tell the relatives. Meanwhile she insisted on letting aunt Viola know, so she set off towards Salvaro and got shot. I took the children to Cadotto but when we got close to the wood they wouldn't go any further. The place was strewn with dead bodies. We could hear shooting. I led on towards La Quercia keeping to a runnel so we couldn't be seen, and when I got to Ravecchia I found granny and the three grandchildren of the Ferrettis. All dead. Granny with her head blown off, the children with a hole in the head.

We went on to Rivabella and as we got near, we couldn't believe our eyes: "*What, you all alive?*" I told them how everyone was dead at Cadotto and many other places. I also mentioned that uncle Augusto was dead and asked them how they'd managed to survive. They answered they'd been pressed into carrying ammunition up to Castelletto; the Germans took their eyes off them for a moment and they escaped towards Rivabella. No-one had any news and when I told them all the dead I'd seen, they thought I'd gone mad.

The two boys, Cioni and Gamberini, crossed the whole mountain and made their way to relatives in Bologna. I went back to look for mum, who was alive; then I went to La Quercia to find brother Aldo. I found aunty's body lying in the house. My brother had hidden in the tunnel and at a special signal he came out. We were to throw three stones to let him know it was all clear and he could come out. Shortly after that, I met Enrico Ventura who reported that everyone had given me up for dead. They'd seen me at Terzè when the SS shot at me. When I saw the SS I ran round the back of a hayrick without knowing there was a gaping hole below it. I landed feet first in the brambles, scratched all the way up to my stomach. The SS shot and missed, but those who saw me fall in the hole thought I was dead.

Meanwhile my mother made her way to Cà di Pè, knowing that the tenant who was pregnant had died.

Next I set off in search of my brothers Aldo and Peppino. Aldo was at La Quercia by himself and I learnt Peppino was alive. I went back to Villa Serana where the SS turned up and set up their machine-gun. My sister was leaning on me from behind with her hands on my shoulders. She kept crying and saying she didn't want to die. I was tired out with running and didn't move. There was a little boy who clung to the SS lads' necks, all of them very young. He started saying "*Bravo Camerata, buono Camerata*". We were evacuees. In the end they told us to go.

I went first, thinking *"They'll be just like Creda; as the people went into the coach-house they shot them in the back. Mine's the first bullet."* I was past caring, but we all survived. The sacristan survived too, saying his prayers though I couldn't follow them, I was too worried. There were nine of us on one mattress in the washroom of Villa Serana and I was going out of my mind. With us there were the mothers of Il Lupo and Gianni Rossi.

I used to have a fantastic memory, I could remember back to when I was two, but at that time I lost my memory. I heard that the massacre took place on September 29th and 30th and October 1st. I only learnt this later when I returned to La Quercia in 1945, after wandering with refugees all over the place.

After the Liberation in May I saw my father. He'd cycled home from Savona to find us. Our house was partly burnt, though we managed to live in part of it. Mum took some ammo bags and sand, tied them up and used them as a door and windows. For chairs we used ammunition cases, for plates the billycans abandoned by soldiers. My brother made glasses for everyone out of soldiers' beer bottles. To cut the glass he would fill the bottle to a certain height with cold water, and then cut the glass with a red-hot wire. You could drink without cutting yourself.

I learned that the only survivor of our priest Don Ferdinando Casagrande's family was his father, who went back home to Castelfranco Emilia.

Don Ferdinando went to the SS to get permission to bury the dead, instead of which they shot him together with his sister. After the Liberation my brother went to retrieve the bodies and found brother and sister clinging together at the "pozza rossa". Don Ferdinando's mother and her other children were injured when a grenade exploded Serana way; they died a lingering death.

When the Allies came we were under the tunnel. They sent us like messengers to test where the SS were, but we just pretended to go and reported that we hadn't seen any.

Down in the tunnel we had nothing to eat, so I, the railway-keeper's wife and a girl from Riveggio forded the swollen Setta and picked chestnuts. On our way back down from the chestnut wood we were halted by an English patrol who took us for spies and kept us prisoner. They took us to Montorio and kept us there the whole day long. There was an interpreter to whom I explained the route I'd taken. He followed with a telescope and saw that all the houses I mentioned really were burned down. At the end of the war I learned that the High Command of the Fifth British Army had its headquarters in the area and maybe they thought the SS were there at our house. I said *"We've got small children down there under the tunnel who are dying."* The English gave us a first-aid box and a tin of food to eat. A despatch-rider went with us and insisted we didn't leave the tunnel on those three days. It was late October. When I got into the tunnel, the little girls were already dead. My brother took a drawer out of a chest of drawers which became the two babies' coffin, and buried them. Next there was the capturing of Monte Salvaro. There were only wounded and dead men to be seen.

Don Casagrande was like Don Bosco. Gentle, calm, a lovable person always there for you. I wasn't a regular, but I do remember the day he took possession of the church. It was a morning of air-raids and we all ran for cover. An aeroplane came down and Don Casagrande rushed to see if there were any injured crew he could help. I know that, later on with his friend Carlo, he took the church valuables to San Martino, but nothing was ever found.

On the second day of the raid when I came looking for my brother at La Quercia I saw they'd bashed down the church door. All the vestments were strewn on the bridge. The SS had trashed everything.

You know, from the 8th September 1943 we didn't have a moment's peace.

At Savona I remember the Germans regularly boarded trains to see if there were any Italian soldiers who'd defected from the army, and then often there were bombing raids. I remember one day an aircraft was hit and came down in the sea. It was June 10th, when war was declared, and ranged along the Savona mountains were all the anti-aircraft batteries. The English aeroplanes began flying over the sea. Our own planes went up; one of them wasn't recognised and got hit and after that our planes weren't allowed to go up by night, since you couldn't recognise them.

After moving and changing lots of jobs, I specialised in physiotherapy and worked at Ravenna and Ferrara in two centres run by the province to re-educate spastic children. I worked from 1964 to 1970, then I got married and devoted my time to the family.



La Quercia – Church

... Don Casagrande was like Don Bosco. Gentle, calm, a lovable person always there for you... the day he took possession of the church was a morning of air-raids and we all took cover. An aeroplane came down and Don Casagrande rushed to see if there were any injured crew to help...

PRIMO RIGHI aged 20

I come from Maccagnano. On 29th September my brother-in-law Ruggero Acacci, who worked at the Pioppe hemp-mill, rushed up to the house and told me to hide in the wood because the SS had come down below in the factory and *"were ransacking the place"*. He said: *"Go with Edoardo Rossi 'Frabet', I'll catch you up"*. I made for the wood, but after a hundred metres a flare came over from Valico near Pian di Setta, followed by a burst of machine-gun fire.

I hid in the wood in a den I'd hollowed out.

Towards midday I went out for a walk round and came across a little girl from Creda in a terrible state. She was nine years old and had managed to get away from the Creda bloodbath a few hours earlier. I took off my jacket, bound her up and handed her on to a woman who lived at Case Nuovo. That evening I saw no-one around, the house was burning, I could hear shooting and realised something awful had happened. My father came home that evening and on the morning of the 30th told me they were all dead. From my family there was my sister-in-law, two sisters, the little granddaughter, mum and another seven people, all women and children.

After days of hiding without eating and feeling dreadful, as soon as it stopped raining I decided to go home. It was the 2nd October and I said to dad: *"I'm going home where I belong. If the Germans come, let them kill me; I can't stay here any longer."* Dad said: *"If you go, I'm coming too."*

We got home and I saw my little niece Luisa lying between mum and aunty. She still had her cheeks stretched by aunty's hands and mum who were kissing her to cover her from the machine-gun. The other children were also being cuddled by their mums and grans.

I sat down in silence.

Then I started to cook. After a few days I went to my uncle's at Campiglio. Dad and uncle took turns at night keeping a fire going in the hearth to warm people up crossing the river before climbing Monte Salvaro and making their way to the Refugee Centre in Florence. At night the women went to a shelter and by day the men hid up in the woods, coming back home at night to perform that service. People would dry off and warm themselves by the fire; those who had a change of clothing would hang their clothes to dry and stay a few hours longer.

One day my brother-in-law Ruggero and I climbed to the top of Monte Salvaro where the front line was, and there we found the Allies. It was the 2nd November. Some German soldiers saw us but no-one shot at us. The Allies offered us tea and then took us on to Grizzana, where they prepared the paperwork to transport us to Florence. I knew a warrant-office in the Carabinieri, and told him I had farming friends, and he let me go to work for them. I went to Tavernola, Riola and Ripoli. From Ripoli I saw the fires on Monte Sole. I remember the incendiary bombs.

I went to work for the Americans. I cleaned and mended roads, and they gave me wages.

On 22nd April 1945 I came back.

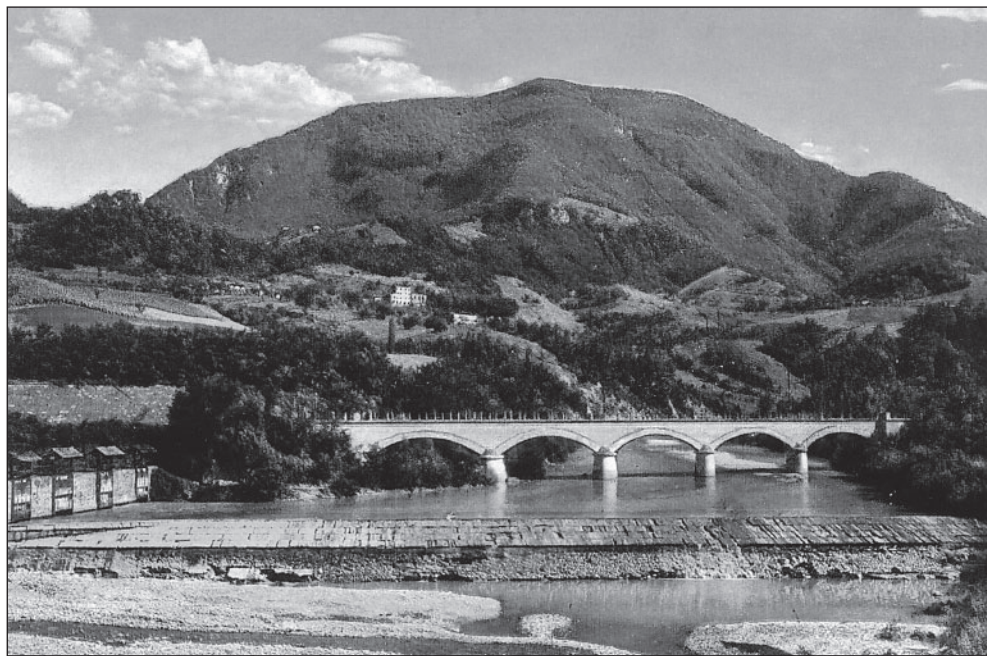
When I got back we collected the bones of the people killed in a single box: they'd been lying in the yard since that 29th September. There were twelve of them, all women and children from the Bevilacqua, Righis and Moruzzis. I went to look at these people before taking the bones away, and you could recognise them.

I had nothing left so I went back to my family at Campiglio. Not even the cattle

were left. When we went into hiding at first we took the animals with us, but we let them go as soon as we heard that the SS were taking everything away. We were scared we'd be taken with our animals.

My wife was at the Florence Refugee Centre, and then at Arezzo where there was a sorting centre, and then in the hills of Siena, away from it all, where they were taken in by nice people.

I returned to Maccagnano in 1947.



...A Campiglio mio babbo e mio zio facevano i turni durante la notte per tenere il focolare acceso per scaldare la gente che attraversava il fiume, per poi salire il Monte di Salvato e poi raggiungere il Centro Profughi di Firenze...

I lived at Casa Giuliani on the Porretta road, near Pioppe di Salvaro.

It was wartime; the siren went in the factory and we ran out up the mountainside, whereas my husband Amedeo stayed there in the hemp-mill with some other men who'd lit a fire to heat up their lunch. A train for Porretta Terme stopped in the station and was full of SS. Their first thought was that the fire was a signal to warn of their arrival. They took everybody including my husband Amedeo, and hauled them into the Station with the trigger pointing like this (*at their temple*). They went to fetch the priest. We were outside watching and crying, as we were sure they would kill them. The priest came, who knew a bit of German, but they wouldn't believe him. The SS kept saying they had to shoot them, and then the siren went off and they went berserk. People tried to explain that the fire was lit by an old man to warm up his lunch. Fortunately it was a false alarm and they weren't killed. They came out of the Station, white in the face, and a German captain said: "*Be grateful, it's never happened before that the SS didn't shoot.*" The siren went off again and Amedeo and I went off towards home. Amedeo couldn't remember the way and for two or three days he didn't know where he was. That was the first unpleasantness we saw at Pioppe. From that moment on I kept telling my husband: "*Now don't you go with the others, you come with me so we die together.*"

On 29th September we got up without suspecting anything. We lived in a place where there was nothing but land and sky. We heard someone knocking and feared it was the Germans, but it was Amedeo's father, crying they'd killed them all at Mac-cagnano. There was his wife, a sister of nearly 30 with a toddler, the son of a widowed sister who'd gone up to Malfolle as a refugee. From the wood where he was hiding he saw everything. They made them come outside and lined them up in the yard. The little boy was holding his aunt's hand and they told her to pick him up: he was to die too. Towards evening time Amedeo's father arranged the bodies and came away. When he returned in May there were no more bodies: the snow and cold and wild animals had only left the bones. It was a war zone and no-one could approach. He went from there to his sister's up at Malfolle and they tried to pass the front line. It was a dangerous journey: you had to cross the river near Calvenzano, holding on to a rope. Some people drowned and the body of a woman was found at Pioppe, put in a box and left inside a house for six months. As for us, from Casa Giuliani we headed for Tolè. Before we left something dangerous happened. The Germans went by and stopped at our place to eat bread and cheese. We went down to the cellar to get wine and found some partisans hiding there. If the Germans had found them, it would have been a bloodbath.

One day when Amedeo and I were returning home through the wood, we met some partisans who were going to make Amedeo dig a hole to shoot him. Amedeo said to one of them he knew quite well: "*You're daft, my wife might be pregnant, and you go frightening her like this?*" He answered that I needn't worry, they'd let him be. They were folk from Pioppe. The reason for their behaviour, Amedeo thought, might have been that his brother Emilio joined the Salò Republic. But their mum went to Vergato to ask where her boy was, and when they told her, she demanded him back, he was still under age. They didn't do anything to Amedeo, but one night his brother was forced to go along the river Reno and beaten up. They threatened they would sort him out when the war was over.

My stuff was all at Casalino and I found it all gone. We had nothing left. I'd embroi-

dered at the Pioppe nuns one winter, and had a sheet for my wedding night which I never used, as I got married in wartime. After the war I went back to work as a weaver at Chiusa dei Serini, while Amedeo like all men was at his wits' end to find a job. After ages he went to work at "Fanfani" for 500 lire a day.

There was little to eat for everybody; the wheat we'd left had been trashed by the Germans who used the room as a toilet.

In the evening I would always prepare a mess-tin for next day's lunch. One evening Amedeo said to me: *"I don't need the mess-tin now, as of tomorrow I'm working for the Jolly Hotel at Bologna"*. It was his first job in ten years of makeshift work.

One night there was a bomb attack inside the Camugnone tunnel where we'd moved to. There was ammunition there, jerrycans of liquid, maybe petrol, and everything was burned out. I remember the flames coming out of the Camugnone tunnel and the wooden huts going up in flames. Once again we lost everything. From then on every tunnel was guarded by Italian soldiers.

There were so many babies, many were orphans and we all rallied round.



Pioppe di Salvaro (Tergate) - Iuzzone.

...A train for Porretta Terme stopped in the station and was full of SS ... They took everybody including my husband Amedeo, and hauled them into the Station with the trigger pointing at their temple...

"QUELLI DAL MONT", THE MONTE GIRLS

Anita, Claudia and Sestilia Baccolini lived at a house called "Il MONTE" near the top of Monte Salvaro on a crest overlooking Vergato and Pioppe, though it belonged to the parish of Veggio di Grizzana.

MARINO BACCOLINI, aged 18, remembers:

My family was made up of mother, father, five daughters and five sons. My four brothers were all in the war, soldiers or prisoners.

On those dreadful days the whole family hid up in the wood, after seeing the Creda atrocity. I saw babies tossed in the air and shot. My sisters Claudia, 22, Anita, 21, and my cousin Sestilia, 17, stayed at home for two reasons. If the SS found the home empty, they would comb the whole area to find and kill us; and then, there were the cows to be looked after.

Twice we'd had Wehrmacht Germans in the house. They ate and drank and did us no harm so we were fairly calm until the morning the SS came.

My brother and I hid in a chestnut wood in a "*burgon*", a great hollow. We heard screaming and saw everything. The SS forced the girls to bring all the animals out of the cowhouse, then threw in grenades and waited to see the cowhouse roof, porch and house collapse.

After demolishing the house, the SS took the girls away. They were accompanied by fascists in SS uniform though with their *fez* on their heads. One fascist said to the girls: "*Pera so cal besti, cal vegnen fora dala streda*" (Bring those animals up off the road).

Come evening, with the house still burning, my brothers, cousins and I approached nearby. Wetting my jacket to keep off the fire, I managed to lug out five or six sacks of corn from the cellar so we had something to eat.

Claudia, Anita and Sestilia were seen at Montumiano, at Pioppe, and then we had no further news.

After the Liberation we learned they were killed on the evening of October 1st near Sibano where there is that ruined Church to this day. We recognised them by their hair and clothes, as they were unrecognisable.

To start with, they were buried at the Marzabotto Memorial; then, at the family's request, we buried them in our graveyard at Veggio di Grizzana.

When we were forced to run for it, we went to Casa Minghello, then bit by bit made our way to Casa Benassi near Veggio where granny lived. On the way we met the South Africans who took us for spies and held us prisoner. Then, thanks to an interpreter, they let us go. From there we were evacuated out. We left Grizzana on board military trucks bound for the Florence Refugee Centre in Via della Scala; then Prato and finally Cinecittà.

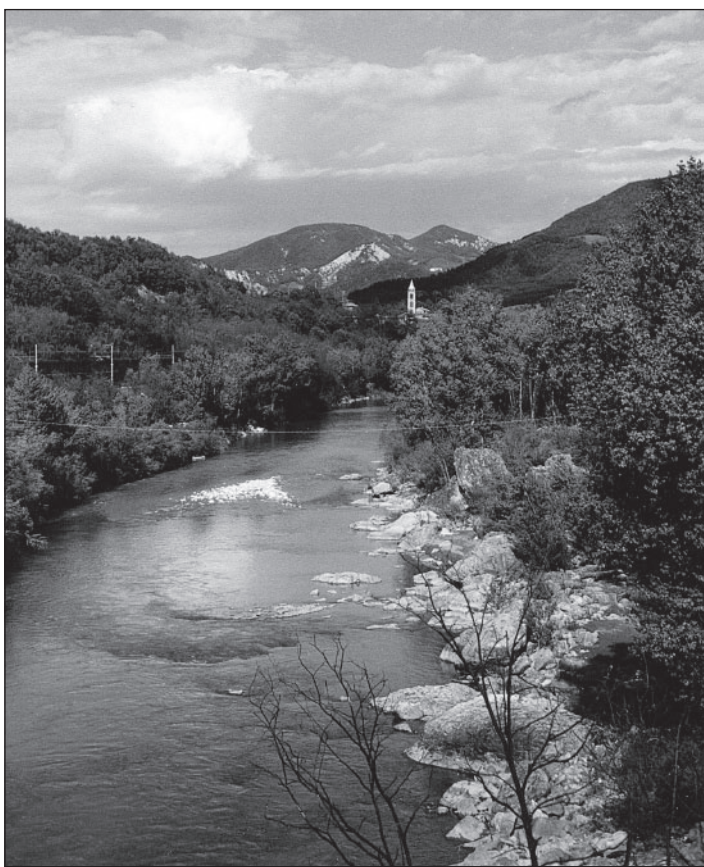
I arrived at Cinecittà with my cousin at nine o'clock in the morning. They put us up in cubicles screened by reed matting. A Red Cross girl said to me: "*You, Baccolini, are to give out the rations and you – to my cousin – must come to the store to dish out the food – pasta and so on – that you will go and buy in Rome*". My cousin used to go shopping in Rome by lorry, then unload it all at the store. That's where I would go and shop with a tub

containing 200 kilos of stuff, which I would afterwards cook.

What we had to take was written down on a slip of paper, but my friend and I managed to get some extra bread and pasta which we gave to families. I had found a job where I could have earned more and been paid in “hamlire”, but they wouldn’t let me go. So I worked at Cinecittà till the last day.

Letters came through informing us the girls were well. They were anonymous letters written by the blockheads who’d killed them. Il Lupo’s sisters were friends of my sisters’ and asked after them many times, but I knew nothing.

From Cinecittà we came back, once again by lorry, to Casa Benassi where mum was. After we split up, as everyone formed his own family.



...We lived at a house called “il Monte” near the top of Monte Salvaro on a crest overlooking Vergato and Pioppe, though it belonged to the parish of Veggio di Grizzana...

Fiume Sand Creek

Fabrizio De André

Si son presi il nostro cuore sotto una coperta scura
sotto una luna morta piccola dormivamo senza paura
fu un generale di vent'anni
occhi turchini e giacca uguale
fu un generale di vent'anni
figlio d'un temporale

c'è un dollaro d'argento sul fondo del Sand Creek.

I nostri guerrieri troppo lontani sulla pista del bisonte
e quella musica distante diventò sempre più forte
chiusi gli occhi per tre volte
mi ritrovai ancora lì
chiesi a mio nonno è solo un sogno
mio nonno disse sì

a volte i pesci cantano sul fondo del Sand Creek

Sognai talmente forte che mi uscì il sangue dal naso
il lampo in un orecchio nell'altro il paradiso
le lacrime più piccole
le lacrime più grosse
quando l'albero della neve
fiorì di stelle rosse

ora i bambini dormono nel letto del Sand Creek

Quando il sole alzò la testa tra le spalle della notte
c'erano solo cani e fumo e tende capovolte
tirai una freccia in cielo
per farlo respirare
tirai una freccia al vento
per farlo sanguinare

la terza freccia cercala sul fondo del Sand Creek

Si son presi il nostro cuore sotto una coperta scura
sotto una luna morta piccola dormivamo senza paura
fu un generale di vent'anni
occhi turchini e giacca uguale
fu un generale di vent'anni
figlio d'un temporale

ora i bambini dormono sul fondo del Sand Creek

De Andrè is describing the massacre at Sand Creek River Colorado, on 29 November 1864. The militia attacked a village of Cheyenne and Arapaho. Most of the victims were women and children.

STORY OF AN ITALIAN

GINO COSTANTINI: "GIO" to his partisan mates, "JOHN" to the Allies

I lived with my mum at Tabina, a hamlet near Calvenzano under Vergato municipality. I never knew my father who died in a prison camp in Bohemia during the last years of the Great War.

I was born in 1918 and a few years later fascism began. At that time one went to school at the age of seven. They dressed me in a black shirt and I was in the Balilla, then an avant-garde, a young fascist, and after twenty I joined the militia. I was part of the fascist militia but I never had any posts of responsibility. I liked sport and to practise you had to be a blackshirt. I was quite good, I ran a special race called the "mountain marathon", and had shooting to do: it was already preparation for war, real arms drill. We had firearms on our shoulders and when we came to targets we had to shoot and got a score for each hit. I ran four times for the provincial races. Three times I came first, the fourth time I came second; then I gave up, thinking I was getting past it.

In February 1938 I did naval service and returned home on 21st April 1938. My ship was based at Messina.

When war broke out, I was already home, exempt from further service.

HOW I BECAME A PARTISAN

When I learnt that fascism had fallen on 25th July 1943, I was confused and wondered anxiously: "*Now that fascism's gone, what next?*" That same evening, returning home from work, I went to the "*Dopolavoro Fascista*" (fascist workman's club) which I ran from my own home in Tabina. Some old anti-fascists saw me and asked what I was worried about, and Fornasini said: "*What is there to think? It's a good thing, should have ended sooner.*"

I was taken aback and told him off: you couldn't speak ill of the Duce. But he explained what dictatorship meant (I didn't even know the word). Then bit by bit friends, Rafani and many others, told me what had been going on in twenty years of fascism, and I realised I didn't believe in that dictatorship, though I'd gone along with it till then. I didn't know about certain things and hadn't seen any; you heard them mentioned, and that was all. Anyone against fascism was not allowed to say so even to his children. I know there were action squads that beat people up, but I thought it was normal. We were to hate anyone who behaved badly or spoke ill of fascism, so it was normal to punish them. I too had come to believe the anti-fascists were "riff-raff".

On 8th September 1943 the armistice was declared and it was bedlam.

At every tunnel along the railway line there was a hut at the entrance and one at the exit and on bridges one hut, manned by soldiers called "Territorials" who guarded the railway day and night against saboteurs. Those who were in the army began to abandon their weapons and my friends and I would collect them, thinking they might come in useful: the way the Salò Republic was shaping, we might be reverting to the old regime.

I was ready to fight against fascism returning: I'd already taken the decision. I received firearms from certain young soldiers and, with my friends, hid them in a ditch near Prunarolo. Three party officials at Vergato got wind of it and asked me where I'd hidden them. To begin with, I said I didn't have them, but then they showed me a list of the weapons I'd received so I couldn't go on denying but took them to the

weapon cache. There were lots of them and the party bosses asked me for names of those who'd helped me hide them. I gave Carlo Rafani's name. He got more alarmed than me and sided with the "repubblichini". I wouldn't. Then Rafani came back over to our side and I had to vouch for his good faith before Il Lupo. I trusted him, and it turned out I was right.



Diploma granting the Cross for Services in War (Croce al Merito di Guerra) to the "partisan combatant Gino Costantini".

The young soldiers had also given me a repeater of the kind used by the Carabinieri. This I had kept at home, hidden under a piece of furniture. I went home to fetch it and hand it in, but unfortunately it had vanished. My mum had hidden it, though she went to get it at once and I handed it over.

Of the three party officials, one put his revolver to my temple, one was for handing me over to the Germans, which meant certain death, while the last, the chief, took my side. He believed me when I said I hid the weapons so as not to let boys get hold of them. When I took the decision to join the partisans, I always hoped that that chief official who saved my life would not be killed by other partisans.

In June 1944 I left Tabina for the partisans and got given my weapons at Calvenzano. The farmers serving the parish priest of Calvenzano, Don Vincenzo Venturi, had retrieved a lot of firearms and the priest put them in a shack under a rock in the "Funtan-az", not far from the church across the fields.

I took up arms and joined the Stella Rossa where I stayed for about twenty days. I wasn't happy: some things I saw stuck in my gullet. Some firebrands thought that any card-carrier of the Salò Republic was to be killed. I decided to come away. My "repubblichino" friend Rafani was pretty wild in his behaviour and got himself hated. Whenever food was being dished out, we would all have to queue up with our ration cards and be given a portion. But Rafani in his "repubblichino" uniform would jump the queue and come out flourishing a large piece of meat, saying "You see how it's done!" I took his side all the same, since he'd told the party chiefs it was him who took the weapons. So it fell to me to defend him when the Stella Rossa partisans accused him of being a "repubblichino". They already had him up against the wall, so I grabbed him and went and talked to Mario, Il Lupo. He heard me out and understood that Rafani had had no option but to join the "repubblichini" to save his own skin. Il Lupo accepted the case I made for the defence and admitted Rafani into the partisans, where he always acquitted himself well. During the days I spent with the Stella Rossa we had a raid at Monte Vignola and some skirmishing. Some were so disillusioned, they dropped out of the partisans and went off home to hide as best they could. Il Lupo was a reasonable man, but towards the end I think he lost control: each formation leader did what he pleased. You also have to remember there were people in every formation who had something to hide and behaved badly.

I decided to join the Modena Division, the Garibaldi Brigade, and went up to Castel D'Aiano. Our formation was called "Formazione Pilota", after the death of a brave combatant, an airforce sergeant called Dario Pedrini. It formed between Vergato and Castel D'Aiano, at Labante, to be precise. I was in command of a hundred partisans. They called me "Giò" and when I later operated with the Allies, I became "John". I was twenty-six and one of the older ones. I was against acts of bravado which then brought down reprisals. When the law came out of ten Italians killed for every German, we had our hands tied. Sometimes it happened that ten Italians were shot because a German was killed by a mortar bomb, and not by my partisans.

We needed the people in the area we occupied to be with us, not against us. When we went and ambushed even an army truck, and they burnt down a church and presbytery, that to me wasn't partisan warfare. We never went in for that kind of thing. To do so meant you didn't respect the people who gave you a roof and a loaf of bread. We were always welcomed, and in some zones when we left, people were crying: they felt we protected them.

We never attacked; we defended ourselves when attacked.

What I cared about was:

- bringing the lads in my charge home safe and sound. If they died out of bravado, their parents would never think well of me.
- we did lose some men, fortunately not many, as fighting did take place.

Our zone of operations was Castel D'Aiano, Montese and the Calvenzano heights.

By day we lived in the woods and went to people's homes when need arose. We had to keep on the move or the Germans would discover where we were, and for the same reason, we split up and never kept together.

It was summertime and we nearly always slept out, under a chestnut tree or in some natural hollow. Occasionally we had a hayloft to sleep in or a bed of straw: that was a luxury.

The big problem was to find food.

You have to remember there was rationing in those days: farmers and producers were mulcted of part of the crop to go into the common pool and be distributed to the population. Whenever I received anything I gave a signed receipt, so that when the war ended, they could be refunded as war damages. I would make out a duplicate for anyone who lost the receipt. I never bullied anyone, but when certain fascist landlords refused to give us a little wheat, we used to demand what we needed without paying.

There were young "repubblichini" who passed themselves off as partisans. They would go into houses and take what suited them. They were trying to survive but we partisans didn't like it, such behaviour was damaging to us.

When the SS attack began on 29th September, I was at Labante. Straight away I went onto the Calvenzano heights facing Creda. We were all ready to intervene. We thought the SS forces were all engaged in the area from Monte Salvaro to Monte Sole and were ready to lend the Stella Rossa partisans a hand. In actual fact the SS were strongly covered in the rear as well. When we came down onto the Calvenzano heights from Querceti and Monte Radicchio, we found them overrun by the SS. We hoped to catch them from the rear, but they had dug themselves in on the Calvenzano heights. We engaged fire, but had to withdraw as they were more heavily armed than us. It was lucky I had some German prisoners; their presence with us may have made them hold back. I never killed anyone. I had taken them prisoner, disarmed them and kept them with me. I also had some Wehrmacht volunteers who had come with us. They'd been

our prisoners for some months; they tried to escape but we recaptured them. With us were two private soldiers and a warrant officer. The latter kept crying because he was due for home leave, and finding himself in the hands of partisans, he was sure his last moment had come. But that wasn't something I agreed with. To kill a person when he's disarmed is an act of cowardice. That warrant officer had an encounter with some partisans, not mine, who had bloodthirsty ideas and kept saying: *"Give him to us, we'll skin him, we'll show him blood."* I said: *"You cut along out of here, or you'll come to a sticky end, do you hear?"* Some prisoners we left their weapons. They'd proved they were tired of war, they'd deserted from Monte Cassino. One soldier turned up living from hand to mouth. There and then I took away his weapons, I got him drunk and interrogated him. He must have been twenty, he kept saying: *"What a horrible thing, what a horrible thing Cassino. All dead, all dead."* Later I gave him his weapons back, I trusted him. He knew Italian quite well and would interrogate other soldiers. He would say "Buono" or "Non buono". If he said "Buono", I gave them their weapons, otherwise I disarmed them.

At Querceti on the Calvenzano heights when the SS came at the end of September-beginning of October, they only set fire to one hayloft and didn't harm the people. I think that some of our prisoners mingling with the SS told them they'd been treated well and for that, probably, we were spared atrocities.

After the massacre we retreated up onto the mountains of Labante. Then we crossed the front line and found the Allies already across the Reno. We spent six months with them at Oreglia below Montovolo, South Africans they were. We handed over a spy to the Allied Command, who was tried at Florence and sentenced to quite a few years in gaol. On the day of the trial I went over to Florence to give evidence. I got to hear of a partisan whose duty was to select men and take them by lorry to help on work sites. That man took it upon himself to beat up former fascists.

I sought him out and told him I didn't agree: punishment of the sort was out of order. Just as I behaved like a man towards fascists, so certain fascists behaved like men to me and my companions. I'm pleased to remember Dr Augusto Fini, Secretary of the Fascio at Vergato, and Dr Luigi Lolli, general practitioner at Cereglio near Vergato and "Podestà" at Castel D'Aiano, who said to me one day: *"I believed in fascism and was taken for a ride"*. I went to Dr Lolli's house at Cereglio for treatment when I was ill. Had he wanted, he could have caught me like a rat in a trap. I used to call on him at two o'clock at night to have injections for backache. Dr Fini was another who told me he'd been disappointed by fascism. When I had a sick or wounded partisan, I used to go to him. One partisan of mine got a bullet in his belly and needed to be taken to hospital. Vergato hospital had been evacuated up to Roffeno, so I sent a messenger who went to an anti-fascist friend of mine and, with the agreement of Bedonni, the consultant, we took him in my van to Suzzano near Cereglio and they took over from there. Fini and Bedonni were both there. They shifted him into their car, took him to hospital and brought him back to Suzzano where we went to fetch him.

There's another episode I'd like to relate. I had a brother who died in 1936. We were both in bed seriously ill. A bit later my brother died. I remember that when mum wanted to pay Dr Fini, he replied: *"No, you've paid quite enough already. You've lost a son."* You don't forget things like that.

I also thanked the son of that party official who saved my life at Tabina.

GOOD PEOPLE HAVE A CALIBRE THAT'S BEYOND ALL IDEOLOGICAL BARRIERS.

In my formation there were even Germans and young "repubblichini" who'd come over. I welcomed them all and respected them all. Some partisans criticised me and said: "*Great formation you've got, it's full of repubblichini!*" I answered, it was better to have them with me than against me.

Others with me were Tuscans and southerners who'd been rounded up for Germany but managed to escape and join up with us.

Men from both sides died fighting, but with us it was always defensive action.

LIFE WITH THE ALLIES

On passing the front, many men lost their will to fight on and stood down. They went back home. Those of us who stayed on served first with the South Africans, then black Americans, white Americans and Brazilians. We shared the Brazilian sector of front, but only met them on night patrol. Friendships sprang up that live to this day.

The front line was across the Reno, towards Castelnuovo.

Every night I was on patrol. Sometimes we engaged the Germans who were deployed across the Castelnuovo ridge. We were lucky: not many partisans died, but unfortunately a lot of Americans did.

Every morning we would report to Headquarters. They gave us our crate of food to cook, and we would go to a farmhouse to cook it, being billeted with farming folk like the Americans.

After the Liberation I met the fellow who held a gun to my temple at Tabina: he was the Vergato vet. When he returned to Vergato, people would have flayed him alive, as a bully and a coward. Some men seized him, took him to the school basement and beat him about. When I was told of this I went to see, and took him to the barracks where the Carabinieri hadn't yet returned. Their barracks had moved to Riola, it being liberated before Vergato. There I put two partisans on guard, in case anyone had another go at him, and I laid him on a bed. I went to fetch Dr Fini who at that moment was on his rounds at Pietracolora. When the fellow saw the doctor he said: "*Augusto, look what they've done to me.*" Dr Fini soothed him down, but later told me it was a serious business, and went and reported the incident at the Prefecture. The point was that, to rescue him, I'd kept him prisoner. A few days later, armed with a certificate from Fini, I took the prisoner down to the Prefecture in Bologna.

At the war's end I met him again at Vergato Town hall. He came up to say hello and made to shake my hand, but I spat in his face and told him: "*That's the least I can do. You wanted to shoot me and I saved your life, but SHAKE HANDS, NO.*"

UNARMED RESISTANCE

Not only friends and comrades deserve our recognition: to my mind, merit and honesty have no flag. All the people who harboured us, gave us bread, looked after us and didn't betray us. All the people, the majority, who, like us, took the most difficult

and risky decision to rebel against man's bullying of man.
They too were "the Resistance".

A WORD TO THE YOUNG

Look for the truth of the facts. All too often I've heard nonsense talked about those years, and especially the Resistance. Nonsense, because unreal and untruthful. Battle stories blown up out of proportion, on the one hand, and on the other, mud and accusations flung at misdeeds that were never committed. It's always the way with the collective memory, the danger of convenient versions getting accepted at the expense of authentic history.

War is the ugliest of things, morally and for the sacrifices it costs; when you speak of war, you always mean humans killing other humans.

MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS FIGHT AGAINST THOSE WHO WANT TO MAKE WAR.

(Some passages are quotations from the book "IL CORAGGIO NON SI COMPRA" (Courage is not for Sale) by Gino Costantini and Gabriele Ronchetti, pub. by Artes-tampa)

Account by Dr Franco Fini, son of Dr Augusto Fini

I wish to thank Gino Costantini for remembering my father as a man and a doctor, acknowledging the values that all who knew him recognise as his. No doubt he was put in a position of responsibility by the fascist authorities precisely because he was greatly loved and esteemed by people. He was a man above taking sides. To begin with, my father saw the advent of fascism as a positive answer to the harm done to Italy by the First World War.

His first disillusionment came when the Bologna Authorities decided on a clamp-down, especially on agriculture. I remember one day the Federale (party leader) of Bologna came to Vergato. I was present when he told father: *"I want you to form squads, go round the farmers and see if they have wheat hidden and, if so, confiscate it; and see if there's anything else to confiscate, meat in particular."* Father's reply was this: *"The first house I'll inspect is yours. If everything is as it should be in your house, then I'll send them round other people's."*

The Federale answered: *"There's no reasoning with you."*

I was a boy and I don't remember all that much, but in the course of time there were surely other more deep-seated disappointments. People weren't under the National Health and didn't go into hospital because they didn't have the money. People would be treated in their homes; father delivered babies too in the home setting. He was busy day and night. One night I went with him to Carbona for a birth and we had to cross the river by boat. There was great poverty and father didn't ask a fee; in some cases it was he who gave the money for medicines. Many people have testified to it; in particular, a chauffeur from Vergato, *"Balota"*, who always drove my father.

We were evacuated to Rocca Pitigliana above Marano. On the top floor of the house we had a partisan, and on the ground floor there were Germans. The partisan had pleurisy and father kept him at home to treat him properly. One day the partisan called me and confided that he possessed ammunition and it needed to be taken to the partisan formation at Torre di Nerone, between Riola and Marano, along the road to Palazzo d'Africo. An uncle and I passed in front of the Germans carrying a bag of ammunition which we took to the partisans.

Father was a balanced character who used simply to tell me: *"Never do to others what you don't want done to you."* Perhaps that equilibrium kept him from acting mistakenly, but above all it committed him to defending any person who asked his help. I remember one day a man appealed to him in desperation because the Vergato customs officer had fined his children for transporting grapes in a cart without first asking permission. The man had actually rushed to the Customs Office by bike to get the permit before his children arrived, but at that very moment they were seen by the official on his motorbike, and he gave them the fine. My father stepped in and told the customs man: *"A real gentleman you are, fining a poor devil!"* One group of partisans remember being warned by father to get out of town as there was *"trouble brewing"*. I remember one day a colonel came, the American Consul, and asked for my father as Director of the hospital. His question was: *"Were you a fascist?"* Father answered that he was, at which the colonel commented, *"You're the first fascist I've found in Italy!"*

Such was that colonel's esteem for my father that, when he took over command of the Modena district, he came back to see him at Vergato and undertook to get the totally depleted hospital all the supplies it needed to resume functioning. The

mechanism was the "SWISS DONATION". An act of generosity which benefited so many people in our parts.

Account by Geminiano Lolli, son of Dr Luigi Lolli

In May and June 1944 there was continuous bombing from Vergato to Cereglio. Those flying fortresses of the Allies' would come over from Bologna and when they got to Monterocca where the valley opened up, they would circle back and bomb Vergato in order to destroy the bridges. At such times, though not always, German fighter aircraft would engage them. I saw battles to make your hair stand on end. They would swoop down suddenly as though coming right on top of you, always around ten in the morning, and then climb back up again.

One day a German aircraft came down behind the mountains of Castel D'Aiano. Some people came to notify father that an aeroplane had crashed in a chestnut wood. As Podestà of Castel D'Aiano father set off there with myself and a municipal roadman or "Cantoniére". The Cantoniére was the all-purpose maintenance person. A man with a little dog joined our group and I ran ahead out of curiosity: I wanted to see the wrecked plane. While all these people were trying to extract the pilot's body, we noticed the dog had a tuft of fair hair in its mouth. Father gave orders to unearth the corpse.

As a young university student in the years 1918, '19 and '20, my father could not sympathise with the communist movement, who were called "Bolsheviks", and felt compelled to oppose them. Certain self-styled Bolsheviks at Salvaro were behaving badly. His mother, left with five children, and no doubt a bit of a bigot, prided herself on going to Mass at six o'clock every morning. On the way from home to church she used to be mocked and even pelted with stones by those gangs. Then in 1920 they set fire to the hayloft and a barn full of wheat, and father resolved to join fascism. To him it was a proper response to all the insolence people were having to put up with.

Actually, as a doctor he appreciated certain aspects of fascism, especially the Ministry of Maternity and Infancy which enabled a woman to be protected while giving birth and have her children looked after (until then, no such welfare had existed). Again, women used not to figure in inheritances: fascism introduced the "legitimate portion", hence another good rule.

Disillusionment came when the Rome-Berlin axis formed.

Every Wednesday evening he was in a group who listened to "Radio London". When a meeting was held at the Fascio Headquarters in Vergato father was told: "*Either with us, or against us*", but he refused to join the Salò Republic and withdrew. The party officials also knew he treated partisans; they knew all about him through what was called "Radio Scarpe" (a local expression like the "Bush Telegraph") - so-called because information was gathered and reported by fascists tramping the length and breadth of the district. For all that, father continued to be Podestà of Castel D'Aiano: it was a post of responsibility and he couldn't desert his duty.

It was July 1944 when father, while working at Zocca, received a phone call from the Castel D'Aiano Secretary to say that ten or twelve people were about to be shot in the square, in reprisal for the clash between partisans and fascists at Monteombraro. Father shut the surgery - it was about 4 p.m. - and drove to the centre of Castel

D'Aiano where a lot of people were lined up against the wall. The fascists, commanded by a high official from Vergato, were all set to execute them. Father knew the man well, having done high school with him. He had the self-restraint to parley with him and said, so as to be overheard: *"What do you think you're doing on my patch? I'm Podestà of this town and that deserves respect."* The official let the prisoners go, but snarled: *"You'll pay for this."*

From then on, the Germans called my father *"that doctor with the beard, the super-spy"*. In their view one couldn't trust a man who had been a fascist and then had partisans as his patients. They kept an eye on him at all times, and on the 29th September he was taken away by the SS with a lot of men. Father was never left alone: they put him at the head or the rear to watch him more closely. They were all locked up in the church of Cereglio. He was segregated: the others could all go to the windows or the tower and so talk to their relatives who had assembled on the road, but he was forbidden. I recall how we cried when we brought food and couldn't see him. After a week the prisoners were all herded out and marched towards Vergato. Father opted for a position in the lead and when they got to a place called "Spezzola", he managed to escape. I later learned that he was bound for Colle Ameno, a place where you were either selected for deportation to Germany, or you had to dig your own grave for execution. My father saved his own life.



...I lived at Tabina, a hamlet near Calvenzano. The farmers serving the parish priest of Calvenzano, Don Vincenzo Venturi, had retrieved a lot of firearms and the priest put them in a shack under a rock in the "Funtanaz", not far from the church across the fields. What I would tell the young is, look for the truth of the facts...Make sure you always fight against those who want to make war... (Gino Costantini).

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Neither of iron nor of glass are they ... children of flesh and soul!

MARCO IUS, Department of Science of Education, University of Padua

After the sorrowing silence shrouding the stories of the Children of 1944 these long decades, one of the “children”, by her delicate determination, has set in motion a process in which these children’s voices have gradually yielded up their narrative and fulfilled a stifled desire to speak of themselves.

These are adults speaking, elders, now grandparents; these children of yesteryear give voice to that experience, their own and their community’s, which wrenched them from their childhood, their family and their people, casting them into a future they describe as undeniably one of suffering, yet also solidarity, support, remembrance, belonging and hope. Though they mainly concentrate on the moment of tragedy and horror and the years of the aftermath, the memoirs collected by Anna Rosa Nannetti nonetheless let us glimpse each character’s whole biographical span. They tell of before the war, the story of their family, their infancy, their farming life of poverty and hardship but also moments of recreation, mutual support and belonging. They also tell of afterwards, the hard return, the fostering in other families; of growing up and becoming adult, launching into life, with a family and job of one’s own, whilst always bearing inside the memory and even voices of those who were wrenched away.

As I read these tales of the “Children of 1944”, they struck me as distinctly relevant to my main business of the present: issues of education today with particular reference to the theme of “resilience”. Resilience is the process whereby people are able to resume their development through creative outlets instead of falling into psychological pathology, despite having gone through trauma and adversity fraught with the risk of a negative outcome. The phenomenon has gained great attention, initially among psychologists, but now increasingly among those involved in education: for the process is based on interaction among various factors – biological, neurological, developmental, environmental and cultural. Interaction, not a list of factors. As researchers, professionals and above all people living in the community, we are challenged to find and promote what factors protect and enhance human growth, even when the scales are tipped against it.

If resilient children are those who receive a hard knock from fate and are not “broken”, we are bound to conclude they are not made of glass. Are such children made, then, of metal, unbreakable? The first answer must be No, since to assert as much would deny certain features constituent of mankind, such as fragility, limitation and suffering. A resilient child is not an invulnerable person, going his way as though impervious to knocks. On the contrary, as Cyrulnik (2000) says, such children are “of flesh and soul”, as vulnerable as any other; unlike others, they have been wounded and will bear that wound all their lives long: a wound to the body, the sense of past, the soul. They have managed to express their way of being human not *despite* but *via* that wound.

The reason why it is so significant to cherish and preserve the stories of the “children of 1944” is not just as a historical memoir to be taught and learnt – a memoir, be it said, that was long neglected, misconceived and maltreated by the rest of the community – , but because it prompts us to ask what we can learn from History and the personal accounts of those who were smashed by the atrocities of 1944 and today stand as the living proof that one can overcome hardship and proceed on one’s way. They let us

glimpse the resources and strategies employed to sustain them on that road.

To learn from the stories of those who “made it” despite all was the aim of some researchers at the Padua University Department of Education. Their subject was resilience and the lifespans of a group of Jewish children who hid during the Shoah and survived (Milani P., Ius M. 2010. *Sotto un cielo di stelle. Educazione, bambini e resilienza*. Milan: Raffaello Cortina). On these children the parents managed to perform a seeming paradox of love: they understood that the best way of protecting their children was to send them away, let them go or, in some instances, even drive them away. The content and results of the research on those hidden children afford interesting tie-ups with the children of 1944. In presenting a few of these I am, of course, aware of the different contexts, and how deserving the accounts of the 1944 children would be of an in-depth study of appropriate length. I just hope that reflecting on the sufferings of past children may prompt us today to provide each little boy and girl with the relationships and conditions for *good-treatment* and *well-being*.

Firstly, then, the older children of 1944 relate that they got “a good start”, they experienced a family life that may have been the simple farming existence, little money, hard work and many mouths to feed, but provided a wealth of relating and the sense of belonging to a family of one’s own and the community of one’s own village, one’s own mountain. The earliest memories of the youngest, by contrast, are of a war that had already begun; they coincide with the Nazi-Fascist occupation which meant for them that they lived no part of their infancy in the peace and quiet of their family. The tragedy acted out on those days in 1944 looms like a great rift in their life history, and that of their families and villages. Some survive by running to hide, others survive at the very centre of the catastrophe, buried under the maimed bodies of friends and relatives, protected by a physical weight that would stifle their voices for many years, and keep their memories hidden as something that cannot or maybe should not be voiced, which no-one perhaps wants to hear.

Like many Jewish child survivors, these children were steeped in a prevailing conspiracy of silence, as what they had to relate was *too much*, nobody wanted to listen to the horror of it, nobody would ask them or give them permission to tell. They were to think themselves lucky they survived; or at times they feared they would not be believed, or maybe they were thought incapable of remembering, having been so young, or they picked up all around them the great drive to start again, to build again, the only thought worth investing energy in. The silence lasted on and on, often fuelled by a kind of pecking order of suffering; the price of this was no doubt high from the viewpoint of human growth and psychological development. The silence was not only due to the child’s own ‘micro’ environment, but above all amplified on a ‘macro’ level by the failure of society to acknowledge the historical deliberateness of what was done.

For a mere handful of years, since the La Spezia trial dossier opened, many of the 1944 children have at last been able to break their fifty-year silence and tell their tale in public, a tale which is now not only listened to, but considered legally indispensable. Their evidence puts a voice to their wounded identity, their brutally severed family tree, their 216 vanished peers, their closest ties of affection. At long last the odd ray of light may now shine again on the shady valleys of Monte Sole. The merit is largely due to the Association of Relatives of Marzabotto Massacre Victims, who have laboured unswervingly to make their stories their own, to tell the outer world, to share them above all, suffering but also recalling the solidarity they received.

After those dreadful days, many of these traumatised children had the unlooked-

for experience of immersion in the love of foster families. New arms taught them to live, arms quite different from their original family's: a different place, culture, job; a love that helped their battered souls to inhabit their fears, to find hope and confidence in themselves and in relations with other people. For those children that family experience seems to have been a springboard from which to bounce back, wounds and all, into a life of their own with a horizon of opportunities, personal fulfilment, in a family, a job, or the community. Some contacts with foster families lasted for a while and then gradually waned, while others report they have kept up the relationship to this day like their own extended family, a nucleus that forms part of their identity, added onto but not replacing the link with their own lost dear ones.

Mulling over these tales today is a precious opportunity not just to learn the history of what happened, but to grasp something about communities which our present social set-up tends to forget: the resilience perspective teaches us that a moment always comes when each of us can do the right thing and foster life in another person.

In presenting us all with their testimony, these children-turned-grandparents have taken up the task of educating our ear to listen receptively to other people's life stories. Through their infant eyes we are given a precious slice of experience that illustrates the infinite ways a human being can travel towards fulfilment; we are also challenged to ask ourselves what kind of people these are, today, who carry inside them a tale of suffering, and are waiting for someone to say "you can tell me, I'm interested in your story". We are moved as we encounter the face of one – child or adult, imprisoned in the silent suffering that comes of pain or hardship, illness, discrimination or abuse – who hopes to meet the outstretched hand of warmth and acceptance, support and sympathy. They remind us it is "up to each and every one of us" to trigger recovery from trauma, even by a small everyday act; it is everyone's joy but also responsibility to set in motion their neighbour's process of becoming a person.

GIUSEPPINA ANGELINI, psychiatrist and psychotherapist.
Carrara, May 2011

One after another, in the space of a single night I read through these accounts by children who survived the massacre in the neighbourhood of Marzabotto, Grizzana and Monzuno: children who are now adults, branded by violence, often on their bodies, yet permanently hopeful and confident of life; children who saw the depravity to which other men were reduced, men so similar to others they knew, yet so different at that moment which marked their lives, so different as to become the eternal persecutor in their minds.

There is a blood-curdling repetition of detail about these tales.

Up to “that moment” war was still quite remote. They had had difficult episodes, of course, but they were still with their families. They may have gone hungry, or had to leave their home and familiar surroundings for others thought to be safer. The men, young and old, had to go into hiding. Worry no doubt filtered through from the grown-ups’ talk. War was ugly, but it still seemed a human business: men fought and maybe died. Then came the unimaginable.

Yesterday’s children, today’s adults tell their tale in nearly the same way: measured words, no overstatement. The horror is all the greater for the simple manner of the telling. Adjectives are superfluous; sufficient to list the facts, list the friends and relatives lost, the dry conjuring of a few scenes: blood from the dead aunt and granny leaking through the mattress and soiling the little sisters hiding under the bed, paralysed with fright; or the child who recalled seeing his tiny sister’s body severed among the other victims, and himself pinned motionless beneath the corpses.

Repetition of events does not lessen the anguish and the nausea. You go on reading in hope of a redeeming gesture restoring faith in mankind. Nothing illuminates the gloom: the only light is the narrating voice, the generosity of those agreeing to summon up the nightmare so that we should know, we should wonder why. The “children” remember as though stuck inside the scenes; the narrative is not mediated by the adult that each has become. The adult may reflect and add, but the scenes belong to the child, buried but fiercely intact.

There is no rancour in these tales, only a deep-seated amazement, the sense of time standing still at that point when each of these children stepped out of infancy and their lives were dramatically divided in two: before and after, though that is just the beginning of the tale.

The importance of Anna Rosa Nannetti’s work is her attention to after.

The wound is not just the instant it is inflicted, not just the moment that overthrows a possibly humble reality, but secure in its family affection. The wound is the days succeeding the horror, the resumption of living after acquaintance with psychic death.

The eye-witnesses recount like good schoolchildren, lined up and putting together their memories. They conjure up a lingering grief like the long days of war; that they survived is a miracle, and the even greater miracle is that they still have something to give.

How does one grow up as a man or woman when even before the atrocity one has witnessed unjustified cruelty that paralyses and leaves one defenceless?

After the pain comes introspection. Life resumes, and you pick up your existence with something missing. At your side, the constant nagging thought of being left to live on, and often a sense of guilt at still being alive. If you die, it is a lottery, and so it

is if you live on – no question of justice or merit. You remain alive with the burden of what your eyes have recorded, like a secret memory that suddenly takes you back in time, a memory etched in the senses.

That is the way with all survivors. The horror returns for years in nightmares, complete with the scenes and smells and sounds of death. When you least expect it, death returns as a flash, like the lens of a cine-camera that tells everything in disjointed fragments: black boots glimpsed beneath a bed, red blood on bodies, the sound of the flowing stream as you wait in vain for it to return the bodies.

Nowadays the scientific world has new names to explain what eye-witnesses relate: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder⁵, the suffering due to an event so dramatic that it sears our brain. Neuro-psychology tests and brain imaging techniques (CT and MRI scans) show that the brain itself bears long-term structural and functional alterations. They are the proof that nothing indeed is as it was before. The whole life and career of such children has been an attempt to repair that injury. But while we know about the consequences of trauma, we know less about the consequences of love, and this emerges from these accounts.

Literature has portrayed the unhappy world of children growing up without adults as their guide. As though we need an adult to mediate our acquaintance with the world, to tell us what is right and warn us of what is wrong, a narrator's voice making the presence of pain bearable; otherwise, it seems, society becomes chaos, microcosms of bullying and violence⁶.

Children's salvation thus lies in the adults who stay alive and can still play a parental role, which mainly means "chewing" the raw events on their behalf, like the painful gaps in life, the presence of disease and death, and turning it into a substance that doesn't poison them, doesn't make them fierce in their turn, or defenceless.

History sometimes gives us dark times to live through, testing our generative and creative capacity. It then appears that nothing can be done about it, or that the harm done cannot be repaired. If the paternal principle is that of *logos*, order, concrete constructiveness, if the masculine knows strength of action, what is left when one feels defeated, when the enemy and the horror get the upper hand? When even God seems to be keeping quiet?

It is at such moments of history, or individual history, that we are sustained by the image of a *Pietà*: in the end it is only a mother absorbing grief, who stands beside the way to the crucifixion and continues to hug her son's body even when it is lifeless.

What supports us is not an image of woman's passiveness, it is not a culturally imposed subordinate role, but a dimension of womanhood which, having gained access to the world of action, having gained a place in history through the experience of women partisans fighting alongside men, or of women fighting the daily battle to procure food and keep the family together, nonetheless retains the qualities of Mary's silent stand beside the Cross.

⁵ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: a psychological complaint affecting people exposed to traumatic events in which they experience fear, horror or a sense of impotence. The event is persistently re-experienced (repeated nightmares, recurrent and intrusive unpleasant memories of the event, acting and feeling as though the event was happening again, psychological distress and reaction to external or internal trigger factors symbolising the event). Behavioural features are shunning of stimuli associated with the trauma, persisting symptoms of activation, such as difficulty in falling asleep, irritability, difficulty in concentrating, exaggerated alarm response. The disturbance is the extreme example of external events managing to produce long-lasting functional and structural changes in the brain.

⁶ By way of example, see: *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding and *The Cement Garden* by Ian McEwan.

That is the strength of the maternal, the strength we carry into the world and are tasked with preserving in a society focusing more and more on domination and power. A function which is not exclusive to us women, but more inborn in us.

When all seems finished, there remains the female ability not to cave in, but stay and share the sorrow, garner the last joys or even the crumbs of a life that looks spent. This is not passiveness, but relational creativity, the conviction that not leaving the other alone in his fear but staying alive for him is, itself, redeeming.

In the tales of the book, and the stories they tell me of the war, I am still struck by the way in which mothers and fathers – meaning a function, not a genetic trait – managed to salvage moments of closeness, lightness, smiles: that shared family nucleus, the fact of being made welcome in the hamlets where they sought refuge, somehow assuaged the harshness of war and the years that followed when the survivors faced up to the desolation of their world, the loss of family and the labour of starting all over again.

All the children in the book talk of grown-ups who befriended them, giving back a kind of balm in return for the parents' self-sacrifice in order that the children might live; the welcome accorded them by those who for months became a substitute family, the delicate gesture that made them feel at home: new towels for the little girl on entering the foster family, the boy who cries over the story of a refugee his own age, the Sunday trips so that the children could visit their surviving relatives, the mother powerless to calm her sick baby's cries of pain, who walks away so as not to imperil the others' lives but procure help.

Great love in the gestures of simple women and men as though the task came naturally, love that enfolds and protects a child, love that temporarily gives up that child so that it may have a better chance of surviving or may live a better life.

The children who went through those days of darkness and terror grew to adulthood thanks to those mothers and fathers who preserved the maternal knack of containing the pain and making it better, a skill that takes its toll but, if retained, preserves us from psychological death.

It has many facets, I believe: listening, creativity, hope, a capacity for love, the courage to stand firmly aside.

Like the memory related by Elena Bono the poet who went to the window on hearing the roar of an army truck taking a group of partisans to be shot: she caught the expression of a youth, almost a boy, clinging to that glimpse of her young woman's face as though to grasp a last image of life⁷, and his look was met and held, it was not spent in vain.

And again Elena Bono, in her poem of David's lament over the slain giant⁸, catches the mood of grief in one who had to kill in a just cause, but still feels he has lost his innocence: after fighting and winning he feels no elation but a kind of *pietas*, one might say responsibility for a life given and a life taken away – which it falls to the female to shoulder in this world.

⁷ The recollection is quoted from Graziella Bernabò's interview with Elena Bono, G. Bernabò, *Elena Bono: una scrittrice europea*, in "Resine". Quaderni liguri di cultura, Anno XXXI, n.124, 2° trimestre 2010, p. 71.

⁸ Elena Bono, *Il lamento di David sul gigante ucciso in Poesie Opera omnia*, Le Mani, Recco, 2007, pp 295-296.

DOCUMENTS: AID AND RELIEF ORGANISATIONS

Swiss Worker Relief ---Swiss Gift

Swiss Worker Relief and Swiss Gift are two different organisations. Swiss Worker Relief is the welfare organisation of the Swiss Socialist Party which is still extant. Information may be had from the website <http://www.sos-ti.ch/>.

Swiss Gift to war victims was a union of miscellaneous welfare, religious and political associations established by the Federal Council on 25th February 1944 with the aim of lending humanitarian aid and support for the reconstruction of postwar Europe. Unlike the UN welfare organisation United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), Swiss Gift was the Swiss people's patriotic welfare body and as such was meant to obviate isolation of the country in foreign policy.

By the time it was discontinued (30th June 1948) it had distributed 203.95 million francs, to which the Confederation had contributed 152.85 francs in two instalments. The pamphlet "We wish to help by way of thanks", circulated in 1.5 million copies, launched a public subscription which collected about 47 million francs between February 1945 and March 1946. Aid was sent to 18 European countries – including Germany. The National Committee, appointed by the Federal Council, was chaired by Ernst Wetter, previously a Federal councillor, while the headquarters was run by Rodolfo Olgiati. In 1948 Swiss Gift gave place to the Association for Swiss Aid to Europe.

Sources <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/i/I43513.php>

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COMUNE DI MARZABOTTO

Provincia di Bologna

N.° 305 di prot.

Cal. 2 Classe Fasc.

Li 11 Febbraio, 1946

Risposta alla nota del

N. Div. Sez.

Allegati N.

UFFICIO SOCCORSO OPERAIO SVIZZERO

Via Palermo 6

OGGETTO

Richiesta soccorsi

MILANO

La popolazione e le Autorità di Marzabotto rivolgono un pensiero di gratitudine alla Delegazione Svizzera in visita a Marzabotto per la particolare attenzione e considerazione.

Abbiamo appreso l'arado trasmissione eloquente, significativa, particolareggiata e precisa del giorno 27 u.s.

Come da richiesta verbale da parte di un Rappresentante Svizzero si comunicano i seguenti dati:

Popolazione anteguerra 7.200 =

Attuale 4.600 =

Merce di necessità: tutto

Il fabbisogno di soccorso della popolazione ha carattere d'urgenza trovandosi tutti i civili in condizioni di estremo bisogno.

Tutta la zona ha subito vari rastrellamenti da parte dell'SS. Germanici e fascisti, culminando le atrocità nel rastrellamento del 29 e 30 settembre e 1° ottobre 1945 nei quali giorni più di 2000 furono i civili uccisi nel modo più inumano e barbaro.

Fosse comuni raccolgono centinaia di morti, e centinaie di caduti giacciono ancora insepolti sul suolo esposti all'insulto del tempo perché i morti stessi sono minati e circondati di mine.

La zona subì nell'ottobre 1944 ordine generale di evacuazione e fu in pochi minuti sgomberata, non permettendo ai civili di trascinarsi le minime cose necessarie.

Dopo sette mesi d'evacuazione e di esilio dal fronte i cittadini rientravano trovando case bruciate, distrutte, tutto una macerie e ogni bene devastato, asportato e distrutto.

Alla popolazione occorre ogni cosa ad iniziare dall'ago da cucire alla casa per abitazione.

E' ammirevole questo popolo per la sua tenacia e fedeltà a propria terra; è rientrato nella quasi totalità e compie veri eroismi per difendersi.

Non sempre è sufficiente la tenacia volontà ed abnegazione occorrono mezzi, completamente mancati in questa zona.

Se, rappresaglie, e l'evacuazione ha messo in modo particolare i bambini e tutti in condizioni di denutrizione e gracilità tale che sarà impossibile salvarli dal morbo della tubercolosi.

Il popolo per casa ha un rifugio, per letto paglia, senza un vestito, alimenti e medicinali, non un attrezzo, senza una capo di animali domestici. Le mine ostacolano l'opera di ricostruzione e di sviluppo.

Solo un intervento immediato, vasto e reale può ancora garantire vita in questo paese che tanto ha offerto per cause di guerra.

S'invoca ogni aiuto ringraziando.

IL SINDACO



Mari

THE FLORENCE REFUGEE CENTRE in Via della Scala

From 1794 to 1883 the Montalve nuns were assigned the CHURCH and MONASTERY OF SAN JACOPO DI RIPOLI; after that date they moved to the villa “Alla Quiete” at Careggi, taking their artworks with them.

In the lunette on the church façade giving onto Via della Scala there remains only the glazed terracotta relief (1510) by Giovanni della Robbia (1469-1529), depicting the Virgin and Child with Saints James the Greater and Domenic. **(foto) togliere?**

In 1883 the convent was purchased by the State and turned into a barracks, originally called “Vittorio Emanuele II”, headquarters of the Third Regiment of Engineers and Signals. At the end of 1944 we refugees began to arrive, having fled our native villages.

In 1945 Florence municipality took an official resolution to requisition the premises for use as temporary refugee accommodation. The buildings were later returned to the army in 1946 and were named after Second Lieutenant Simone Simoni, a hero of the First World War.

In 1980 the barracks were definitively divided into two separate units: the “Morandi” barracks (HQ of the 43rd “Abetone” Signals Battalion) and the “Simoni” barracks (HQ of the Commando Unit of the Tusco-Emilian Military Region).

Since 2002, the building has housed the Management and Administration of the Italian Army.



The windows of our rooms and the terraces where we played “ladder” and “moon”. I felt relaxed as soon as I got to Florence. Not a plane to be heard, none of the shellfire I’d seen during the bombardment of Monte Salvato after the massacre. I can remember carts full of wounded men coming down the mountain. Opposite our room there was the humanitarian aid store with bundles of clothing which they gave out to refugees. (Maria Paselli)

My mother Giannina helped run that store while I was inside the Santa Maria Novella Hospital in Florence (Anna Rosa Nannetti)

LA CASERMA "SIMONI"

La Caserma, in origine chiamata "Vittorio Emanuele II", dal 1883, anno della sua fondazione, ospitò il 3° Reggimento Genio Telegrafisti. In seguito nel 1945 il Comune di Firenze decise di requisire i locali per destinarli temporaneamente ad alloggi per gli sfollati.

UFFICIO REQUISIZIONI FIRENZE

PIAZZA STROZZI, 2 ²⁴²⁴ Ad esportazione in base a...

Numero di serie

Numero di Req. ⁴⁵⁰⁷
(- inglese)

REQUISIZIONE DI TERRENI E FABBRICATI

Si comunica che su richiesta del Comando Alleato - il Comando Militare Territoriale di Firenze, con foglio N. ¹⁵⁰⁷ 4680/SEV, in data 15/12/1945 ha ordinato la requisizione dell'immobile ad ⁴⁵⁰⁷ Caserma V. Emanuele II° di proprietà del sito in Firenze Via con decorrenza dal 1 OTTOBRE 1945
Firenze, li 27/12/1945

Al Sig.
Via

IL CAPO UFFICIO REQUISIZIONI
MASSIMO LUCI

SERVIZIO ALLOGGI COMUNALI

Copia da...
al Sig....
reale sua abitazione post'a in via...
per portando e consegnando a mano del...
per...

Al Signor...

IL DIRIGENTE GENERALE



When we got there we were put in a deconsecrated church, with straw spread on the floor. Then we were shown into rooms holding up to forty people. I used to go to catechism in that church. The priest, called Padre Mongai, wanted me to be confirmed, but mum said no, she wanted me to do that from our home (Maria Paselli)



There was a building in the courtyard where you went to eat. They always gave us bean hash. We had to line up in two files. Each of us had a card with lots of coupons which got torn off every time we got food. They gave us our ration through the window, and we would go back to the room to eat. To start with we all turned up for food with a jar, a tin can or whatever we could find; then they gave us little mess-tins. (Ersilio Gabusi)

I had an aluminium saucepan I found in a ditch on the way to Castiglion dei Pepoli (Maria Paselli)



I was in the courtyard opposite, the one with the arches but no terraces. We were on the ground floor. They dished out the food right in front of our rooms; a roll and some soup in a tin can (or a jam jar or whatever). One day I was given bean soup and pasta rings in my tin. I couldn't eat it so I went to the fountain in the courtyard "to rinse out the first course". Bit by bit I tipped away the broth and kept the pasta and beans. They were completely tasteless. In the end a lady gave us a stock cube. Mum dissolved it in some hot water from the stove in the room and we all managed to get it down. On the floor above they all had camp-beds, whereas on the ground floor we had bedding on the floor, close together. On the ground floor there was the infirmary and the first-aid room. You had to go and be de-loused with DDT (Lina Venturi)

A.M.G. EVACUATION CAMP N° 27
FLORENCE REFUGEE CENTRE
 D. P. R. S. ALLIED COMMISSION

No. <u>8470</u>	No in family <u>2</u>	No of room <u>A. 21</u>
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Name Fava Giovanni
 Age 30 Dimezzo
 Arrived 12/11/44 From Genova
 Departed _____ For 20-8-45
 Remarks u/c

Mod. 92 AA.
 P. F. R.
 FEDERAZIONE DEI FASCI REPUBBLICANI - FIRENZE
 ENTE PROVINCIALE ASSISTENZA FASCISTA

LIBRETTO
 DI
 ASSISTENZA AGLI SFOLLATI
 da località colpite da incursioni aeree

SFOLLATO
 Assistenza accordata alla famiglia del
Fava Giovanni
 abitante in Via Centro Profchi
 composto di N. 2 persone, sfollate da
Genova
 arrivata a Firenze il 30 12 44
 proveniente da _____

Refugee registration papers.

My mother's story by John Madden

I am English but my mother, Nilva Marchi, was born at Casa Minghella near Grizzana in 1923. She lived in Pioppe until evacuated to Florence at the end of the War. Her father, Adolfo Marchi, was the village carpenter. They lived with her mother Genoveffa Palmanti, her sisters Clara and Paolina and her brother Dino in Pian di Bagulo near the church.

When I was a child I loved hearing about my mother's life in Italy in the mountains. To me it sounded wonderful. She told me about how as a girl she would pack her little case whenever she felt like it and follow the narrow rocky paths to live with her Uncle Dante and Auntie Maria at Casa Minghella over the mountain, then come back when she had had enough. I have always loved nature and it thrilled me to hear about seeing wild boar fighting by the well and to hear la poopla (hoopoe) calling in the woods (these birds are very exotic to an Englishman as they are not found in Britain). The stories about the farm were special to me: how they kept a pig until the butcher visited once a year; how every part of the pig was used even the bristles; how they made flour from the chestnuts which grew all around; how her uncles hunted partridges up on the mountain. I knew that her Uncle Julio lived at La Colonia but that it was so remote and the paths so bad that you could only get there by horse or mule. I knew that some of the valleys on the mountain were so steep that the snow would not melt for months. And the places had lovely names like Monte Sole, mountain of the sun or Ca Fame, hungry house.

I knew a few things about the war. I knew that my Uncle Dino was taken by the Germans and shot in Grizzana in July 1944. He was 16 years old. I am not clear what happened to my Grandfather, Alfonso, but I think he was hit by shrapnel and eventually died of his wounds. I also believe that my Mum's uncle, Adolfo, who farmed with his brother Dante at Casa Minghella, stepped on a mine and was killed. The other thing I remember is being told that the German wounded were brought down from the mountain and laid in the road outside Pian di Bagullo. My mother said they would give them water. I remember asking why they did that and she said the soldiers were just young men and that the ordinary German soldiers were no different to anyone else. It was the SS and the Gestapo who were not.

In 1967 we visited Italy. I was eleven. It was my first ever holiday and my first time abroad. Pioppe was as wonderful as I imagined. Everything was different to England. The weather, the food, the mountains (Essex where I lived is by the sea and very flat) and even the smells were strange but exciting. Casa Minghella was marvellous. There was the barn and cellars full of food. There were the pigs in the sty under the house. The views down the valley were lovely. My mother's cousins, Bruno, Marino and Giuseppe Palmanti showed me American helmets and bullets. I thought this was fantastic too. I had a very British, romantic, schoolboy view of the War.

It was a lovely holiday but one or two things about the War stay with me. I remember my Mother's old aunt. She was friendly but very loud. Apparently she would go mad if she saw a child with a toy gun so I had to hide mine. It was something to do with the war. We went into Pioppe and saw the mill. My Mother said that her uncle had been shot there by the Germans and his body went under the mill. I also remember something which I found very strange. I played with some of the boys in Pioppe. They were nice friendly boys of my own age and were very kind to me. We played "war" but I did not understand their game. All they wanted to do was pretend that

they had been shot and fall to the ground dead. We did not play like that in England. We attacked the Germans and killed them. We did not get killed.

That was all I really knew about the War in Pioppe for many years. However, in about 1988 I visited again with my mother and my sister and her family. During the visit we went to the cemetery in Pioppe to pay our respects to my Mother's family. It was there that I noticed a plaque to the victims of a massacre in 1944. I was shocked to see how many people were murdered and their ages: babies, children, women, old people. The biggest shock was the date of the massacre: 29th September, my birthday. I had never been told about this massacre.

What I did know, of course, was that my Mother met my father in the War. Apparently my parents had met in Florence where my Mother's family had been evacuated. My father was a British soldier running an officer's mess and had to buy provisions. My Mother used to go out with him to buy them.

My Father had been in the British Army since he joined as a boy soldier at 14 years old. His regiment, the Cameronians, was a tough Scots infantry regiment recruited from Glasgow and the surrounding areas. They were an old regiment formed in the 1600s as "Covenanters" to fight the English and their allies who were trying to control the way some Scots worshipped. My father was English! He joined the regiment because his father had served with the Cameronians (he was English too). I often wonder how my Father and his two brothers, as Englishmen, survived in a regiment with traditions and a history like that.

My father had fought throughout the War after setting out for France with the British Expeditionary Force in 1939. By the end of the War he was a sergeant. He was wounded and evacuated on a hospital ship from Dunkirk. He fought the Vichy French in Madagascar then moved to India to wait for the Japanese. His battalion were not in India long but instead moved to Persia to train and protect the oil fields. Incredibly they then travelled overland via Palestine and Egypt to join the fighting with the German Afrika Corps in North Africa. Maybe he fought the Italian Army too! I do not really know the details of what my Father did in North Africa but I do know that afterwards he took part in the invasion of Italy. I understand that he fought at Anzio and Salerno but I have no idea what happened to him between being in these battles and meeting my Mother in Florence. I know he was wounded in Italy and I believe that is why he was looking after an officer's mess and not on active service when he met my Mother.

My parents were married in Pioppe, then went to Austria where my Father was part of the army of occupation. My older sister Patricia was born in Vienna. My Father was later discharged from the army as no longer fit for service possibly due to the effects of his wounds. My parents returned to England to start a new life together. What a shock England must have been for a 23 year-old girl from Pioppe with only four years of education in her life and no English. They settled down in Southend on Sea in Essex and although they were never well off they had a very happy marriage with three children. My mother's English became excellent.

I only really understood what happened in 1944 when I read a book called "Silence on Monte Sole" by an American journalist called Jack Olsen. This is a detailed account based on the stories told by the survivors. It is written in English. It starts with a description of life in the mountains before the War and talks about the mountain civilisation that existed at that time. I found that part of the book fascinating. It then describes in detail the horror of what followed in the Autumn of 1944. I found

that part very hard to read and it made we wonder how my family survived such awful times.



Allied soldiers at Salvaro church.

DEPORTATION AND HARD LABOUR

COLLE AMENO

In the eighteenth century the *borgo* of Colle Ameno on the Porrettana highway was developed by the Marquis Filippo Carlo Ghisilieri who wanted to turn it into an ideal town⁹. Many years later, from 6th October to 23rd December 1944 the village was used as a concentration and sorting camp for men between 17 and 55 years of age, imprisoned regardless of social status, creed or political affiliation, captured to be used as a labour force. Forming part of the Nazi plan to exploit Italian resources – men, factories, raw materials and agricultural produce – Colle Ameno was a hub in the network by which men rounded up were transported to Germany, the front or wherever the war effort needed labour. Small camps were fitted out for this purpose in northern Italy, such as il Ghisigliere and larger depots like the Caserme Rosse or the Fossoli camp.

Colle Ameno was the headquarters of a Luftwaffe unit, but as throughout the Sasso Marconi district from April onwards, this was replaced by the SS: in this case the SS-Feldgendarmarie or SS Military Police¹⁰. The German troops were looking for men to use as labour, and conducted strict spot-checks and round-ups to control the hinterland behind the front. Living conditions grew tougher, and when the Nazi high command gave orders for nearly all the district to be evacuated in October-November 1944, the inhabitants were forced down to Bologna by such means as they could find, some on foot, or on ox-carts if the animals hadn't been plundered by the Germans. To get to town the only route was the Via Porrettana, with its many road blocks and the constant risk of meeting German patrols. The route passed in front of Colle Ameno whose entrance is on the Via Porrettana at Pontecchio Marconi. Men ran an acute risk of being imprisoned at il Ghisigliere.

Internees underwent a first selection by Friedrich Brotschy, the commandant, before being despatched to labour destinations. It is impossible to reconstruct the number of men interned, but it runs into thousands. Writing on a wall records that on 18th December 1944 one single room contained 234 men.

It was generally not a long confinement, since the men were being shipped to work sites or other assembly points. Some remember their destination as the Caserme Rosse, but this is unlikely to have been the case once bombing on 12th October put that camp out of action. The new destination might have been a Bologna barracks for the Third Artillery at Porta San Mamolo. In that case there was an obvious risk of deportation to Germany. Men were normally employed close to the front line.

Episodes of savage cruelty were common during internment. People were often knocked about for no reason and many a time the Nazis would pick out people at random from the room in which they huddled; such prisoners would not return.

After the Monte Sole massacre the round-ups brought in many men for deportation to Germany. An edict was passed that by 5th October adult males must report to German command posts for document control, on pain of execution. Whoever did report was arrested and most of them pressed into local maintenance work under the Todt organization. Some were interned at Colle Ameno where six men from Marzabotto and

⁹ Francesca Pellegrini, *Il sogno della ragione L'attuazione del progetto del Marchese Filippo Carlo Ghisilieri a Colle Ameno, 1733-1765*, in *Graffiti di memoria Colle Ameno dall'utopia alla prigionia*, ed. Cinzia Venturoli, Sasso Marconi, Municipality of Sasso Marconi, 2007.

¹⁰ Cinzia Venturoli, *Colle Ameno: campo di concentramento e smistamento*, in *Graffiti di memoria Colle Ameno dall'utopia alla prigionia*, op. cit.

Lama di Reno were shot on 18th October 1944. At the war's end 21 corpses were found buried around the villa, including the six killed on 18th October and others summarily executed in November and December 1944. The reason for the executions is hard to make out: at times it would be people unfit for work, or deemed so; in other cases no clear reconstruction has been possible of the motives or manner of these murders.

The Colle Ameno camp closed down on 23rd December 1944.

CASERME ROSSE

Round-up prisoners (known as *rastrellati*) from Tuscany, the Marche, Umbria, Emilia Romagna and other parts of Italy converged on the Bologna Caserme Rosse (Red Barracks) as an assembly and sorting point run by the German army and the Republican National Guard. The first to be taken to the Red Barracks were soldiers who failed to avoid capture when the army disbanded after the armistice. In October 1943 Carabinieri from Rome, Latium and Campania were interned in that place.

It is impossible to establish the exact number of people who came through this barracks near the race track, at present N° 147, Via di Corticella. There is evidence that between June and October 1944 around 35,000 round-up prisoners passed through, including men of every social extraction pressed into the labour force, as well as arrested partisans. According to the information of Militärkommandatur 1012, between 15th July and 11th August 3,336 men and 47 women were arrested in the province of Bologna and taken to the Caserme Rosse¹¹.

There is little information about the place. The main record comes from Don Giulio Salmi who was appointed chaplain to the Caserme Rosse in February 1944. With help from nuns of the Congregazione delle Visitandine, volunteers and Red Cross staff, he organised a welfare network called *Pro rastrellati (Pro-Ra)*.

Arrivals at the camp usually took place by night and the reception conditions were far from comfortable. The next step was a medical examination, following which prisoners were divided into three groups: the first were those judged to be in good health and hence fit for work in Germany, the second included those destined for work in Italy, and the third, the unfit, were removed from the sorting camp. The first category set out on the long journey to Germany, generally with an initial halt at the Fossoli camp before heading for the Brenner Pass. From 12th August on, a periodic connecting line was set up between Caserme Rosse and Fossoli.

Some witnesses relate that, as of August 1944, selection was done directly by the Germans, presumably a medical officer, since the Italian MO, Dr De Biase, was accused of favouring prisoners¹².

Although short-lived, the prisoners' stay was blighted by lack of water, including WC facilities, no relief against the cold, bedding infested by parasites, and bullying guards.

In September the SS took over from the Wehrmacht in running the Red Barracks and on 9th October, after many a threat, Don Salmi was literally kicked out. His place

¹¹ L. Klinkhammer, *The Nazi occupation and Tusco-Emilian society straddling the Gothic Line according to German sources*, in L. Arbizzani (ed.), *Al di qua e al di là della Linea gotica*, Regione Emilia Romagna e Toscana, 1993, p. 142. Out of this number 1,903 men and 38 women were sent to Germany, 1,151 men were put to work in Italy, and 282 men and 9 women were deemed unfit for work.

¹² L. Aquilano, 1944- *"Vengono i tedeschi ci prendono in casa". I rastrellamenti, i campi di concentramento nell'area toscana, romagnola, bolognese. Prima ricognizione*, Bologna, editcomp, 1995, p. 14.

was taken by Red Cross worker Bice Braschi who stayed there until the bombing on 12th October razed the barracks to the ground. Thereafter round-up prisoners were moved to the Third Artillery barracks at Porta San Mamolo.

On 14th October Don Salmi was reappointed to his relief work at the Third Artillery barracks and also at Pieve del Pino, Villa Malvasia at Sasso Marconi, Paderno, Roncizio, Croara and other centres.

The Todt Organisation

Gian Luca Luccarini

The Todt Organisation was a major construction firm operating first in Nazi Germany and then in all the countries occupied by the Wehrmacht, where it employed forced labour to the tune of half a million men and boys. Created by Fritz Todt, *Reichsminister für Rüstung- und Kriegsproduktion* (Minister for Armaments and Supplies), the organisation worked in close synergy with the high military command during the Second World War.

The firm's main job was to build roads, bridges and other vital communication links needed for the German armies and their supply lines. It also built defence works: the Siegfried Line and the Atlantic Wall, while in Italy the Gustav Line and the Gothic Line are prime examples of Todt operations.

Compared with the handful of engineers and specialist technicians, an enormous mass of workers (over 1,500,000 in 1944) performed "heavy duty" labour; many of them were prisoners of war.

In 1944 my father Antonio Luccarini was among those called to work at TODT. So as not to side with the Germans, he took the advice of the postman, Angiolino Bertuzzi, and joined the Stella Rossa Brigade on Monte Sole.

MONTE SOLE TODAY



Borough of Marzabotto
Gold medallion for Military Bravery
Town whose name spells Peace
Province of Bologna

DANTE CRUICCHI: THE PEACE-BUILDER

Dante Cruicchi passed away recently.

I'd like to honour his memory in simple terms, as I think he would have appreciated.

I was very fond of Dante. I first met him in 1975 during the local elections where he was elected mayor of Marzabotto for two terms.

An untiring worker, he truly believed in what he was doing and acted without any ulterior motives: not for a career, not for himself, but for the good of the community. Politics for him – in the true and upright meaning of the word – was a way of spreading democracy, combating injustice, fostering employment, solidarity and legality against all abuse of power.

He was a strictly institutional figure, a freedom fighter, an anti-fascist, a partisan – meaning one who took sides, though always prepared to listen, open to dialogue and confrontation.

First as Mayor, then as President of the Regional Memorial Committee, he worked with commitment to perpetuate the memory of that ruthless extermination of common people, and made Marzabotto, and then Monte Sole, a symbol of peace, not just in Italy but throughout Europe.

Of all his achievements, may I recall two in particular: bringing German President Rau to San Martino, together with our President Ciampi; and arranging for the victims' relatives to meet Pope Wojtila.

Our intention is to name the new primary school after him, with a dedication he would have approved of:

“Marzabotto Primary School: Dante Cruicchi, peace-builder”.

Thank you, Dante, for all you did on behalf of our community.

Romano Franchi
Mayor of Marzabotto



17 aprile 2002 - San Martino. Visita dei Presidenti della Germania Rau e dell'Italia Ciampi.

WERE IT SO SIMPLE

Recollection and education at the Peace School of Monte Sole

by Marzia Gigli and Elena Monicelli

Were it so simple.
Were there just wicked people
furtively committing acts of evil,
people to be weeded from the rest of us, and destroyed.
But the line between good and evil cuts
right through the heart of every human being.
Things just worked out that way, I suppose,
that others were murderers, and we were not.
Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*

Between the valleys of Setta and Reno today, among the hills south of Bologna, there are woods and fields and some farmland. Up to the Second World War, however, it was a scattered community made up of isolated homesteads and hamlets. The silence and peace of this apparently uncontaminated landscape are the fruit of unholy violence, in memory of which stand the ruins marking the events of 29th September - 5th October 1944, when the front line was on our doorstep. Days when Monte Sole was a theatre of bloodshed, civilians slaughtered by Nazi soldiers aided by Italian fascists. In that bloodbath, known as the *Marzabotto Massacre*, 800 people¹³ lost their lives, largely women, children and the old¹⁴. On those sites there has risen the Monte Sole School of Peace¹⁵. Reconciliation sums up its task; but reconciliation is something of a conundrum. All reconciliation, we feel, entails awareness of what happened, with no ducking of personal and collective responsibilities, and recognising the memory of events in all its diverse forms. At the School, therefore, we learn/teach how to remember.

¹³ For a long time the number circulating was much higher: 1830 dead. Painstaking research by the Regional Committee to honour the fallen, *Marzabotto. Quanti, chi e dove* (Marzabotto. How many, who and where) (Bologna, 1995) threw clearer light on the number of victims involved in the Monte Sole atrocities (though the exact number may perhaps never be known). The figure of 1830, which emerged in the immediate aftermath of war and appears in Medaglia d'Oro citations, sums all who died of wartime causes both before and after the dates of 29th September – 5th October. The inexact total of 1830 victims is still found in many school books and historical reconstructions by the media.

¹⁴ The benchmark work is now L. Baldissara, P. Pezzino, *Il massacro. Guerra ai civili a Monte Sole*, (Massacre. War on civilians at Monte Sole) Il Mulino 2009. Various other books contain eye-witness accounts and reconstruction of events connected with the Monte Sole atrocities: Luciano Gherardi *Le querce di Monte Sole. Vita e morte delle comunità martiri fra Setta e Reno. 1898-1944*, Il Mulino, 1986; Renato Giorgi, *Marzabotto parla*, Marsilio, 1955; Lutz Klinkhammer, *Stragi naziste in Italia*, Universale Donzelli, 1995; Luciano Casali, Dianella Gagliani (eds.), *La politica del terrore. Stragi e violenze naziste e fasciste in Emilia Romagna*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2008.

¹⁵ The Monte Sole School of Peace Foundation was officially established in December 2002 after lengthy negotiation among local authorities and civil society, the outcome of which was an autonomous body empowered to conduct its primary educational purpose of fostering a culture of peace and coexistence by dialogue with organisations pursuing the same objectives on a local, regional, national and international scale.

Memory and memories

As Portelli says: "There is not just one 'official' and 'ideological' memory, on the one hand, and a pure authentic memory, on the other, but multiple memories mediated on the narrative, cultural, ideological plane"¹⁶. The purpose of our research is to explore as deeply as possible into the relationship between construction of an official memory and the multiple individual or collective memories of survivors and victims' relatives. Not so much a historical reconstruction, therefore, as an attempt to bring to light the differing interpretations of the various key players.

The relationship between partisan formations, for example, and the civil population has always been central to our work. A holeogram picture of the Resistance as war by a whole people has served the Italians, partly, as a great ritual self-absolution, in order to forget the mass adherence to fascism and the collective responsibility for the racial laws and war crimes. The historical reality is far more complex, as the fruits of our research show: often the survivors of Monte Sole do not identify with the "Resistance paradigm". In their account of the facts the massacre does not form part of a broader context going some way to explaining the mechanisms behind the violence they were subjected to: thus at times the presence of the partisans is itself considered the cause of the massacre, while the Germans are perceived almost as a natural calamity, virtually exempt from human responsibility¹⁷. The need to attribute responsibility for what happened to someone close at hand conceals an urge to restore sense to a terrifying situation and find logical connections explaining it (for example, warlike behaviour by "irregular formations" and "natural" reprisal on the part of the Nazi army).

Here again an important part has been played by public management of memory and official celebrations which have always been designed as a heroic celebration of the Stella Rossa and its fighters. This has affected how the victims' relatives have worked through the issues of responsibility for the massacre. They clearly perceive that their own suffering has been exploited: while they represent themselves as "innocent" victims quite outside the dynamics of history or politics, the public story nationalises their suffering and makes them "martyrs for freedom"¹⁸. The focus of their resentment seems not the partisan cause as such, or how it was experienced by the local community during the war, but the "heroic partisan" and "antifascist resistance" as *subsequent* invented myths. In the last few years the survivors and victims' relatives have had a new phase of working through their individual and collective memory, triggered by the preliminary inquiries and opening of the trial for the Monte Sole mass murder, which was held between January 2006 and January 2007 at the military tribu-

¹⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *Lutto, senso comune, mito e politica nella memoria della strage di Civitella* in Leonardo Paggi (ed.), *Storia e memoria di un massacro ordinario*, cit., p. 86.

¹⁷ "In the memory deposit of many such massacre survivors the moral responsibility is not laid at the door of the perpetrators, i.e. the Germans and perhaps their Italian collaborators, but the partisans whose actions, and often mere presence, are accused of attracting the potential violence of the former", Michele Battini and Paolo Pezzino, *Guerra ai civili. Occupazione tedesca e politica del massacro. Toscana 1944*, Marsilio, 1997, p. XIV.

¹⁸ Thus the Motivation for the Gold Medal to Marzabotto reads: "For fourteen months they endured the outrage of the Teutonic hordes *who could not war down the pride of their sons perched on the grim peaks of Monte Venere and Monte Sole spurred by the love of their old folk, women and children...*" Renato Giorgi, *Marzabotto parla*, Marsilio 1955, p. 17 (our italics).

nal of La Spezia¹⁹. The trial marked a different way of collectively recollecting those tragic events (extending to the local institutions themselves): it was a “rite” which enabled relatives and survivors not only to tell their story, but to do so in a court of law where it was legitimated, pondered and accorded value as the indispensable source from which justice might be attained. The need for minute reconstruction of the whole complex picture in a trial setting stripped the facts of rhetoric and demanded a hearing for all who could or would say something. In this case many, even of those who have always shunned public discussion, felt bound to play their part in that great event celebrated in an official and symbolic place – though their expectations varied and some had to overcome reluctance and inner resistance.

Poetics of memory

Our oral history approach to the poetics and politics of memory (2004-2007) produced a documentary, *What we went through. Memories of Monte Sole*. It is not a documentary reconstructing history, but aims to broaden the focus to an anthropological plane, capturing the finer relations between individuals and memoirs, the public and the private dimension. In that sense it also stands as an effective educational aid. Starting as we did from a strong intellectual and emotional bond with Monte Sole, we found that meeting the protagonists and hearing their stories collided with the “scientific venture” on which we were launched, but meanwhile enabled us to relate more deeply with that web of human passion, history, overlapping memories, suffering and nostalgia, resentment and rage.

To make the accounts of survivors and partisans understandable in context, we preferred not to focus exclusively on the descriptions of the massacre, but on the story of their whole lives, where the massacre acted as a watershed between *before* and *after*. The protagonists are thus not “survivors”, but women and men with unique personal tales to tell, based on individual recollections mulled over in time, beginning with their own social, cultural and political background and the events that marked their lives. We went into their childhood, daily life and the world they belonged to. We then wove the individual stories into the historical and political backcloth of those years, including fascism: a much-needed task if we were to understand each one’s relationship with the context, their degree of awareness and perception of the world, and how all this caused them to process the memory of the atrocities.

Representation of their lives *prior* to the turning point was conditioned by the clean break that the massacre brought; similarly, representation of the massacre and its dynamics was conditioned by the view of the world imparted by their upbringing. We then concentrated on how they told their experience of the atrocities, on how they interpreted that event, and on the key issues that we have alluded to. One fundamental chapter of the research concerned the words by which they related to their own recollections, the need to tell but the difficulty of doing so. What emerged was the intimate side to remembrance, the dreams, the repression, the indescribable horror, the relationship between remembering, their daily lives and the demands of the present. The

¹⁹ The gap of 62 years was because in 1994 there came to light 695 Italian and Allied trial dossiers collated between 1944 and 1950 on war crimes committed in Italy between 8th September 1943 and 25th April 1945. These had been illegally archived in 1960 by the military prosecutor general Enrico Santacroce of the Rome Military Public Prosecution. See, among others, Mimmo Franzinelli, *Le stragi nascoste*, Mondadori, 2002.

listener garners the whole complex, dramatic dimension of those private recollections and their unique irreducible quality²⁰.

The last part of our work was to discover what store the protagonists set by passing on the memory, touching on the subjects of pardon, justice, peace and war. The interviewees' personal thoughts on these matters connect to their wish to give meaning to their experience, anchoring it in the present.

Educating for peace

The Peace School opted not to turn remembrance into a kind of monument to itself, but to make it active and bring it alive in the present, keeping an eye on the future.

We asked ourselves: what is the pedagogical role of remembrance shrines like Auschwitz and Monte Sole? How can such places be made to speak without becoming a kind of pornography of pain in our entertainment-geared society? How to prevent them getting onto the route of a remembrance tourism industry? How to salvage memory from the "duty to remember"? Ours is the heyday of eye-witnesses in school. Such witnesses are being asked not just to testify but to moralise as well. Telling tales of horror is not enough to vaccinate against horror. Teachers cannot delegate the job of educators and historians to eye-witnesses.

The "itch to judge" is the very devil with history, as with education. The urge to dehumanise the butcher betrays a consolatory need to ward off evil. There is no point in educating around a memory site if one cannot rise above the "itch to judge". Hence education cannot just leave it to the eye-witness; we need a mediator able to penetrate to the "grey area", an educator who can probe the genealogy of violence, the multi-causal factors that made it possible.

To prevent the past from returning, it is not enough to recount it. Only by getting into the shoes of the evil-doer can we transform the dutiful remembrance whereby commemorations banalise and sanctify the feelings, into an active kind of remembering which probes the present and detects the mechanisms joining war criminal to peace criminal violence, that state of otherness which still reduces *our neighbour* to *homo sacer*, a bare life over which biopolitics has the power to decide when it ceases to deserve to exist and can be allowed to die, something that can be abandoned to death by "suicide" in a prison cell, or death by thirst and drowning in the Strait of Sicily.

Educating for peace at Monte Sole thus means educating towards a *culture of peace*, the conceptual pivot of which approach is the *memory of Monte Sole*. Via a dialogue between historical reconstruction and memories – entailing an effort to combine the rational, intellectual and emotional level of historical understanding – we focus the attention on various topics: the mechanisms of violence at work on Monte Sole; the perpetrators' individual responsibility; education and propaganda in the Nazi period; thoughts on the public use of history and memory.

The laboratory-tour follows an itinerary which develops the historical account via increasing levels of dramatization designed to create emotional tension, culminating in the reading of an eye-witness account on one of the prime memorial sites, the Casaglia

²⁰ Some of the prompts we used during interviews were: "Has your way of remembering what happened changed with the passing of the years? Your way of relating to such tragic memories? Has the place they occupied in your thoughts changed? How did such thoughts interact with your everyday life, plans, dreams and wishes? How did you manage to reconcile those memories with all the life you led afterwards?"

graveyard. The three stopping-places (the Caprara di Sopra hamlet, Casaglia church and Casaglia graveyard) focus more and more on the experience of survivors and their relations to the perpetrators: we see it through their words as their statements are read out. The points for thought hinge on the personal and collective history of the agents of massacre: systems of totalitarian education; exposure to propaganda; their previous war experience; the story of the individual battalions; the system of orders in the Italian war area; the emotional state of the Nazi army; the emotional state of the Monte Sole population; the connection between the individual scope for choice and the background to which the individual belonged. Note that the emerging picture is partly made possible by careful use of the words chosen in telling the story. Attention to terminology is an integral part of a laboratory 'practical' designed to instil critical awareness in the participant. Words inevitably carry a great range of connotations affecting how one interprets the world. One may use the expression *Nazi soldier* instead of *German soldier*; one may make his reasoning explicit; or one may focus on the different ways of styling the resistance movement on Monte Sole (*partisans, bandits, rebels, terrorists*). All this gives an idea of the complexity of the phenomenon, its links with the present and the wide range of viewpoints. Visitors are often surprised or thrown by a message where some layers of memory jar with others. Let us remember that the Monte Sole education is not intended to stun people or leave them in a vague state of sadness, but to harness their emotional involvement so as to trigger ethical awareness vis-à-vis themselves and their own background. This enables visitors to come to terms with their own previous expectations, to rearrange them and relate them to the fact of *being there*.

Whereas the Monte Sole atrocities entail a total collapse (destruction) of meaning, conducting visitors on the spot is an attempt to construct and retrieve meaning precisely by passing through horror. The way this happens is twofold: in the stage prior to Casaglia rational inquiry aims to trace the conditions and context of the event; Casaglia symbolises the incompleteness and inadequacy of that inquiry, as well as enabling visitors to go on asking themselves deep questions and putting the pieces together from a different angle.

The Peace School staff are experienced guides, educators, facilitators; their prime task is to manage the personal and group dynamics so as to create a fertile setting in which all can expose themselves, each in their own individual way. The central question becomes: "Why have we done all this?" The answer will bring out and make explicit where the group visiting Monte Sole and its individual members are coming from intellectually and emotionally. It will elicit their different perceptions as to the links between the place and their thoughts about past and present. It may even happen that visitors are unable in the upshot to discover those links. In juxtaposing the terms "education" and "peace" there is a risk of pure and simple abstraction, a danger of feeling clear of all personal involvement (emotions, mind, body). By contrast, what we do is very concrete: we begin by the first necessary step in any responsible or aware creation of a *real* culture of peace, which is to be individually involved.

The various research and historical/educational activities stem from the above premise:

- *personalised educational opportunities designed for students and teachers of regional and Italian schools*: interactive laboratories (including residential) to ponder the questions: "How can Monte Sole speak to the present moment?". Moving on from "Never Again" (all too often rhetorical) to the constant question of "Why

Still?"; "How was it possible? Do the same mechanisms still exist in everyday life?" The laboratories we propose do not come in ready-made packets, but focus on the person, personal needs and goals.

- *Intellectual camps (in Italy and abroad): educational opportunities to provide comparisons and dialogue among young people from different and distant lands, undergoing conflict or in a post-conflict situation.*

To list some examples: 2009 – European project “*CreARTing Common Europe*”: held at the Monte Sole Peace School, Marzabotto (Bologna) participants including young Italians, Macedonians, Serbs and Slovenians of either sex; 2009 – European project “*Let’s be active in Europe*”: in Serbia with young Italian, Serbian, Albanian, Macedonian, French and Polish participants; 2002-2011 - “*Four-part Peace*” Project: held at the Monte Sole Peace School, Marzabotto (Bologna) participants including young Italians, Germans, Israelis and Palestinians; 2002 – 2011 “*European Youth Weeks*” Project: held at Heppenheim, in the German Land of Hesse, with young male and female participants from Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland.

- *Radio project “Memory on air. Memory worlds apart”* (www.radiocittafujiko.it): asking ourselves some searching questions about our present set-up, prompted by thoughts on memory and peace. Our doubts and complexity help us think about what action we can take now.
- *M.E.T.A Project (MemoryEducationTheatreAction)*: this cultural and educational project is open to young people and adult participants. It stems from two different yet connected professional experiences pooling their ideas: the theatre troupe Archivio Zeta (part of the Teatro di Parola, www.archiviozeta.eu) and the Peace School. It provides opportunities of theatre-laboratory using basic texts from world culture. Sessions are neither lessons nor lecture/shows, but are designed to trigger and experiment with democratic forums for learning, sharing and thinking.
- *Managing a democratic forum for organizations, associations and persons bent on promoting peace*: hospitality (including longer stays) for all groups from civil society that wish to share with us some of their thoughts and their own past road.

The Monte Sole Peace School has arranged various national and international partnerships, and one that is dear to our hearts is with the Austrian Association *Verein Gedenkdienst*²¹ (memory service). It is an association of young Austrians of either sex which has set itself the task of reminding Austrian society of crimes by Nazis and their accomplices, and in particular Austrian participation in Nazi iniquity. Their commitment takes various forms: training courses for students and teachers, public seminars and conversations, meetings, exhibitions, study tours, a thrice-yearly journal, and so on. One of their most important tasks is to select Austrian men and women who have opted for civil rather than military service. Civil service with Verein Gedenkdienst takes an original form: “Serving memory” (a literal translation). Maintaining close contact with the Austrian Home Office and embassies of countries where it sends its volunteers, the Association chooses and trains young people to send out to places that suffered in the past at the hands of Austrian Nazis. Also, to places and institutions recognised nationally and internationally concerning memory and education through

²¹ www.gedenkdienst.at

in-depth historical and educational research. These include: Yad Vashem, the Anne Frank Foundation, Terezin. The Associations works in many countries: Israel, Poland, Czech Republic, France, Great Britain, Holland and others.

At Monte Sole the job of educating for peace – as we broadly define our operations and projects – always begins from dialogue among men and women of all ages, sharing their life stories, emotions, aspirations, ideas, opinions and world views. We keep our attention focused on differences of gender, generation, culture, ethnic background, nation and class. In this process visiting the memory sites is a journey in its own right, a point of departure, and a pivot for reflection. It is a journey, since Monte Sole marks a break from everyone's daily reality, family surroundings and entrenched behaviour. It is a point of departure, because the story of Monte Sole leads into other civic, ethical and historical channels. It is a pivot for reflection as the story and memories of Monte Sole catalyse a whole educational process.

When all is said, Monte Sole, cannot be *explained*, it must be *experienced*.



Monte Sole Peace School.

Monte Sole Memorial Park

Anna Salerno

Since it was established in 1989, the Monte Sole Memorial Park has been active in keeping the memory alive and prompting thoughts about the massacre that took place in the area it is appointed by law to manage and protect.

The task also includes conservation of the natural habitat, since this area bears the scars of war and human behaviour: man's age-old relationship to the environment has changed as a result, and in postwar years the area has been largely abandoned.

Setting up the Park brought a new turn in this relationship, coming in the wake of renewed attention to the area on the part of the community.

The first outline for a Park and a new plan for the area were put forward in the Seventies by various institutions. Studies and projects were drawn up in the Eighties, with explicit mention of the historic and teaching function of this territory. Over the years there were various events held on the location, some organised by civil society, some connected with institutions: commemorations, peace marches, group memorial occasions. Meanwhile in 1982, after nearly a decade of voluntary work, a regional law formally established the Regional Committee to Honour the Marzabotto Dead.

The same period saw the religious community return to Monte Sole with marches and celebration of the eucharist. In 1984 Don Giuseppe Dossetti installed his community of monks at Casetta, near the church of Casaglia.

The regional law setting up the Park was finally passed in May 1990, after extensive consultation and heated debate among the various local authorities, partisan associations, the Regional Committee to Honour the Marzabotto Dead and nature conservation associations.

In 1994 the "Il Poggiolo" Visitors' Centre in the heart of the Park began its work of receiving visitors and school parties, offering its premises to the Don Giuseppe Dossetti Teaching Room as a point of reference for students and teachers interested in exploring the history and facilities of the Park.

Organising and guiding visiting school parties, which had been performed for years by professionals engaged by the Marzabotto Secondary School, is currently being handled by the Park. This involves liaison with professional guides and above all with volunteer guides who tend to be pensioners living in the area or adjacent boroughs, people closely connected by ties of family, commitment and interest. Trained and practised in relating to youngsters visiting every year by the thousand, these guides provide a bridge across the generations in the name of remembrance, learning and protection of the area. They are a symbol of the Park's characteristic attention to linking past and present.

Other important links with schoolchildren, mainly from the boroughs included in the Park or those abutting on it, have been forged over the years by environmental education projects involving students, families and the community in schemes designed to instil attention and respect for the park area and its history.

Contact is made with the community, and especially with the youthful energy it engenders, via cultural events concerned with remembrance or civil commitment.

Over these years the Park has embarked on research into historical issues and the massacre in particular. This has given rise to various publications and a mass of documentation, including numerous eye-witness accounts, kept along with the films and

other material at the Marzabotto Documentation Centre to investigate Nazi and fascist atrocities and wartime reprisals.

An open-air museum in the vicinity of the Memorial symbolises the soul of the Park and welcomes visitors, supplying information panels at some of the best known and most visited sites. It houses stone mementoes of past life and serves as a place of silence and meditation. Part of the guided tour is now also covered by audio-guides and facilities for the blind. Other information is displayed on Monte Caprara, which was a stretch of the well-known Second Gothic Line.

A number of theme-itineraries have also been marked inside the Park, exhibiting its points of rich complexity and helping visitors to get the most out of their tour of a very special area.



MONTE SOLE. THE COMMUNITY OF DON GIUSEPPE DOSSETTI HAS LIVED HERE SINCE 1985.

Giuseppe Dossetti – a short biographical profile

Visitors to Monte Sole will find the grave of Don Giuseppe Dossetti in the cemetery of Casaglia.

First a partisan, then a father of the Constitution, he was one who channelled his hopes and energies into bringing Italy out of the disaster of war and fascism. As he tended a friend mortally wounded by the Germans, he vowed to give his life for freedom and justice; his subsequent political commitment he saw as the keeping of that vow taken upon the body of a friend who symbolised so many who died in that tragic chapter of our country.

He next became a monk (1955) and a priest (1959), consecrated to God in silence and small-scale humility, begging for the peace and life of the world, just as, at journey's end, he wished to lie humbly and respectfully beside those he firmly believed to have preceded him into peace and life.

If he was a father of the Republic he was, then, father to those who enjoyed an age of democracy and prosperity beyond our deserts. As a monk and father of the Little Family of Our Lady of the Annunciation, he strove to the last to teach us God's way through the history of our times.

"If I have aspired to be buried in the place where so many innocent victims shed their blood, it is for two reasons: first to bring home to all who knew me the relevance, now greater than ever, of the glorious fecund death those victims died on Monte Sole; and second, to give my children a visible token that I here laid down a life of great continuity and stability in silence and prayer, as I said, for the dead and the living" (*Letter to the Marzabotto municipal council*, 18th May 1993).

Giuseppe Dossetti was born in Genoa on 13th February 1913 and was baptised on the Feast of the Annunciation, that 25th March. He grew amid the strongest family affection and a solid Christian upbringing. An intellectual of high calibre, he graduated *cum laude* from Bologna University in 1934, discussing a thesis on Canon Law. At the Milan Università Cattolica he completed his studies and in 1946 won the chair of ecclesiastical law at the University of Modena. The judgment of the examining commission shows his stature: "The commission unanimously agrees that this is a scholar and jurist of exceptional quality combining originality with a rare sense of balance, one who has pursued to great heights the most disparate arguments of civil and canon law with singular penetration, fine critical sense, independence of judgment and the confidence born of amazingly mature study resulting from a set of the solidest gifts."

Resistance and political life

The years 1943-1945 saw him generously engaged in the Resistance, without taking up weapons and doing his utmost to contain the violence of those times. In 1946-1947 he took a leading role in the Constituent Assembly, following which he sat as an MP in the first republican legislature, from which he resigned in July 1952. His political career was marked by intense service to the national community. Milestones in that

career: choosing the Republican cause; helping to draft the Constitution as a pact restoring the possibility of peaceful coexistence among the Italian people, the keystone of true and upright democratic life which was to magnify the meaning of the vital bond between person and community; a consistent attempt to get the people more involved and responsible for political decisions, to see justice prevailing over privilege in economic matters, to pursue independence in international affairs without falling into attitudes of subordination cramping our country's freedom and peace.

Bologna: cardinal G. Lercaro and a monastic debut in a new religious order

1953 brought a new turn: transfer to Bologna where he founded the Documentation Centre for Religious Studies. The choice fell on Bologna because of its great bishop, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, whom Dossetti sought as his guide on a course that promised rewards but also difficulty and uncertainty. With great verve and some naïvety, he/they hoped to revive the climate of Italian theology, it being clear that the first step to renewing the country was to renew the Church. That task twinned with “an even stranger parallel aspiration to blaze a path of spiritual life bolstering and inspiring scientific research” (*Il discepolato*, in *La parola e il silenzio*, Milan 2005, p. 308).

Within a few years part of the group saw its way more clearly towards a life consecrated “to seeking God and His holiness”. This took the shape of a *Little Rule* of the community, an outline of spiritual principles penned straight off by Dossetti on 8th September 1955. It would serve thereafter as the basis of a monastic experiment focusing on the Eucharist and the Word of God.

The municipal council

Hard on the heels of this came another departure that might have sounded contradictory, yet sprang straight from religious obedience: in a spirit of service and humility Dossetti agreed to run for Mayor of Bologna at the administrative elections 1956. He would be defeated, as he at once foresaw, but for about two years (1956-1958) it caused him to divide his time between community life and participation on the municipal council as leader of the opposition. The fruit would be a creative contribution that benefited the city, and would receive special acknowledgment marked by the *Archiginasio d'Oro* (22nd February 1986). His death would be commemorated by Mayor Vitali in a council meeting, and a state of mourning proclaimed for the city. When the coffin came out of San Petronio basilica after a eucharistic celebration headed by Cardinal G. Biffi with Cardinal A. Silvestrini and the vice-patriarch of Jerusalem as concelebrants, the bell of Palazzo Accursio was rung.

Priesthood and the Council

That chapter of his life came to an end, and Don Giuseppe prepared for the priesthood, conferred upon him on 6th January 1959 by Cardinal Lercaro.

What followed was: his role during the Second Vatican Council; the battle to get it applied in the Diocese; and then about thirty years of silence, almost entirely governed

by the principles laid down in the Little Rule: life as a pure gift of God's infinite mercy; the acute sense of man's nullity combined with the glory to which he is called if he consents to the gift and abandons himself to it, if he allows listening to God's word and joining in the Eucharist to transform him; the summons to live within the Church in communion with all the angels, saints, God's Mother, all men of all generations and indeed the whole of creation, since everything is embraced by the glorious cross of the Saviour and everything awaits redemption.

The high season of the Council saw Dossetti called to Rome by Cardinal G. Lercaro as his consultant. His commitment to the Council would be all-engrossing and uninterrupted, crowned by the important duty of being secretary to the four cardinal moderators of the Council. It was a time of genuine enthusiasm: the Church stood before the world in all her profoundest mystical reality as the "sign and tool of intimate union with God and unity with the whole of human kind" (dogmatic constitution on the Church); she, the Church, re-proclaimed "Holy Scripture as the supreme rule of faith" (dogmatic constitution on divine revelation). The sacred liturgy was placed centre stage in the Church as "the culminating point to which all her action tends, as well as the source of all her energy" (dogmatic constitution on the holy liturgy).

Words cannot express the deep joyful reverberation of these solemn proclamations by the holy and venerable Council upon the heart of Don Giuseppe and his Little Family.

From the start, however, he was lucid in his analysis of its faults and points of incompleteness. One especially unsatisfactory point was the pastoral constitution on the Church in the contemporary world, which sounded somewhat ingenuously over-optimistic about the modern world. Such optimism was bound "to turn into pessimism, almost resignation, in the face of the gravest threat of annihilation that has ever loomed over human civilization" (Cardinal Lercaro's written address to the Council, October 1965). What Dossetti found wanting, in short, was the key content which would have given concreteness inside and outside the Church: that is, the fundamental condemnation of war. Inevitably, in decades to come his suffering increased at how little the great teachings of the Council were being heeded, an inadequacy that was felt in most quarters. What he never lost was his theological, Christian hope.

When the Council ended, Don Giuseppe threw himself into applying it, both in the internal life of the community (liturgical reform, service of the Word, studying the Council documents), and in the diocese where for one year he was Cardinal Lercaro's episcopal pro-vicar.

Prayer and vigilance over the world's dramas

After Lercaro resigned, Dossetti spent years intensely engrossed in prayer, asceticism, in-depth study of the Bible, immersion in the Church's sacramental mysteries, as well as close inspection of history, Church issues, the *Angst* and problems of mankind near and far, even very remote. The community strengthened relations with the Eastern Churches, the boundless peoples of remotest Asia, Israel and its great biblical tradition, Islam and the bitter conflict racking our Lord's homeland. Part of the Family moved to the south of Italy to experience the wealth of its past tradition and its present humiliation.

Return to the public eye

Rich as this picture is, if substantially unvarying, it did experience one new turn. After some thirty years' silence Don Giuseppe spoke out in public. His first public address came on the evening of 22nd February 1986, when Bologna municipality awarded him the Archiginnasio d'Oro. There followed a long period of internal travail caused by the crisis in our Italian society. At length he decided to throw the authority of his own liturgy into public defence of the Constitution. There was an unseemly attempt by the government in office to reform the basic tenets of the Constitution by media manipulation, at which, old and sick, he launched his appeal to civil society and toured Italy calling publicly on people to sit up and notice the magnitude of what was at stake. It was a promise made to the dead on Monte Sole: "To preserve not only lucidity but vigilance of awareness so as to stand against any 'system of evil' while there is still time" (Introduction to *The Oaks of Monte Sole* in *The Word and Silence* cit., p. 97): before it was too late, in short, to nip the attempted return to barbarism in the bud.

In one of his very last speeches – when he could hardly speak – he said to a group of priests from Foggia on 21st June 1996: "I absolutely believe that the whole life of the Church, today more than ever, tomorrow still more than today, depends on setting, and living the Gospel in the Eucharist ... Let priests and the laity steep themselves in the Gospel, ... read it, read it, read it ... It is absurd to grow tired of the Gospel ... it is infinitely deep, unexhausted and inexhaustible. It constantly moulds us, sustains us, forms us and creates us first of all as Christians ... And then one must steep oneself in history, know it through and through ... not the chronicle of events but history, and not only that of the Church: the history of civilization and civil society ... because the world exists and is an essential component of the work of the Creator and the Redeemer" (in *The Word of God, seed of life and incorruptible faith*, Bologna 2002, p. 217-219).

Last illness and death

About death he was prone to say: "Man's life is incomplete as long as it lacks the most important work, which gives meaning and truth to all that has happened: that work is our death, how we prepare it and how we live it ... Just as I cannot stop my dying, so we should pray constantly that the two things, praying and dying, should become one and the same".

In a sermon at Jerusalem on Holy Saturday 1981 he said: "When we come to be utterly on our own, maybe deserted by the faculties that let us communicate with others, but at the tip of our being we still are able to communicate with the Spirit ... perhaps for those moments the supreme understanding of Christ's mysteries is reserved ... the Lord will illuminate and console us. With those supreme moments in mind we must call upon Him, and our flesh will continue to do so even if our faculties cannot – that flesh which will enjoy spiritual life and repose in hope."

The last eighteen years of his life were punctuated by serious onslaughts on his health: strokes (the first in 1979), hard ordeals, and in the end three operations with slight recoveries, before the meeting with the Lord on 15th December 1996, *Dominica Gaudete*.

"What did Our Lady say of herself? Behold the slave of the Lord! What did Mary

offer the Lord? *Nothing*. She was nothing. Virtuous, certainly, but what is that before God? God's gift, the incarnation of the Word? *Nothing*. We are nothing; Mary offered God her nothing and the Holy Spirit filled her. We are nothing, nothing, nothing. That alone is truly ours, that alone can we offer up in truth. We must continuously offer God our nothingness. Then, as with Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon us ... As our Lord says: the flesh is of no account, it is the Spirit that vivifies ... one thing alone counts: to invoke the Holy Spirit ... from there lies true fraternity, charity: the humility, efficaciousness and coherence of our baptism, our real conformation with Christ, being children of God ..." (*Address to the Hospital of Modena*, 16th August 1995, in *A community born of the Bible*, Brescia 1999, p. 21-22).

Paolo Barabino

The Little Family of Our Lady of the Annunciation



**Visit to some of the massacre sites in Marzabotto, Grizzana Morandi and Monzuno
paid by 2nd and 3rd year classes on 9th October 2010**

**From the Peace School at the parish of "St Anthony", Dozza.
Taking part were pupils, family members and teachers**

**The pupils: Giovanni, Sinclair, Alice, Chiara, Davide, Anna, Francesca,
Rut, Sara and Agnese wrote these**

Points for reflection

One morning we went to visit a number of places where atrocities took place, guided by Anna Rosa Nannetti, Lucia Cardì, Primo Righi and Renato Venturi.

We visited the church and the Stables/prison at Pioppe, the Cistern or 'Botte', the church of Salvaro, Maccagnano, Creda, the church of San Martino, the church and cemetery of Casaglia.

We retraced the whole story from information given by our guides who lived at the time and had relatives involved in the massacre. We knew about Monte Sole, but knew little or nothing about what happened all around, and this visit provided us with new stories.

Meeting Anna Rosa made an impression on me and let me understand a lot of things. Anna Rosa is very good at explaining the history of what happened. She is full of kindness and at the same time also very strong to bear all that suffering. We also appreciated her work in collecting the stories of the "Children of 1944". But for her, no-one would have gone and recounted them.

Collecting eye-witness evidence is really important work, not forgetting what we've put behind us nowadays, remembering how lucky we are in our times when nothing is destroying our town or our families, as happened in those places.

To forget all the people who went through so much, all the pain that passed that way, would be shameful.

Anna Rosa is bravely remembering and letting everyone know what happened in 1944 when she was still only a baby. Such experience should be shared more. We think it is very useful to realise the truth about the past.

We still seem to be living that moment: out in the country at Creda on Monte Salvaro, a dog barking and us listening with bated breath to the voice of Lucia. She is all moved as she tells us what happened to her father on 29th September 1944.

Right here in that house 69 people were killed by German SS, but her father was lucky enough to survive under the pile of bodies, and then made his getaway into the wood.

Two ladies on the balcony are listening with us to what happened in that place where they are now living.

Some questions and thoughts spring to mind:

- Why did they do this?
- What kind of pleasure can they have had in killing so many people?
- How did some of the survivors manage to forgive the former soldiers?

- The SS stopped at nothing, not even people praying in church – a story that struck us.

I hope man never again commits such a cruel massacre in any other part of the world.

Children they saw screaming
mothers twisting in pain
Yet nothing could stop them

Shouting, shots, explosions
in the ears of those rare children
that now have grown,
become the ideals
of a world where hate may always rise again,
except where, enlightened by virtue and splendour,
those ageing children
are there always to stop it.
They have cried "I forgive you"
"I forgive you people unaware of what occurred,
what we went through,
what you brought to pass.
But I forgive so that the power of love
may always overcome."

Sara

The smell of ashes,
the noise of broken hearts
two eyes swollen with sadness but full of goodness,
from which stream tears of anguish
dripping from her little girl cheeks,
till then a girl used only to caresses.
Tears that vanish onto the mouth of a corpse.
She howls for a soul past all returning.
This happened long ago; the girl has grown,
has learnt to pardon and love those people
who once, long ago, caused her to suffer
so bitterly.

Agnese

WITNESSES TO PAST MEMORIES

**To our friends of Marzabotto*, Sant' Anna di Stazzema and the Fosse Ardeatine
as Christmas draws near**

Long custom has it that we honour
those dying for their fatherland
with tears and solemn words of praise:
whether they fell fighting in the field
or slaughtered innocent by a barbarian hand.

My eyes today are burning
burnt out,
and I am poor at solemn speeches,
but let me say, dear friends, a heartfelt word of loss.

Like one who on a clear summer's night
strolls by the sea with her bosom friend,
a little dazed by the moonshine
and the bittersweet pungence of the oleanders.

Once home, she cannot bring herself to part
and after endlessly repeating:
"See you tomorrow, then", "See you tomorrow",
still lingers on the doorstep
gazing at her friend as for the last time;

with just such tones of loss and hesitation
I speak now. Would it were with astral voice
raining from skies afar,
or a mere scent of flowers that will not fade
like the flowers of our gardens,
but who knows where, oh where, dear friends

Elena Bono
Chiavari, 5th December 2009

*Marzabotto, Grizzana, Monzuno and all the neighbouring districts.

"BEYOND THE ABYSS: ONLY LOVE"

A meeting with

SHLOMO VENEZIA

"SONDERKOMMANDO" at AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

Recording of the meeting between Shlomo Venezia and students of the "Laeng-Meucci" Institute, Osimo-Castelfidardo

Let me try and make you understand what that period was like. I'm an Italian citizen. My ancestors came from Spain. They came to Italy at the time of Isabella II in 1492 when the Spanish had it in for the Jews. Anyone who could pay might stay, the rest were sent packing. My folk left and came to Venice in Italy. At that time Jews didn't have surnames, they were called "son of ...", by their father's name. When they got to Italy they had to take a surname. I chose to call myself Venezia, after the city that hosted and saved me.

Time passed and work grew scarce, so my family moved to Salonika in Greece where jobs were to be had. Many Jews moved to that town; it was welcoming, there was work, and above all we felt free. We all knew one another, we got along fine, until war broke out. In 1940 Italy entered the war against Greece and I, as an Italian, felt out of place there. I was a minor, and didn't understand much. Then the Germans moved in and in 1941 they started deporting Jews. On the first ten days 10,000 people were deported, entire families, from great-granddad down to the smallest child, women expecting babies. There were six or seven Jewish districts, one of them 150 metres from the railway station. They closed that off as a ghetto and made the entrance on the north and the exit on the south side towards the station. The Jews from that district were taken away very early next morning, about four o'clock. People didn't see anyone leaving and when they did begin to see, there was a mood of general indifference. No one thought the Germans capable of doing things of the sort.

Every cattle truck was packed with 60 to 90 people. Inside there was a single bin for people's needs. I know from experience. When they got to where they were being deported, our Italian consul, Guelfo Zamboni, spoke up on behalf of the 320 Italian Jews: Guelfo's gravestone in Jerusalem now numbers him among the "Just" for having stood up to the Germans. Whatever their race or religion, he told them, Italian citizens could not be touched. The Germans felt superior: to them the Italians were "under-dogs", and so they would have remained, had Germany won the war.

The Germans gave us fifteen days to get organised and then sent us to Athens on a troop-train where we took few possessions (mattresses and suchlike). Athens was under Italian control. From Salonika to Athens we took four days, as the Germans would halt the train every now and then to give priority to other troop-trains going up to the front. When we got to Athens we were billeted in a school and while the Italians were there, they fed us. After the 8th September 1943 it was all over. When I was at Salonika, I was a kind of Neapolitan urchin; I tried to get by and find something to eat. From



INVITO

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COMUNE DI
CASTELFIDARDO



FPMI

TESTIMONI DELLA MEMORIA

OSIMO 17 GENNAIO 2011 - ORE 10,30
TEATRO LA NUOVA FENICE

"OLTRE L'ABISSO: SOLO L'AMORE"

Incontro con:

Shlomo Venezia

"SONDERKOMMANDO" AD AUSCHWITZ - BIRKENAU

CASTELFIDARDO 18 GENNAIO 2011 - ORE 10,30
AUDITORIUM S. FRANCESCO

"1943-1945: DONNE AL TEMPO DELLA GUERRA"

Incontro con:

Anna Rosa Nannetti

Storica e autrice de: "I bambini del '44"

Franco Leoni
Francesco Pirini

Sopravvissuti alle stragi dei comuni di Marzabotto, Grizzana e Monzuno

that moment on, however, I took up with the Greek partisans for four or five months, until we were deported.

To start with, all went smoothly for the Germans. They spread the rumour we were being taken somewhere without saying the country or town. They told us each family would receive an apartment suited to its size; the men would go to work, the women would look after the children. This was all quite normal and everyone was content, especially in those days when the war meant there was no work. What could be better?

Before we left, though, every Friday we men particularly had to report to the Jewish community office beside the Synagogue between 9 o'clock and 1 to sign a register. We began to see that there was something wrong, but no-one thought about escaping – not that we had much chance.

We would try to go and sign early, since afterwards we would go to the main market and try and pick up something being thrown out, maybe a rotten apple or anything to go in the minestrone. That's how we got by.

One day as we came out of the office after signing, the SS barred the way. We were shut in and didn't know what was going on. We were told an SS officer was coming to tell us something. We waited and waited and no-one came. As people turned up, they put us all in the Synagogue. The windows were high up so you couldn't see outside. Some of the younger ones formed a human ladder, one on top of the other. I was nineteen years old and fairly agile, so I climbed up last. I looked out and saw that lorries with tarpaulins and writing in German were lined up ready; soldiers too, holding bren-guns, and the invariable dogs, Dobermans. Many of us were afraid and we all stayed inside the Synagogue.

At half-past one we were ordered out, packed onto the lorries and sent to a huge prison. We were parked in the shower area. The only others in that immense prison were partisans. Every morning we would hear volleys of shooting about 4 a.m. The partisans chosen the day before were being shot outside. I was so innocent that I went up to a young soldier beyond the barbed wire in the prison. I don't even know what his uniform was, but when he went by with his rifle, I called out: "*Excuse me, I'm Italian, is there any way of escaping?*" the soldier turned his rifle on me and I backed off, saying:

"I didn't mean anything, just pretending."

Soldiers like him were not in charge. Those really in charge were in the guard-posts with machine-guns at every corner of the prison. There was no way you could escape.

One day, just before they took us away, as we came out in the courtyard early in the morning we were told to stick close to relatives so that when we got to our destination it would be easier for us to get what they had promised. That was not how it was. I straight away sought out my mum – "the mother I think of every day, always" – my three sisters and my brother, he was there, though dad had died five days earlier so he saw none of all that. We hugged one another and were immediately put on board lorries and taken to the station. A train with cattle trucks was standing waiting. On we got. In the middle of the truck was a bin for a WC, next to it another one holding about 150 litres of water, and in one corner three crates of raisins and about 20 kilos of carrots. Those were our rations for the journey. We had no idea how long it might last so as to make it go round. We were rather lucky, as it happened, since the Red Cross managed to bring us food packages in which there was a bit of everything. From Athens we went to Salonika. I kept looking out of a tiny window without any barbed wire across; I managed to poke my head out and count the trucks: there were 34 of them, plus the engine. At a rough estimate, there must have been over 1,500 of us. The train ran on coal and steam, and would stop outside stations to fill up. In the distance I made out a railwayman checking the brakes. He was tapping them with a long-handled hammer to make sure everything was in order. He gradually worked his way to below my window and I saw it was a young man, maybe five years older than myself. His dad had been taken on the first day, being a hot communist; he vanished straight away and no more was heard of him. For them there was the firing squad straight away. When he saw me, a look of terror came over him. He was called Gyorgos and he muttered in Greek: *"You, too, here; try and get out. Where they're taking you, you'll all be killed."* Our position was dire: treated like cattle, unable to lie down, jammed up one against one another. Seeing mum in that state, my cousins and I started planning how to escape.

Towards midnight I made up my mind to make a break for it. There was a full moon, it was like broad daylight. When my brother worked his leg free of the bodies with a view to jumping, uncle started shouting, joined my mum and the others, so we decided not to try and escape. We couldn't leave the others in that state. Destiny demanded we stick together, so we stuck together. Uncle added: *"They'll count us when we get to the place and if someone's missing they'll kill the lot of us"*.

The SS had already decided to kill the lot of us.

From Athens to AUSCHWITZ we travelled for eleven days. After three days they let us go out in the open air and tip out our latrine bin. The trucks were already gas chambers, and we noted the difference with the fresh air. We crossed part of Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. From there it took two days to get to Birkenau and Auschwitz. We crossed dense forest where it was hard to see the sky.

At long last we heard the engine whistle, then a long screech of brakes. All those truck doors were flung open. I jumped down, expecting my mum to join up with me. I hung back to see her and my sisters, and was given a heavy blow on the head. For a moment the pain made me lose consciousness. When I came round there was no-one to be seen. They had vanished into the blue, mum and three sisters, one of 11, one 14 and the other two years older than me. Later I worked in that place and I saw how the position was. I'll tell you how the SS used prisoners. They had no problem finding labour, having thousands of men. Even the strongest men, after three weeks' work, were

exhausted and were replaced by other prisoners. The first thing they did was separate women and children on one side and men on the other. From our group they needed 320 men that day and 115 women. I still have papers to prove what I'm saying. After that selection, part were marched off and those who couldn't walk were taken away in lorries and disappeared into the crematorium ovens.

That day we were halfway between BirKenau and Auschwitz, two places where they'd built four immense crematoria. The real extermination camp was BirKenau; Auschwitz was a labour camp where people died every day of exhaustion. Auschwitz was built of bricks to shelter from the cold, while BirKenau had wooden huts and open windows.

At Auschwitz we waited around for two or three hours. Meanwhile a Greek interpreter warned us we'd be asked if we were fit, without any diseases. If they asked us whether we had lice or anything, the interpreter told us to say no, or we would all be eliminated.

When the SS arrived, they decided to send us all to BirKenau. Dark had now fallen; we made our way on foot to BirKenau (about 3 kilometres). When we got there they sent us all to the place called "Zentralsauna". You went inside, they made you strip right off. In one corner were two white-coated doctors; opposite there was a soldier. At a sign from those two, the soldier put the man to one side. *Those doctors had to examine us to see if we were fit for work, that we weren't invalids and weren't skinny.*

That evening eighteen people were weeded out from the group. We were told they would be taken to a hospital ward, but actually, naked as they stood, they were taken away to be killed. Then we were escorted into a little room where the showers were. We were happy, feeling the need for a wash, but the little German working the taps took a delight in suddenly turning on boiling water and scalding us.

Then we were given a serial number. Mine was 182.727. There was a table about ten metres long, at one end were prisoners stamping our numbers on our arms and at the other end a fresh batch. It hurt. You laid your arm on the table. One man held your arm tight and another used a kind of pen that pricked the number onto the skin. I felt the pain and when they'd finished I got a shock: there was a mess of blood on my arm and you couldn't see the number. I thought it had all been cancelled. I had the wit to rub some saliva on the arm and fortunately you could read the number, otherwise I'd have got twenty-five lashes on my backside. Next we were given clothing. In those days they didn't give the stripey uniform you see in films; we were given clothes belonging to other people who'd arrived before us. We had to keep the ones we'd been given even if they didn't fit. It was like Carnival time. Suddenly I heard my name being shouted: "SHLOMO". It was my brother wanting to get close to me. The two of us and our cousins tried to help one another and be company. Next I heard someone speaking in dialect, our Spanish dialect which we Jews have always spoken since we left Spain. I went up to him and asked: "Where are my mum and sisters?" He was reluctant to give me the bad news, so to cheer me up he said we were bound to hear about them next day.

After a bit I heard Yiddish being spoken, a Hebrew dialect mixed with other languages. I went over and asked in German: "Where's my mum, where are my sisters?" He took me by the arm and led me over to the window. It was dark and you could make out a chimney about a hundred yards away. He said that anyone who hadn't come with us was already being saved. I thought it was a joke, or he wanted to frighten me. Next day all over the camp, to a range of fifty kilometres, you could smell that pun-

gent stink of burnt flesh, a smell wafted around by the wind. Then we were taken to a hut where you stayed forty days, "quarantine", since the SS wanted to make sure we weren't ill. If anyone came down with TB or typhus or any other infectious disease, the whole hutful would be eliminated.

About three weeks later I was asked what job I did. I said I was a barber, thinking that, as my head had been shaved, that might be a useful job. My brother and cousins gave the same answer. Then we were moved into another hut where a supervisor offered me a chunk of bread which I shared straight away with my brother. The man later explained that the place was called *Sonderkommando*, that is, 'special commando'. It was called that because we were to work at the crematorium where people were burnt, people who walked into the crematorium alive.

When I got to the *Sonderkommando* hut, I looked out of the window and saw piles of bodies. They were the unburnt bodies from the previous convoy. They'd put them there to make room in the gas chamber when the new convoy came in.

I saw whole families waiting in front of the hut: youngsters, women and babies. The babies were restless and kept crying. BABIES ARE ALWAYS THE FIRST TO NOTICE SOMETHING SERIOUS IS GOING ON. The SS had told them they were to take a shower.

They all went inside the hut, the doors were shut and a German went up to a little aperture high up on one of the hut walls. Then he took a box, opened it and poured the contents into that hole, which he duly closed, and retreated. A few moments later the screaming and wailing grew louder and shortly died away to nothing.

The Germans made us drag the bodies out of the gas chamber and round to the pits along the other side of the hut. It seems hard to believe, but our minds were blank at this gruesome spectacle: we'd become automatons.

I was liberated on the 6th May 1945. From July 1945 to November 1946 I was in a sanatorium at Udine. After being freed from the camps, I spent seven years in various hospitals. I lost one lung, but the treatment I received every day enabled me to get better.

I was 32 when I married Marika, aged 17. We had three children and six grandchildren. In 1957 I met up with my eldest sister at Haifa. Out of the whole family, three of us survived: a miracle, if you think that most families were wiped out with none of them left to preserve the memory.

SHLOMO dedicated his book "SONDERKOMMANDO AUSCHWITZ" (BUR Rizzoli) to his two families. The first: his mother, two sisters Marica aged 14 and Marta, 15, eliminated at Auschwitz-Birkenau on 11th April 1944; the second, his new family. He says of his wife Marika: *"She's always looked after me, relieving the ailments I got from imprisonment in the camps. She deserves more than my silent affection."*

LE HAIM (TO LIFE), with these words Marika raised a glass of wine to all of us friends gathered around a table at Osimo.

LE HAIM, Marika and Shlomo, for my part, who had the joy of meeting you, and on behalf of our whole Association.

Thank you, Shlomo, for letting me record and publish what was said at that special meeting.

On behalf of all of us in the Association, many thanks to the headmaster, Prof. Giovanni Giri, Prof. Romeo Marconi and all the staff at the "Laeng-Meucci" Institute of Osimo Castelfidardo for inviting us to come and hear Shlomo Venezia and present our book "The Children of 1944".

AN UNPUBLISHED TEXT

ELENA BONO was born at Sonnino in Latium. After a short period of infancy at Recanati she has spent most of her existence at Chiavari, in Liguria, where she had her schooling.

CHIAVARI and the meeting with Anna Rosa Nannetti on 24th and 26th May 2009 Elena Bono relates:

I was a partisan go-between under Bisagno, a great man. He was called the first partisan in Italy. I can say that everything I saw and suffered, I put into that book *Like a river like a dream* which describes exactly what it was like in the 6th operational zone of the Liguria Resistance, stretching from Chiavari to Santo Stefano D'Aveto.

None of what I wrote was invented. It is all true, it was all experienced. In places I've even kept the real names.

I wrote a narrative trilogy the whole of which was entitled "*Man and Superman*". It is Nietzsche's idea, though I turned it against Nazism. It begins with *Like a river like a dream*, then *A black leather suitcase* and *Fanuel Nuti, days before God*, which I'm finishing at this moment, and there is more, since the battle is not over.

In a book written in French Max Picard rightly says: "*Hitler est en nous*": Hitler is inside us, not outside.

Unfortunately, inside us all there is always violence, pride, a sense of superiority, and never that strange Christian pessimism which says: "*The real sinner is me*".

Against Hitler inside us, we need to set Christ inside us. That is the battle to wage. Jesus went to the Cross saying: "*Father, forgive them*".

The battle is every day.

Conversion is every day.

In *Civiltà Cattolica* Padre Castelli wrote a fine article on the book *La testa del Profeta* (The head of the prophet). Pasolini wanted to make a film of that book, he suggested I might come in on it, but I refused. I said: "He has his ideas, and I have mine; it's better not to create confusion." But Pasolini did remember my words when he shot his beautiful film *The Gospel according to Matthew*. In the scene with John the Baptist and Salome, he makes Salome the way I described her: not an apparently pure and chaste Salome; the Salome of my play is a little vixen who takes everyone in. In terms of the world, she is the winner; actually she's a poor creature dazzled by the illusion of power.

Power is the greatest poison of mankind: we all want to wield it, if only in the family. Such sins of pride, envy and bullying, brow-beating being Lucifer's chief sin. He is the real main character in that play *The head of the prophet*. At the end I put a note about my ideas. It boils down to a debate over Machiavelli and Pascal.

Machiavelli says: "*Tutti i profeti armati vincono e i profeti disarmati ruinano*" (All armed prophets won and unarmed prophets came to grief). As an armed prophet he cites Moses, and as an unarmed one Savonarola.

Jesus was unarmed and ended on the Cross. He wouldn't respond to the provocation: "*If this is the son of God, let him descend from the Cross*".

And who won?

Was it Pilate?

Did the Synedrion win?

No, Jesus was the winner.

Pascal says: *"Who is the Christian? The Christian is he who agonizes with Jesus in the Garden of Olives unto the end of the world"*. What a marvellous thought!

The audience or reader must choose. Either Machiavelli is right in saying you need weapons to win, without thinking that the Cross is the Christian's weapon: the Cross revolts him. His idol is Valentino who employs poison and the dagger to win.

Or the winner is he who abides by Christ until the end of the world.

To me the play goes with the man who agonizes unto the world's end, which is Daniel. It's a drama that gets me involved. You too are involved because at any moment you're made to say *"That's a pretty good argument from Annas, Scaurus or Cusa"*. They're all right in their own little way, but you have to see Right in the larger scale of things.

The President of the Republic received my poems and thanked me.

Taking part in this conversation is Elena's husband, Gian Maria Mazzini, who says: *"About the book The Children of 1944, I think it was right to include the poem Now the scent of gardens says. It's not a partisan poem, but it fits."*

Elena adds: *"I appreciated the finesse of putting that poem which doesn't seem to do with the resistance, but it's true in the sense that there are moments of respite after the storm. The Albino poem's right too."*

Resistance: Catholics versus communists

Anna Rosa: "was there conflict, vying between Catholics and communists?"

Elena: "Yes, there was, intolerably so. I did the Resistance as a Catholic and worked with everyone in the same operational zone. We were actually based on a presbytery run by the parish priest Don Gigetto, who welcomed one and all: communists, Catholics and others.

We lived shoulder to shoulder, but I know ugly things went on between Catholics and communists even with us. Unluckily, the Resistance chief, Bisagno, died in a very strange way. He'd driven his lads in a lorry and, it's unsure how, he fell out of the lorry. His brother died a week ago. We were close friends. He was happy to have my little disc of partisan poems."

Anna Rosa: "As a child of 1944, I ask you, Elena, a young woman of 1944, what reasons prompted you to be engaged in the Resistance, and what would you tell young people today?

Elena: "My father gave me a liberal education. He was a great teacher, a headmaster who brought up the young to be free.

At home every morning I read Croce's review *La Critica*. It was dangerous to be a subscriber, as we were on the list of anti-fascists, but for all that, I must say fascism respected my father. Mussolini proposed him for Headmaster of the famous Roman high school "*Giulio Cesare*". Father refused, not so much because Mussolini's children were at it; Mussolini didn't meddle in his children's schooling, he was actually quite strict. No, but Farinacci's son was there, so papa said: *"I'm not coming"*. However, at the time of the Matteotti assassination when Bocchi, Chief of Police was wondering where his

children should study, he said: "At Chiavari. There's an enemy of fascism there, a great person who won't give way to blackmail of threats and that's Headmaster Bono."

Then Matteotti's son Matteo was sent to Chiavari by his uncle Wrunoschi the lawyer, followed by the other children, and all three, one girl and two boys, finished their schooling in peace at the Liceo Delpino of Chiavari. No-one seized the opportunity to cause trouble. The youngsters got their diplomas and went on to university. At this, Bocchi said to Mussolini: "*Headmaster Bono is our enemy, an anti-fascist, but he's an honest man.*"

So, you see, I was born and grew up in that respect for, that cult of, freedom.

Every morning, before going to school, I would read that famous, marvellous speech by Croce: "*Why we cannot fail to call ourselves Christian!*"

When war broke out, Croce, though an agnostic who certainly didn't go to church, spoke out about the absolute necessity of being Christian. If we want to side with the Nazis we can do so, but then we are anti-Christian and we fall out of history. If we want to stay in history, we must go on being Christians.

A marvellous piece of writing, I knew it by heart and was proud of it. One day at my house a schoolmate of mine mocked me for it and I looked at him almost in contempt. "*How's that for irresponsibility? He's laughing his head off while here we are in danger of sliding into world barbarism.*"

My schoolmate later died for the Resistance, as God only knows. He filled all his mates with courage and was the last to fall, shouting: "*Long live Italy, long live Bisagno.*" He was called Cesare Talassano. In Corso Millo there are some public gardens in his name. I managed to get them called after Cesare Talassano.

Another schoolmate of mine was hanged with a hook through his throat: that was Giampaolo Grosso. They were the two most cheerful boys in my class. That was the way of their dying, filling everyone with courage. Cesare the last to fall, and Grosso, vice commissioner of the Rosselli Brigade in Lombardy, was betrayed by the farmers when he went to collect a calf as they had agreed. He found Germans in wait for him, who took him and hanged him by the throat on a hook.

The book *The black leather suitcase* has German characters. It shows the great crisis that racked Germany, especially among her intellectuals. A family of judges in the high cultural tradition who finish in a ruthless clique. I tried to get to the bottom of where the cancer sprang from in Germany. Even in Luther's thinking we see the concept of "serving", never setting oneself free, serving, serving all the time; and that led them to serve Evil.

Authority is something from above, one must obey, you're a servant, you're a servant. I was obeying orders – that's what they used to say.

The SS educated them in boarding schools. There were castles where those lads were taken and trained to kill.

Books have been written on the SS; one is *Educazione alla morte* (Educating to kill). They had chateaux in France where even the architecture was symbolic, something ancient going back to Frederick II with a sense of mystery. They used mystical forms, hallucinations. Think of those oceanic crowds.

My father used to say: "*If you want to fight something, you must know it*". So he took out a subscription to *Das Reich*, edited by Goebbels. There was an article my father translated for me. It was entitled "*Los von Rome*", "Free from Rome" written at a time when they were allies of Mussolini. It is the cry of Martin Luther, nailing up his 96 articles.

Free from Rome, free from the legal conception of Rome which is based on the juridical *personality*. What does Roman law say? Everybody is responsible for what he does: if you are wronged, you must take the person who wronged you, not his father, son or others. That's Rome's great discovery: every man is responsible for what he does.

German law is different: "*The whole community is answerable*". Enter the Fosse Ardeatine, Marzabotto, Sant'Anna. So you belong to a tribe by which I think I've been wronged? Then I'll kill you, your mother, your grandfather, your brother ... the lot.

That's where the two civilizations divide: the Roman from the Germanic.

Bertolt Brecht (Germany, 1898-1956)

General, your tank's a mighty machine
flattens a wood and pulps a hundred men.
Has just one fault:
it needs a driver.

General, your bomber's majestic.
flies faster than a storm, can carry an elephant.
Has just one fault:
it needs a mechanic.

General, man turns his hand to everything.
can fly, can even kill.
Has just one fault:
he can think.

Bertold Brecht, the German poet, was forced to quit his homeland during the Nazi period. The poem is addressed to those in power. It protests against the horror of death, the ferocity of man's devilish weapons, man who will do anything.

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