Alcuni familiari delle vittime presenti al Processo d'Appello a Roma 7 maggio 2008

Translation by Ralph Nisbet

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Anna Rosa Nannetti

THE CHILDREN OF 1944 - Life after mass murder - Marzabotto 2008

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

Anna Rosa Nannetti
born at Vergato on 1st August 1943 and lives in Bologna.
Within the Association of Relatives of the Victims of Nazi-fascist massacres in the municipalities of Marzabotto, Grizzana, Monzuno and neighbouring districts she has been active in collecting the stories of young children and teenagers who survived the atrocities of 1944. These are stories of grief but also love in wartime and immediately afterwards. The present work is a starting point: the interviewing of witnesses will go on.

LIST OF "CHILD" WITNESSES
Benito Acacci, Dora Amadesi, Carlo Angiolini, Nino Amici,
Tullio and Ida Baccolini, Lorenzo Cucchi, Chiara Elmi, Caterina Fornasini,
Leo Gabusi, Ferruccio Laffi, Anna Lippi, Gianfranco Lorenzini,
Marino Marzari, Matilde Monetti, Lucia Monari, Giovanna Monti,
Anna Rosa Nannetti, Maria Paselli, Fernando Piretti, Umberto Possenti,
Vittorio Rosmini, Edmonda Rosti, Antonietta Sassi, Carmen Spinnato,
Giuliana Stanzani, Maria Tiviroli, Franca Venturi, Gianna Vignudelli

WITNESS ON BEHALF OF "CHILDREN"
Lina Bevilacqua, Valter Cardi, Francesco Franzoni, Primo Righi
Mary Toffoletto Romagnoli, Scolastico Vannini, Mario Venturi,
Bruno Zebri

Anna Rosa Nannetti

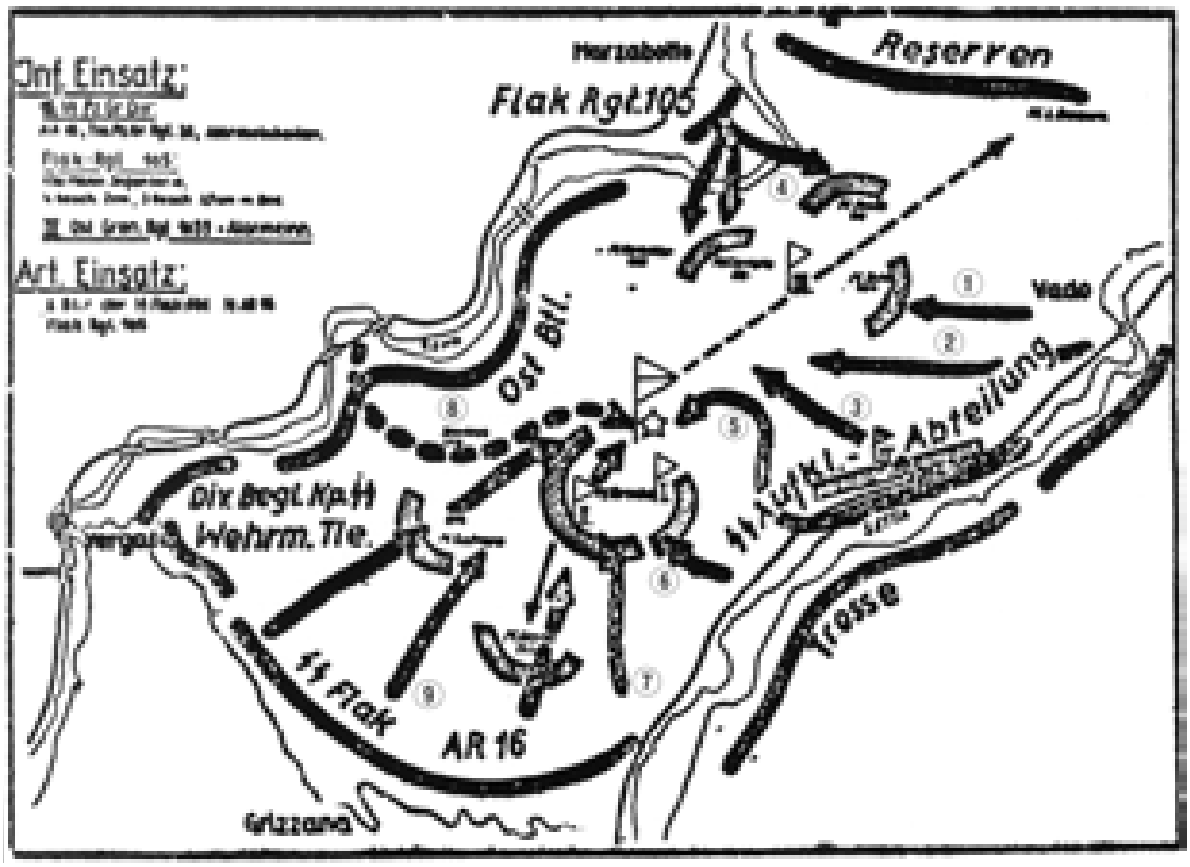
THE CHILDREN OF 1944

Life after mass murder

Marzabotto 2008

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

These pages are dedicated
to all the martyrs of atrocity,
those who build peace
and all who refuse to forget



Map used by the German military command for their plan of attack on the whole partisan area, employing 5 columns belonging to various corps from the 16th Panzergrenadier Reichsführer S.S. Division

Cartina in arrivo

Foreword

Blessed shall they be that build thee again, Jerusalem *(Tb 13,14)*

This labour of collecting eyewitness accounts by Anna Rosa Nannetti certainly leaves its mark. In its painstaking way it transports us right into the 1944 massacre that stained the Montesole area. We are taken not so much into the slaughter and fury, as into the aftermath and the issues that aftermath raised. How to react in the face of such persisting grief? How to build upon the rubble? How to give life meaning amid constant hardship? The facts behind these questions as here recorded provide some answers, since they hymn the names and doings of people who managed to come through evil and defeat it. This is no theoretical reflection upon survival of trauma and catastrophe, but a lesson transpiring from a pilgrimage down memory lane. We read the stories of families and the fostering of their children, gestures of affection that built again after the time of hatred and the severed ties of love. Facts evoked and recounted long afterwards by those who have been through a chasm and look back at the narrow path that led them across, inscribed with the teaching: "when you are plunged in the darkness of evil, this is the way through".

Many passages in the Bible are a glance backward at a homeland despoiled and the labour of restoring buildings and people. The limelight is not on the aggressors, but on the fallen and the survivors, since they are the true victors. Those who lapse into cursing are caught up in it and disappear; those who render love remain for ever (cf. Psal 109,17; Prov 14,14; Ez 35,6; Mt 7,2). A line from the Book of Tobias compares these destinies and warns: "cursed shall they be that destroy and demolish thy walls, ruin thy towers and set fire to thy houses!"; but the point does not lie there, for it concludes with lapidary succinctness: "But blessed for ever those that rebuild thee again" (Tb 13,14).

The mountain children have become grandparents, passing the baton to a new generation. One that is not, and will not be, exempt from tragic episodes of bloodshed, but is challenged to make up its mind which way to go, what is the only viable choice, what toil to accept and where to pin their hope were a hurricane to come their way.

Don Athos Righi

Brethren of the Little Family of Our Lady of the Annunciation, at their Monte Sole centre

Preface

The children of '44: trial and memory

It was spring 2002 when I began to get involved with the "Marzabotto-dossier" which came to light in the archives of Palazzo 'Cesi', now known as the "Cupboard of Shame".
I had previous experience of the topic – history in relation to criminal procedure – and I can remember my first reaction was one of great curiosity. What struck me and upset me most about that 'dossier' was the time-frame it contained, time passing, how the cupboard found in August 1994, with its content of 695 folders and details of crime, had stood there for most of the history of our Republic. The time-line culminating in the shelving of that dossier had gone on unfolding for 34 long years amid blank unawareness on the part of relatives of the actual victims, and indeed the enormous bulk of the Italian population.
What astounded me right from my first reading of the documents was the realisation that the information gathered by the British Special Investigation Branch almost immediately after the German troops' atrocity had brought to light many names of war criminals responsible for the massacre. Some of those allied investigation reports found their way into the proceedings of the 1950 war crime trials. But a large part did not.
In glaring contrast to the fistful of postwar trials lay a vast bulk of inquiry material destined to gather dust after the illegitimate and juridically out-of-order ruling of "temporary archival" passed by the Military Prosecutor General on January 14th 1960[1].
When I was first authorised to inspect the documents by the Military Attorney of La Spezia, Dr De Paolis, in 2002 I was forcibly struck by certain thoughts that would remain with me throughout the long sequel. The time elapsing since the events had produced a state of impunity for the authors of the crimes; but that cupboard of shame concealed more than the names of the war criminals: it held the stories, lives and expectation of justice of hundreds of families. Lastly, it was going to be enormously difficult to produce proof such as to convict those responsible for the mass murders.
As I thumbed through the yellowed pages of the Reder trial minutes, my first sensation was one of distance. Not just chronological but anthropological, social and political distance from those events. I began to wonder what was really meant to be shut away in the Palazzo Cesi cupboard, not to mention how one could possibly bring the perpetrators to justice.
To find an exhaustive answer has taken me until today. The quest ran parallel with all the ins-and-outs of trial procedure and substance that arose in the course of the first-degree hearing which ended on January 13th 2007 with life imprisonment for the NCOs of the 16th Explorer

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[1] The exact wording of the "temporary archival" ruling ran: *"In light of the documents relating to the incident described in the dossier in question belonging to the above-mentioned Office, the Military Prosecutor General orders that the documents be temporarily archived in that, despite the lapse of time since the date of the aforesaid incident, no information has come to light serving to identify the authors thereof or ascertain their responsibility"*.

Unit, Paul Albers, Helmut Wulf, Joseph Baumann, Hubert Bichler, Adolf Schneider, Max Schneider, Kurt Spieler, Heinz Fritz Träger and Georg Wache. I think that the end of the tunnel was glimpsed on 7th May 2008, in the selfsame premises of Palazzo Cesi, when the appeal court confirmed the previous life-sentences, except for private Spieler, and added a life-sentence for Squad Commandant Wilhelm Kusterer[2]. At my side for the occasion were many of the Children of '44.

The answer I have come up with is by no means simple to summarise in a few lines. But it was considerably fleshed out thanks to the victims' relatives, their accounts of life before and after, and not just the complex jigsaw puzzle of the massacres themselves. I had a chance to get to know and hear reminiscences of the tragic experience they had witnessed and been through, crimes of unspeakable gravity committed by the SS of the 16th Explorer Unit on the Monte Sole massif.

At the time in question most of my present clients were children or adolescents. Over the months I have come to see that their idea of justice for what was done found concrete outlet in the act of narration. All these people, with their histories, their culture, their world, their aspiration to justice, prove one fact to me today: hushing up a crime against humanity like Marzabotto has not only impeded the establishment of criminal liability, but also prevented an outraged sector of humanity from telling its proper tale.

On top of the physical genocide to members of that community perpetrated by the Nazi-fascists, "temporary archival" added another genocide, anthropological and cultural, in 1960. Filling that black hole of justice created by the cover-up comes this volume edited by Anna Rosa Nannetti, along with all the projects to keep the memory alive being organised by the Association of Relatives of Victims.

During the trial hearing, mixed with the bleakly tragic account of crimes inflicted, there would often shine a ray of love for those who remained and a keen attachment to the "life before"; in the same way many of the Children of '44 speak in these pages of a "place where there was nothing but land and sky", where the hardships of daily life were offset by solidarity of a human kind.

In my view, the idea of community and family transpiring from these collected reminiscences is summed up in a sentence used by the curator of the volume: "Loneliness was not something we felt; we were there for one another." This remark, stemming from mutual love and solidarity for one's neighbour, reminds me of the seemingly endless tour of inspection on which, with most of the 1944 children, I visited nearly all the rustic properties around Marzabotto, Grizzana and Monzuno. As these people stared at the ruined houses, the land, tracks that remained and those no longer to be seen, their memories were kindled to other paths of remembrance. They were not always easy paths to tread, but I think that all those relatives wanted to return to the spot as a way of re-appropriating their grief and their personal history.

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[2] To date the term for appealing to the Upper Bench (Cassazione) has not yet expired.

From these tales, some of them repeated before the La Spezia tribunal, two lodestars of peasant life emerged: an intense connection to the family, and a deep attachment to the land and nature.
To the Children of ’44 remembering is meaningful: *going back to the heart* (*re-cordis* in Latin) and expressing not just facts but emotions from a world that has risen to flower again after the extermination plan carried out by men from the SS *Reichsführer* Division in September 1944, and after that “temporary archival” ascribable to *raison d’état* in 1960.
I also think that Anna Rosa Nannetti’s collected eye-witness stories capture another victory chalked up by these surviving relatives: that of never losing their humanity, despite the experience of de-humanisation and death inflicted by other humans. In this connection there springs to mind a remark made by one of the Children during that round of visits that preceded the hearing. Seeing a wild rose growing amidst a briar patch, he said: “There you are, lawyer, see that flower? Our lives were just the same. But that flower is still capable of perfuming the air around today.”

Andrea Speranzoni
Civil-part counsel in the Marzabotto massacre trial

[2] To date the term for appealing to the Upper Bench (Cassazione) has not yet expired.

Introduction

by Anna Rosa Nannetti

When the massacre was over, and the time of family mourning, most of the children were in for another long period of suffering.
The houses had been ransacked and destroyed, fields mined, cowhouses emptied. Survival was impossible: there was nothing for it but to decamp from our villages and seek some provisional shelter at a Refugee Centre, a cowshed, a barn, a church presbytery, clinging to the few or maybe only relative whom war had not wiped out.
With the end of war came a second stage facing the adults with an urgent task: to restore the home and find a job, anywhere, even away from the village, none of which made allowance for looking after children who needed tending physically, psychologically and spiritually.
Given the emergency, children left their families and went to stay with outsiders who could offer them food, medication, warm clothing and, for the bigger ones, a chance to go to school.
Some children were taken in by boarding schools, others by relations and friends. All the rest who lacked such opportunities were taken care of by the Bologna Labour Office, the municipal authorities and all the other municipalities involved who sent out an appeal to such farming folk and workers in the Bolognese hinterland as had escaped the horrors of warfare: could they take in one of the "mountain children"?
People rallied generously to the call, and so began the painful experience for many a youngster of living away from home with relatives, friends or foster families. A traumatic experience, though in the hearts of most such children it did leave some pleasant and meaningful memories.
In their new homes and families the children learned the value of hospitality, generosity - freely given, more to the point. Having witnessed the horror of war, they could experience the many different facets of love. After the brutal inhuman dark, here was light, human kindness and beauty. The foster families gave of their best to settle the little ones in and help them get over the fright they had been through, and find new confidence in themselves and other people.
This is a story of anonymous heroines and heroes (names that are nowhere recorded) who saved a whole generation of children. It is also a story of how mothers and fathers had to love their children in silence and separation, leaving those who could feed, tend and clothe them to enjoy this seminal if short-lived role in their children's emotional upbringing.
It was cooperation between the foster families and these parents that kindled hope in us youngsters that the world might conquer war by the generous daily commitment of one and all.
Our families, friends and all the kind persons we encountered managed to pick up the pieces of our lives as we passed from house to house and person to person. By the "wisdom of the

heart" they staved off the danger that we might erase all memory of our earliest years; they helped us recognize the goodness shown by all who, without fomenting hatred, taught us to say thank you: thank you to each and every member of an extended community that had welcomed us with love. Learning to say thank you meant gratitude for help appropriate to our needs; it made us *remember* we were being helped, and taught us to share these people's daily lives as best we could and show affection in return.

Throughout those awful days when family and ties of love were being brutally violated, that little corner of heaven and earth witnessed the turmoil of our deepest, most vulnerable thoughts, our tears and grief for the dead, the deported, the destruction of our environment, and the realisation that nothing would ever be the same again. As survivors reported, the thoughts of our fathers, sons, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents turned to their families as they awaited the firing squad, and when family meant young children their distress was all the keener. They would whisper their boys' and girls' names, little ones so much in need of protection, a guiding hand as they grew up, words of love, plans for the future already formed in their parents' minds and hearts.

Our mothers, daughters, elder sisters, aunts and grandmothers would shoulder that pain in addition to their own. Weakened and crushed by suffering, those women who had been widowed or orphaned in the space of days had no choice but to band together and begin again, a new life which would demand all their strength and courage.

Qualities they had already displayed when their menfolk took to the woods and hideouts, leaving them the children and all the rest of the family to fend for, procure food for, at great personal danger. Undaunted by the SS, they had visited their men in captivity to offer a word of comfort or morsel of food for which no man had much appetite. Unseen, they had witnessed their men being herded onto trains and deported to workcamps in Germany. They had searched for loved ones' faces among the heaped corpses.

With their houses in ruins, they stuck it out alone in the kitchen, the only room with any heating, keeping alive the memory of those who had died, waiting for the prisoners' return from Germany. Their job, to support the surviving males in their lengthy unemployment – a moral support first and foremost. Even when a job was found, it would always be the toughest and worst-paid. Exploited and humiliated, the men retained their families' respect. The women lent a hand in the fields, opened tiny shops, worked "in service" for rich city families, looked after the old, and while waiting for us children to return from our enforced fostercare, silently made sure our inmost feelings were protected.

They would watch and listen and volunteer help lest anything happen to humiliate us too deeply. They watched over us and helped our host families to understand how desperate and marginalised we might be feeling and how hard it would be gradually to assuage the wounds of war. Theirs was an example of responsible and loving care, calling for patience. The patience needed by a widowed mother as, unaided by a husband, she set about building a new freedom for herself and her children.

If they chose to stay in their husband's family, it was not just for protection but above all to

honour the marriage agreement. Keeping faith with that forged roots and family ties for their children and made sure every family member actively lived up to their role and helped to bring up those children.
Of course, though families and groups gave security and protection, petty or major forms of discrimination or even outright slavery might materialise, targeting the weakest ones. Those mothers were the weakest ones.
Too many people still think the weakest only *take* and don't *give*. The weak tend to get the blame: theirs is the submerged world of the humble and maltreated, the defenceless who lack the strength to cry out and demand recognition for their own work, which the family and group so badly need. Someone who has gone through that degree of suffering becomes a resource, enhancing the lives of all around her, but for that human quality to blossom, it takes time; it needs patience.
Patience, in time, melts the hardest heart, softens the bullying, profoundly queries the superiority of material values. What patience is needed with those "in power", who often only throw their weight about! When those women reported to "institutional" offices, all too often they would be slighted, subtly mocked for the least sign of incompetence, their vital needs unheeded. This added to their lot, but they never gave up. Peaceably negotiating, they found words to explain the inexplicable to people who could not, or couldn't be bothered to, understand the magnitude of the damage we suffered, what mystery engulfed us; yet these were the people who took the decisions on our behalf to help us survive from one day to the next. Banding together, those women kept their dignity and fought to get their boys and girls the right to study, to train for a job and gain independence.

The tension would relax at times and they would have fun together like old times.
A merry company, those women, when picking over samples at a market stall or exchanging tips about making a new outfit for their children, something to press for the Patron Saint's feast, or a wedding, a First Communion, or Carnival-tide. I can remember them all together in the yard or under a pergola, embroidering a new tablecloth or some nice new curtains to prettify our homes once more.
Every farm had an oven and they would cluster round it while bread or cakes were baking: time for a chat and a smile, harmony restored while the children played. The bigger kids would help with the household chores, the little ones left free to play. A few rudimentary toys, but what scope for inventing new forms of amusement! That daily outlet for their creativity helped the children gain serenity and self-esteem: it would enable them to apply themselves at school or work, whatever the troubles they had undergone and perhaps not worked through.
Their every tiny success was an opportunity to celebrate in the family.
And another party, again, when a house was restored - "topping out", *la bandiga* – everyone out in the threshing yard, men, women, children, workmen, sometimes the Arch-priest. After the meal we would sing our folk-songs to accordion accompaniment. Some might recite

nursery-rhymes or tell jokes, while the children played merrily and were allowed to stay up past their bedtime.

When a harvest came in, that was another time of feasting; and then there was the merry tradition of the *"veglia"*: something to eat and drink around a table but, more than anything else, a lot of talking and laughing as in the old days. We knew each other inside out and could tell when to speak and what to leave unsaid. Loneliness was not something we felt; we were there for one another.

The strength, bravery, wisdom, sense of dialogue and sacrifice experienced by all those families during and after the war as we struggled to rebuild our society, the generosity of so many who lent a hand, and the ever-kindled remembrance of all our martyred kith and kin formed the legacy upon which "the children of Forty-Four" built up an identity for themselves, day by day.

Who are “the children of ’44”?

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.

Last Will

(free translation from the poem by Kriton Athanasulis)

May you be no laughing-stock to all.
The sun I bequeath you as father did to me.
The stars will shine no less, and nights
induce sweet sleep.
The sea will bring you dreams galore. My wry
smile I bequeath you: be lavish with it
though do not let me down. The world's a poor place
now. It's steeped itself in blood
and stayed a pauper. Earn the world's love
if you would become rich.
My unfinished cause I bequeath you,
my red-hot gun barrel.
Not for a trophy on the wall. The world has need of it.
I leave you my heartache. Pain upon pain
reaped from time's battles.
Remember. This order I leave you.
Remembering means not dying.
Never to say I fell short, that
despair bore me on and I was left
behind, flunking the trench.
I bellowed my No a thousand times,
though the wind blew and rain and hail
drowned my voice. I bequeath you
my story penned
by a hopeful hand. Yours to conclude it.
I leave you simulacra of heroes
with severed stumps for hands,
boys who never had time
to take the grim form of men,
weed-wearing mothers, young girls raped.
I leave you Belsen and Auschwitz in memoriam.
Grow up, make haste. Feed your
lean heart on the flesh
of the world's peace, my boy.
Learn how brothers by the million
vanished innocent into the icy snow
of a mean mass grave.

Enemies, they were called. You bet: enemies of hate.
I leave you the tomb's whereabouts:
you can read the epitaph for yourself.
I leave you the campsite
of a townful of prisoners:
they say Yes, but inside growls
the pent-up No of the free spirit.
I too am one who outward says
the Yes of need, and inside nurses No.
That's how it was my day. Turn a kind eye
on our embittered dusk,
the bread is stone, the water mud,
the truth a mute songbird.
That's what I leave you. I earned the courage
of a head held high. Take life's plunge.
Jump the ditch alone and set yourself free.
I thirst for news. That's what I leave you.

from Anthology of Contemporary Greek Poetry, Milan – Crocetti 2004

Eyewitness accounts

MATILDE MONETTI, aged 4 months

I am one of the 1944 children. Born at Ponte della Venturina on 5th May 1944; a few months old at the time of the Marzabotto massacre. My mother and I were evacuated to Casalino where we lived with Primo and Giorgina Monetti, my paternal grandfather and aunt.
My tale is not an eyewitness account, therefore, but the memory of what my mother and aunt told me, and above all how I felt in the years that followed
Father was away at war. After marrying, mother had lived in her husband's family house at Pontelungo, Bologna, with his parents, siblings and a sister-in-law. Come her last months of pregnancy, she had moved to her sister-in-law's at Ponte della Venturina, an Apennine village on the highway to Porretta, right at the border with Tuscany. The Pontelungo house on the Via Emilia a few hundred yards from the river Reno had become unsafe. The bridge was a constant target for bombing and our family house had received its share of damage.

Aunty Dina's house soon proved no less dangerous. In spring 1944 the front got stuck a few kilometres away. Some weeks after I was born, mum decided to move nearer to Bologna, leaving her father- and sister-in-law who were evacuated in their turn to an outlying house above Pioppe di Salvaro. For my mother and me it was the beginning of a year-long odyssey, on the move from one home to another, including some unexpected places for a young mother and baby: the pied-à-terre of a well-known Bologna professional in a posh building in Via Montegrappa, and the enclosed nunnery of Santa Caterina da' Vigri in via Tagliapietre. I have no recollection whatsoever of our couple of months at Casalino which the family would remember not just for its tragic side. Grandpa Monetti used jokingly to call me "the Casalino matron"[3].
Come the end of September 1944, my mother decided to take me to the doctor's in Bologna – whether I was ill or just for a routine check, I don't know. That time we stayed with the Bologna grandparents. On her way home with me in her arms – mum related – she was stopped by a local woman who ran up shouting in dialect "Where do you think you're going? Don't you know what's happened?" Panic-stricken, the woman told her about the SS round-up throughout our area: men, women, old folk and children had been taken away. I can no longer recall exactly how mother's story continued. I just remember snatches of grown-up family conversation from after the war, when the bad old days were chewed over with friends. Interspersed with harrowing accounts, there would be tragic-comic episodes like that of the panicking housewife *(arzdaura)* who ran off carrying a pastryboard piled with newly-made pasta.

My own direct memories date from four, five or six years later: my impressions of All Souls' Day visits to "la Botte" and the Calvenzano graveyard.

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[3] In dialect this was "l'arzdaura id Casalein". *Arzdaura* was the senior female figure of the household.

The first halt would be la Botte. As a child, la Botte gave me the creeps. I remember this dark, damp, tumbledown place dripping with November fog. I knew what had happened. I knew my father's father, his uncles and cousin had been shot at la Botte. I knew that Aunty – still a young woman – had tried to get to the place of execution and retrieve the bodies, together with other victims' womenfolk, but had been brutally driven off.

As a child I was frightened by the murky river water gushing through the sinister millrace cistern known as "la Botte". The grown-ups said that it was dry at the time of the shootings, that the bodies fell into the sludge, and it wasn't till the millrace channel was opened later that the flow washed them downstream. There I would stand, a tiny mite among head-scarfed women in tears, and men like my father and Uncle Dante, ashen-faced and red-eyed.

Next we would go on to the Calvenzano graveyard. We gathered with relatives in front of the tombstone of the Nannettis, the family of my paternal granny after whom I am named. Father's uncle Adolfo had gathered in one tomb the remains of his parents (my great-grandparents) and sisters (granny and great-aunt). Himself, Adolfo had not managed to be buried in the family grave. He was killed at la Botte and his corpse ended up in the river along with his brothers-in-law, Primo Monetti and Virgilio Venturi and his fellow-"in-law" Antonio Fava. When the war was over and they got back from their labour camp in Germany, the sons that survived - Alfredo and Giovanni (Giannino) – buried their brother Guido Sabatino there. Guido was shot at la Botte and found dead in a basement of the local hemp-mill. Symbolically, his tombstone included the name of the grandfathers and great-uncles who were washed away by the Reno.

After the dull silent misery of la Botte, the gathering in the graveyard left a sensation of searing pain, and a damp cold striking through our coats to freeze our hearts and congeal the limbs. Even the grown-ups felt the need to fight off the chill that numbed us body and soul. They would mutter a greeting, exchange a hug and a kiss, and a few words. Some busily tended the graves. The relative that stands out in my memory is the lanky figure of Giannina, Guido Sabatino's young wife and mother to Anna Rosa who was my own age. Tall, thin, eternally dressed in black: I can picture her with a woollen headscarf knotted tightly under the chin, her face pale and pointed, her nose long and reddened by cold and tears. To me, she might have been any age, but she was actually young, little over 30, prematurely aged by grief and worry.

After the cemetery we would set off on foot for the inn at Camugnone run by Giannino, father's cousin. In the warmth of the kitchen the tension would finally ease, my body regain some heat and the knot in my stomach loosen. The grown-ups relaxed too, and conversation shifted to everyday subjects like work, school, births and deaths. The men would recount their wartime adventures. A snack of bread, ham and salami would be served. For lunch one went on into the village to the Cionis' house, relatives of Uncle Dante and Aunty Giorgia.

Years later as a growing girl I began to wonder how grandpa must have felt on the days and hours before he was executed: terror, resignation, hope, dejection …. Did he find support in those around him, brothers-in-law, villagers, friends? Did he comfort the younger ones? Did

he review his own life? Maybe he recalled crossing the Atlantic to Brazil, the fazenda where he worked, his wife and children born over there, some long dead, the youngest three still alive: two youths and a girl. How did he die? despairing and cursing, or praying? at once or after further suffering?
Such questions and graveyard memories made me sensitive to news and discussion of atrocities as they continued to recur in history. There was nothing intellectual about it, just a deep emotional link with Marzabotto and my own memories. I was particularly engrossed by the circumstances of the Vietnamese village that was wiped out: *My Lai*[4].
The Vietnamese incident made a lasting impression. I remember that when the radio broadcast news of the sentencing of Lt William Calley (one of the chief instigators) to house arrest – after 44 months he was back in circulation! – I was in a car with my father. Restrained as usual in his emotional reactions, he made no comment but was visibly upset. I couldn't muster the courage to broach the subject. I recollect an embarrassing silence and a tear on father's cheek. For him it meant more than raking up some tragic memories: it was the demise of a political illusion. The Americans, his "liberators" of old, had been guilty of the same crimes as the Nazis. No doubt he too wondered how such a thing could be.
He had been a soldier against his will for nine years: first the African campaign and then the Second World War from Dunkirk to Sardinia. He returned as an anti-militarist and pacifist, proud of not killing anyone and deeply disgusted by all warmongering talk. When he made it back from Africa with pernicious malaria and a body that weighed 35 kg, the State demanded reimbursement for the rifle he lost in an Askari attack or in the forest he took refuge in.

My family were shielded from hatred and over-simplification by their experience of war as well as their deeply humane sentiments. When I announced I was marrying a German lad and going to live in Germany, there were no recriminations from father or aunty. Father had been closely attached to one, Hans, a German corporal who had been his escort in the closing stages of the war. After a round-up Hans sought him out and saved him from the firing squad or deportation. Father could distinguish between people and made no generalisations.
I think Aunty Giorgia found my decision harder to accept at the beginning with her more immediate traumatic experience of Marzabotto. It was her good heart and generosity that kept her from prejudice at that first meeting with her future nephew (in-law) where she was won over by his delicacy of feeling. "It wasn't his fault, after all!"
My husband was born in July 1944, exactly my age. His own story shows the absurd way war repeats itself. His mother, like mine, had taken shelter from bombs falling on the town.

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[4] **The My Lai massacre**, also known as the **Song My massacre**, took place during the Vietnam war on 16th March 1968. Under orders from Lt. William Calley, soldiers of Charlie Company from the 11th Brigade of Light Infantry killed 347 unarmed civilians, mainly old people, women, children and babies. Some soldiers tortured and raped inhabitants. My Lai was a village in the province of Quang Ngai about 840 kms north of Saigon. The massacre was alleged to be a vendetta after Viet Cong had mingled with villagers.
There was a belated inquiry and trial at which Lt. Calley was sentenced to life imprisonment. Two days later, by order of President Nixon, this was commuted to 3 and a half years' house arrest. Calley maintained he was acting under orders from his captain, who denied the charge and was acquitted.

She had gone back to her parents in her beloved Pomerania, at a small town a few miles from the Baltic Sea between Stettn and Danzig. That again turned out to be a hazardous decision. The eastern front collapsed and the Red Army was drawing near. My mother-in-law heeded the advice of her husband and family who lived in Lower Saxony: she gathered up her months-old baby and fled to her in-laws in the countryside near Braunschweig. Her sister with two young children and one on the way had also taken shelter with her parents. Not having relatives in the West, she stayed on for some months in Treptow am Riga. When the Red Army came, she fled with her children and parents. A few years back on some birthday occasion a childhood friend of theirs handed us some typewritten pages: her account of flight from Pomerania. It is a woman's-eye view of war. It took these women half a century to pluck up courage and tell their tale to a wider audience than those directly involved. Private tales of private experience, unconcerned with political correctness or revanchism, or collective guilt feelings. They just related what happened to them, what they saw and felt, perhaps to set the record straight as the end grew nearer.
Where I did find doubt and guilt was among my own generation of Germans or those a fraction younger. Monika studied the history of Nazism, and it has taken her nearly fifty years to be able to talk to her '80-plus' father about his experiences of the Russian front and imprisonment. As a student Sabine tour-guided a group of young hawks (an organization of young social-democrats) to Marzabotto with a view to doing something publicly useful. Michaela acted as moderator to an Erzählkaffee at Cologne – a reunion of victims of Nazism, Jews, homosexuals, communists, Roma. The experience brought her closer to her father, a Ukrainian prisoner-of-war who worked for a family of German farmers, managed to evade the Russian round-ups and deportation to Siberia, so that he remained in Germany. Andreas is a politically-committed unionist.
Of the younger generation, Andreas K., who went to school with one of my daughters, worked for eighteen months as a volunteer at a youth centre in Oświęcimiu (near the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum) and then at the Anna Frank Centre[5], Frankfurt, before devoting himself to historical research into the Nazi policy of annihilation.
These are just some of the many people critically adjusting to the history of their country and their family past. They are by no means a majority, clearly, but they comprise the social group I have formed over the years.

The pupils at my German-as-a-foreign-language course in the Seventies and Eighties were not exactly chosen, though it can hardly be called an accidental encounter – indeed, more like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many were political refugees, victims of war and dictatorship from various continents. Parisa fled one oligarchic regime and returned to Khomeini's Iran full of hope, only to get out again because of the ayatollahs' religious dogmatism. Arturo

[5] See the website http://www.annefrank.de/

from Chile lost a brother to Pinochet's henchmen[6] who threw him out of a plane into the sea. The Royas were Afghani doctors banned from practising. Lem Lem from Eritrea had the good luck to possess a qualification in demand in Germany, and became a nurse whom her colleagues esteem and her patients love. Then there were Kurds, Bosnians…

My classes brought me contact with the victims of the military and political madness of the age: men and women with histories similar to Marzabotto under different flags and different ideologies. Their accounts and their humanity are consolation for memories of my grandfather and his companions in misfortune: they help me not to forget.

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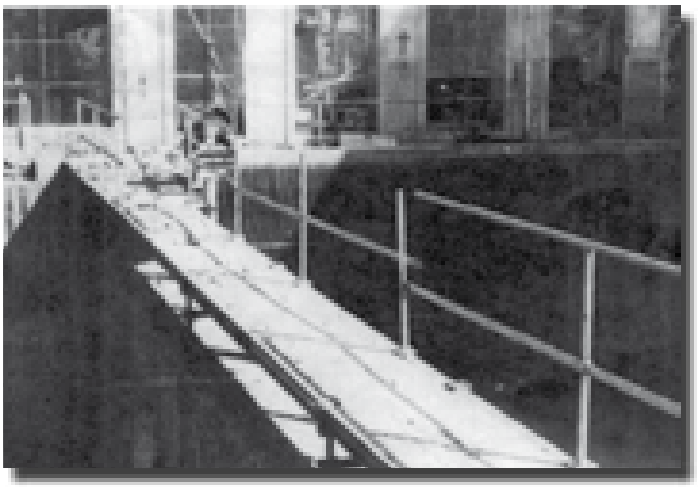
[6] **Augusto José Ramón Pinochet Ugarte** (Valparaíso, 25 November 1915 – Santiago, Chile, 10 December 2006) was a general in the Chilean army. Following a military coup, he governed the country as dictator from September 1973 to 11 March 1990.
He came to power with the 1973 golpe (the military coup d'état that overthrew the government of Socialist President Salvador Allende). A referendum in 1988 put an end to the dictatorship and reintroduced democracy. He officially relinquished power two years later in 1990, but retained control of the army until 1998. He then became a life senator, enjoying parliamentary immunity.

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

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 instants afterwards. 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.

2008

LA BOTTE, PIOPPE DI SALVARO

The stone records the victims who fell on October 1st. Four men's names are missing: one from Pisa and three from Lucca. Rounded up with other Tuscans, they toiled for days on the road until they came to Pioppe where, after three days' confinement, they ended up in the massacre. Their names were unknown.

ANNA ROSA NANNETTI, aged 14 months

The destruction of my family began on 29 September 1944. Soon after dawn the SS descended on Creda, near Salvaro, where they killed women and children and set fire to the house and cowhouse. It was then Maccagnano's turn, where again women and children were killed. At the same time other SS patrols began a house-to-house search, taking away all the men, whom they divided off from the women and children at machine-gun point.
Brutally formed into a column of march, these men were herded to the "Stables" at Pioppe, also known as the "Carters' house", which stands on the square in front of the church. This and the church itself became a prison for our fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, uncles and grandfathers. Hastily, arbitrarily, without any kind of hearing, the SS decided who was fit for work and who unfit. Those declared unfit were left at the Stables awaiting execution, while the fit were kept in the church and neighbouring rooms until they could be deported to labour camps in Germany. Those who managed to sneak up to the Stables at the time reported seeing a huddle of men, withdrawn into themselves and in a stupor.
Among them were my father Guido Sabatino, 35 years old, a tax guard at Savona who had just returned home, and my grandfathers Adolfo Nannetti and Antonio Fava, as well as Grandpa Adolfo's two brothers-in-law, Primo Monetti and Venturi Virginio.
All were shot at 'la Botte', Pioppe di Salvaro, on 1st October 1944.
One of the three survivors, Domenico Piretti, told my mother that before execution my father tried to sidle over to his father Adolfo and hold him up, only to be bashed over the head by an SS rifle butt. The same soldier struck Don Elia Comini over the hands, knocking his breviary into the cistern. The prisoners had all been ordered to throw whatever they had away, but right to the last Don Comini held on to his breviary, and was duly punished. Two very youthful uncles, Alfredo and Giovanni (Giannino) Nannetti, were deported to Germany and only got back when the war was over.
The same round-up also involved Uncle Dino Stagni who was set to driving cows down the Porrettana highway to Bologna. There were also two cousins, Don Quinto Nannetti and Mario Venturi. Don Quinto was a missionary in Africa, home on short leave. He would quickly be released, while Mario managed to escape from the Bologna Red Barracks which was a sorting office for Germany.

La Botte is a kind of pit or cistern which stood empty at the time. My father and another two men managed to clamber out but died shortly afterwards. Father hid in the nearby electricity cabin at the hemp-mill where he was found by Arrigo Gabusi, the foreman: he had bled to death. Some kind soul covered his naked body with part of a cassock from one of the two priests who died along with our relatives: Don Elia Comini and Father Martino Capelli.
Not until spring 1945 was it possible to retrieve his body and give it burial in the family tomb at Calvenzano cemetery. The bodies of my grandparents, relatives and the rest lay for many

days in that open-air tomb. Then the sluices of the channel that brings the cistern its water were opened up, and the broken, putrefying corpses were washed out into the river Reno. None of them were ever found. We relations wonder to this day why the bodies couldn't be removed and given proper burial – a painful question that was not to be answered.

The Favas and the Nannettis lived at Camugnone and Camporonzo in the municipal district of Vergato. One night in early December following the la Botte massacre and the destruction of our houses and fields, our family and many others resolved to cross the Reno, climb Monte Salvaro and make our way to Grizzana where the Allies had already arrived. They would take us to the Florence Refugee Centre.

The river was still in spate and had to be crossed at night, to avoid detection by the SS. Others had drowned that way, as we were well aware, but there was no option: we had to get away. At Campiglio on the opposite bank stood two houses belonging to the numerous Righi family. Those generous folk took turns in keeping the fires going so as to bring us some relief. And a great relief it was, though we didn't have time to dry out our soaked clothing, bent as we were, despite the conditions, on getting to Florence and receiving help. None of us had a change of clothing: the SS had stolen all our possessions and loaded them onto trains bound for Germany. I was suffering from a perforated eardrum and a bad throat infection which would not clear up without a doctor and medicines. I was crying out in pain.

That night too on Monte Salvaro I was howling when the sound of soldiers coming down the mountain was distinctly heard. There and then, my mother, Giovannina (called Giannina) Fava, made up her mind to move away from the group. If the soldiers were SS drawn by my wailing, they would find the group, we'd all be shot and the blame would be hers for another atrocity. Fair and brave that she was, mother resolved to set out alone, carrying me in her arms, straight towards the soldiers. All she said was: "If you hear me shout, you'll understand and make your getaway. If all's clear, I'll be back to let you know". We had covered some ground when suddenly a soldier came out of the trees, smiling, arms wide to pick me up and relieve mum of her load. It was a young Brazilian GI. That's where I encountered the allies, halfway up Monte Salvaro one winter night, rocked and hugged by this youthful black-skinned brother.

All together, friends and relatives, we set off for the Florence Refugee Centre. My health was deteriorating by the hour, so mum decided to stay the night with Aunt Augusta at Stanco near Grizzana, in the hope of giving me respite. But for all their loving attentions, I continued to be very unwell and it became a question of getting to Florence with all speed so that mum could find a doctor.

At long last we reached the Refugee Centre and a first-rate doctor to treat my condition, but the experience I had been through left me so weak, I was in no condition to tackle a diphtheria epidemic which was laying low all the refugees. At death's door, I was urgently admitted to hospital, and it was months before I came out again or we could make our way to Porretta Terme and be greeted by Aunty Lea and Uncle Alfredo Palmieri and my cousins Anna, Giuseppe and Pietro.

Uncle Alfredo moved heaven and earth to have a private car pick me up from Florence, the only way I could possibly have endured that journey. That was only one of the many acts of kindness mother and I received from his family whenever need might arise. During our stay with them I was cured of my illness and my fears: first and foremost, the fear of sleeping in a bed with white sheets, which reminded me of my hospital ordeal. Anna, above all, was like an elder sister to me but, one and all, they endeavoured to get me back to the routine of everyday life. It would be a harder job, not to say impossible in certain respects, to help me recover from the deeper-seated traumas.

One such came my way just at that time: separation from mum – a decidedly traumatic event for one so tiny, though people were really kind to me and I would see her quite often; so I hope I may say that I managed to accept the new situation fairly quickly.
Mum needed to go back to Camugnone and try to get the shop and tavern going again without delay in some undamaged building; otherwise she might lose her licence, our only form of sustenance, orphaned as we were of our family. What with the atrocity itself and the period before it, mum had lost her only brother, her mother, father, husband and father-in-law. She was 30 years old, alone in the world with a sick baby. Heedless of her own health and work problems, she embarked on a new life full of sacrifice, hardship and many debts, but she would manage to restore the home and put me through schooling, as my father and she had both decided.

The daily grind brought her life to an end at a mere 59 but never clouded her smile or expression, her kind affable relations with other people; nor did she ever waver in her daily prayers, whether in the silence of her room or in active parish participation. Only in church when praying or singing did her voice ring out.
Every year from dawn on 29th September to evening on 1st October we would remember our dear departed in silence. Praying or just living, we would keep the radio turned off, a token of respect that was the rule whenever relatives or neighbours were in mourning. With us there would always be Teresina, widow of Luigi Costa, another la Botte victim.
For us children October 1st was the first day of school and the whole morning would be devoted to remembering our relatives' fate. The teachers would take us to church where our families would be waiting for the Mass; then we processed to la Botte, following the prisoners' own route.
I recall the memories exchanged by mother, Teresina and a whole lot more who came to see us on those mournful occasions. Two stories by witnesses whose names I forget have always moved me. When their fate was certain, grandpa Adolfo invited my father to say the act of contrition; and the other was daddy distractedly whispering "Anna Rosa, the little mite".
I went off to boarding school and that too was a wrench to begin with. Other separations followed: the times when mum had health or work problems and I stayed with daddy's family, where I was always made a great fuss of by granny Cesira (Zaira). Then I too spent

time away from home for my own work. But the ties were never broken; they grew deeper and stronger in time since mum always managed to maintain a closeness yet defend our points of difference as these developed amid grief and joy, mishap and consolation – things only we two knew. Our relationship was bolstered by many a staunch friend to whom I hope I have shown my gratitude and love.

Gratitude and love were authentic values cultivated throughout her life by my mother. To have been her daughter was a great gift, and all who knew her felt the same way. Those who needed help or a consoling word found her a good listener who could share their hardship and their sorrow.

My grandfather Antonio Fava, grandfather Adolfo Nannetti, and Guido Sabatino Nannetti, my father

EDMONDA ROSTI, aged 19 months

It all started with the 29th September round-up in which daddy and uncle were caught. Uncle Augusto Rosti was killed at la Botte near Pioppe on October 1st, while daddy managed to escape from the SS squads and mingle with the men driving cattle to Bologna. When he got to Bologna he was harboured by friends.
But then mum was blown up by a mine, leaving me and my 3 year-old sister Luana to be taken in by Aunt Giulietta and Granny Teresa. (Giulietta had just lost her husband, gunned down by the SS.) Instead of making for the shelter at San Pietro, granny and aunty decided to move into a peasant house at Casetto. When people shook their heads over two women and two little girls being left to fend for themselves, granny would say: "Don't you worry! As long as there's smoke from the chimney, it'll mean nothing's happened."
When two family friends, Giovanni Vannini and Fernando Ventura, saw that two days had passed and no smoke from the chimney, they crept up to the house and, entering the bedroom, found Giulietta and Teresa murdered in their beds, granny still holding a rosary in her hand.
I can't remember if we girls dived under the bed, or aunty hid us there when she realised the SS patrol was coming. The fact is, we were safe in our hiding-place and stayed there for a day and two nights. When they found us we were spattered with blood dripping through the mattresses. We were taken to Serra di Sotto where everyone remembers me wolfing a dish of polenta, so hungry was I.
Then daddy got through. It was no mean feat getting across to our side, the bridge at Pioppe being blown up and the river in spate. Daddy was helped by the Bologna fire-brigade under orders from a German officer. That officer being with them meant that the SS didn't open fire.
I couldn't recognise my own father and cried all the way from Pioppe to Bologna. My sister Luana had had a vivid sight of SS jackboots from under the bed that fatal night, and when daddy later took her to see the Liberation parade in Bologna, she ran away in terror at the sight of the soldiers' boots.
Alone, homeless, jobless, daddy boarded us at a nuns' school in Imola where our aunt, Sister Agata Rosti, welcomed us lovingly. Later we went back home. Daddy married again, to Nella Simoncini who would be a good mother to us. But then he got ill and had to go into the sanatorium. Mamma Nella went to nurse him and we girls were taken in by Aunts Clara and Cesarina over in Genoa. Unfortunately, they had to go out to work, so we were placed in boarding school, though they did keep visiting us and being kind to us.
One day we came back home for good. Our new family was reunited, with all our old girlfriends back and a helping hand from their mothers and lots of kind folk in the village. For Luana and me it was back to normal life.

As an appendage to Edmonda Rosti's account, one should also read what Scolastico Vannini has to say:
My father Giovanni was always close to that family (the Rostis, ed.) From his shelter under the San Pietro mound he would keep a lookout for any German patrols on the road and, as soon as he could, come up to Casetto with food and a word of cheer for the women and little girls all on their own.

GIANNA VIGNUDELLI, aged 2

My daddy Giovanni was rounded up on 29th September 1944 on the hills around Grizzana, from where he was taken and imprisoned at the Pioppe di Salvaro Stables. When the SS asked about his health, he said he was unwell, hoping to stay near his family and not be packed off to Germany, whereas he was lumped with those roughly classified as unfit, and shot at la Botte on 1st October 1944.
Uncle Oreste Campeggi was also taken in the round-up. A boy of 18, he was sent to a work-camp in Germany and came back in very poor shape after the Liberation.
After daddy died, my mum (Nerina, aged 23) had to cope with evacuation on her own. We were taken to Rome, which was a nightmare for her as I was sick. When we got to the Refugee Centre I was taken straight into hospital with pneumonia, which not everybody recovered from in those days.
Another time I went in for a goitre. They kept me in and wouldn't let mum stay with me. She told me that night had fallen when she left the hospital and she had no idea where we had ended up. All the same, she found her way back to the Centre.
I kept crying and crying for want of a bit of bread.
I overheard from grown-ups talking that daddy was buried in a pit. He was always in my thoughts and whenever I came across a shell-crater in the road I would ask mum "Is daddy under there?"
We came back home and mum had nothing for it but to return to the family with her brothers and sisters. They were so poor, it was clearly a great sacrifice for them to take us in, and the food had to stretch, but mum stayed at home to keep me with her. For my sake, too, she made a second marriage, though it wasn't a happy decision. Mum and I were together at all times. When rich Mr Tonelli from Grizzana Morandi offered to help with the cost of boarding school, she turned him down, so as not to be parted from me. Now she is the weaker one; she lives with me and all the family have rallied round.
I really missed having a father and it may have been that which I saw in my husband, who is older than me. I was only 15 when I got pregnant and Benito and I decided to get married. Mum hastened to tell uncle the news, and he went round to Benito's and said: "Remember, Gianna may not have a father, but she's not alone. I'll be keeping a close eye on her." My husband reassured him and promised to help and cherish me. We were so young, but he'd been through the war as well, so we understood one another and helped each other out all the years we've been together. A few months back we celebrated our fiftieth. I hope no other generation has it as rough as we did, with our wounded feelings and lack of the bare necessities.

TULLIO BACCOLINI, aged 2
IDA BACCOLINI, aged 3½

Ida Baccolini relates:
On September 29th 1944 the SS came to our house, Casa Simoni in the district of Vergato. They rounded up our father Ruffillo and two uncles, Calisto and Giuseppe, who were out working in the field. They took them to the Stables at Pioppe and held them prisoner till the afternoon of 1st October, when they were gunned down in la Botte along with 42 others.
In early December 1944 we were helped across the river Reno which was continually in spate and we might well have drowned as so many others did. We climbed Monte Salvaro where the Americans were, and they took us to Florence.
I was sick and had to go into the Refugee Hospital. They wouldn't let mummy Albertina sat with me but we managed to see a bit of each other for all that. She used to peep through a window when no one was looking, and I could see her from my bed. Neither of us knew how the other was, so our looks had to express the love and help we wanted to share but weren't allowed. Our love was stronger than those humiliating hospital rules.
For a few weeks my younger brother Tullio was farmed out to uncles who were billeted over Carbona way in a cowshed with beds of straw. He too got badly sick and was at death's door, but luckily the Americans treated him and bit by bit he got better. He had a bad time of it, away from mum and very unwell.
The reason we had to be evacuated was that our houses were bombed. There were mines in the roads and fields.
We later made it back from Florence on foot, not having the money to pay for transport. There was me, mummy and other people. By night some kind family would put us up, and by day we hit the road again. Mummy actually carried me, small that I was. When her shoes gave out, she went barefoot through the stones and mud. It took a fortnight to get to grandpa's, our own house no longer existing. My brother was brought over to us and we all lived together. Daddy was dead and mummy, a widow at 22, was taken in by her father, grandpa Ettore Quadri, for about four years. Then we went back to our own home and lived in the part that had survived the bombing. What with a war pension and constant help from grandpa and our uncles, Tullio and I managed to get through those first years together with mummy.
But then came the moment of parting for one of us: me. I went to the Baraccano in Bologna as a boarder. It was a trauma leaving my family. I was only home for Christmas and Easter, and every time I had to go back to school, it was the same old pang. And so it was when mum would come and see me: after the short moment of joy at being with her, I used to cry at parting. That's why I came home before finishing secondary school. I spent seven years as a boarder, made some good friends and was treated well, though the nuns' rules were strict.
Grandpa was an old man now and fell ill, so at the age of 15 it was up to me to keep house for mummy, grandpa and my brother. He was still a kid when he went to work as a mechanic.

Grandpa passed away and mummy's illness got worse. She would be bedridden for 18 years. In those days there was no help, of course, and no allowance from the authorities.
If daddy had been there, the situation would have been more bearable, money-wise and affection-wise. We missed him when times were difficult or at important moments. We missed him being around.
When I returned from boarding school, to fill in my days mummy sent me to a friend who did knitwear. Then I went to work, first in a shop in Vergato, then at the Ducati factory in Bologna, which suited me very well. But I had to quit and look after mummy when she took a turn for the worse.
I never went short of food, but my brother and I never had all those things a father can give. Grandpa stood in for a father, but as I grew up I realised what it meant not to have a father. It's a great lack, a pain that stays for ever.

CASA SIMONI
Our parents Ruffillo and Albertina together with relatives

GIOVANNA MONTI, aged 4

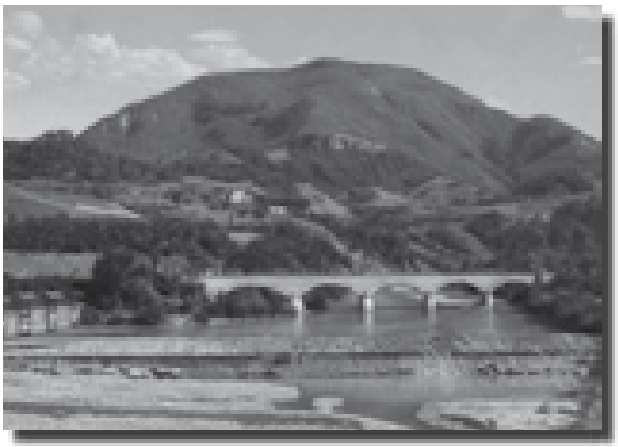
I lived at Sibano. On the morning of 29th September 1944 the SS came with machine-guns raised, and took away my father Fernando to the Stables at Pioppe where he was kept prisoner for three days and then shot at la Botte on 1st October 1944.
He was 37 years old but was considered an invalid because he was on sick leave from the army. Where he was imprisoned mummy managed to see him and talk three times. All he kept saying was to take good care of me and see I studied. Father was bent double, his head nearly touching the ground, a horrible sight.
It was a hard decision for my mother but she was determined to keep her promise, and I was sent to boarding school. I have good memories of those four years.
Losing my father left a lifelong mark: I so yearned to be fondled by him. I treasure as a keepsake what mummy found on the Botte ramp two days after the killing: a straw bag holding father's cape, waistcoat and hat.
Words fail me when I try to do justice to Annita Lippi, my mother. She managed to be mother and father when he was gone. She was only 32. My life with her was symbiotic, always together. The umbilical cord was cut when she died, far too young, at only 75 years of age. Hers was a sad and a hard life; but she put everything she had into it and worked as a home help, there being no choice.
We decamped to Bologna and she carried me all the way from Sibano. What little she could bring away was on a cart drawn by the Bettini family cows. She couldn't put me on the cart for more than minutes at a time, since I clung close to her and granny, her mother, who was a constant support at our sides.
We were lucky to be taken in by a cousin of father's, who made sure we lacked for nothing. When we made our way back home, we found nothing left. The house had been blown up so for years we lived in a single room fitted out with the generous help of "Swiss aid" which enabled us to have the household necessities. I've still kept certain things, so thank you again.
I was still very little but I well remember that at least twice or three times a week we would go to the cistern at Pioppe. Mummy needed to feel close to father.
Year after year when the war was over she went down to the Reno banks whenever some mortal remains came to light. Imagine how she suffered, each time hoping against hope she would recognise father and give him decent burial.
It's so important for everyone to have their dear one's grave where they can leave a flower.
I reckon that from up there she was cheering when they held the La Spezia trial. The law managed to put a face on the butchers who killed her husband. She was present herself at the trial of Major Walter Reder.
The memories I have stored away! I always feel her near me and thank God for giving me such a mother. Thanks for everything.

Our generation grew up with next to nothing, but we children of Sibano managed to grow up and live serenely and in friendship.

My father Fernando

DORA AMADESI, aged 4

Though I was very little, I do remember some things, and mum filled in the rest.
From Villa di Salvaro where we lived we set out for Clogna over Grizzana way, heading for the Florence Refugee Centre. What stuck in my child's mind was a white horse killed by a shell and a gesture by a German who held my hand when I started howling, and said to mum: "I've got children myself".
On the awful days of the massacre two of my aunts died, for different reasons. One was very sick and died in October because we couldn't go to Marzabotto or Vergato to get her medicines. The other aunt died in November: from over at Calvenzano they opened fire on our house; some shrapnel came through a round window in the cellar and killed her on the spot. I still remember her body wrapped in a sheet.
After that business we set out for the Refugee Centre at Florence. We were near the church of San Domenico, up towards Fiesole. We all slept on the floor in a great big room. For food we were issued with a mess-tin with a wire handle; I can remember the stink of that 'plop'. Luckily daddy and uncle managed to find work with the friars at the monastery, helping out their aged steward. He was kind-hearted: at milking time the first cup of milk was for me and us, before it went to the friars.
Later on we stayed with a family and slept in their hayloft. Mum got a job cooking for the American soldiers. I don't know if she was paid, but the American colonel allowed her to take away any leftovers. It had to go round all of us, including the peasant family. Mum also baked fresh bread, helped by the soldiers. I was treated to sweets and chocolate by the Americans.
When we got home we found the house gutted and empty. Dad looked around for the odd hour's work, and later set up as a miller, and I too started work very young. I count myself lucky our family came through and began a normal life again together.
One wish I did have: to see the sea. My friend Luciana and I went and asked Don Cavazza and he managed to get us to the seaside down at the "ships" of Cattolica, where I met other children from our parts.



MONTE SALVARO
…From Villa di Salvaro where we lived, I set out for Clogna, over Grizzana way, heading for the Florence Refugee Camp and then the Church of San Domenico near Fiesole …

LUCIA MONARI, aged 4

I lived at Poggiolo. At home on 29th September 1944 were my mother, three young children, granny, an uncle who had a broken spine so couldn't walk, and an aunt.
The menfolk were: three in the partisan brigade, one a prisoner in Russia, my father a prisoner in Sardinia, grandpa who wasn't at home that day but was killed in another place. All of us there were women and children.
Grandpa's sister said to mum: "I'll take the kids and see if I can find some eggs for lunch." On our way back we decided to stop at the church, which was full of people. Granny came rushing up and said: "Come away, come away, at Casaglia they've killed everybody." We went out with granny. Many others thought such a thing impossible, so they stayed in the church and were all killed.
Granny saved our lives.
Aunty hoisted the bedridden uncle over her shoulders and we all took to the wood, with shots ringing out. We headed for Marzabotto. We got a lift on an oxcart and were taken down to Bologna.
In via Sant' Isaia we went inside a school along with other refugees. We went to fetch a saucepan of minestrone from somewhere though non-one could eat it. I was always told I was the only one who ate because I was little and didn't know what was going on.
Granny, mummy, grandpa's sister, grandpa's sister-in-law, uncle and we three children stayed there until the Liberation. I remember Liberation Day: great celebrations, people parading and shouting happily, flags everywhere. I saw it all from the school window.
Then daddy turned up and we moved to a house at Rioveggio, sharing with other people. After daddy joined us another little sister was born.
One recurring dream I've often had: I get shot in the chest and smoke comes out of my mouth.

From Lucia Monari's Diary: my memories date from just after the war. Daddy had just arrived from Sardinia where he had been a prisoner all through the war. Everyone was poor and hungry. To help the worst off families, the Marzabotto authorities arranged for the children to be farmed out to other families.
In church one Sunday at Polverara near Rioveggio - my father was still going to Mass at the time - the priest said the Marzabotto town hall was feeding those children to the communists and the parents just couldn't see. From that day on, daddy never went to church again. That is what mum always told me.
My sister Germana and I were quite happy to go (I had just had my fifth birthday). I was sent to a family at San Giorgio di Piano – anything but a rich family. He was a labourer at the Farmers' Consortium and she was a paddyfield worker. (Their wealth was *inside*.)
The first thing I saw on my arrival when they opened the door was a large framed photo. I thought it was their grandfather, judging by the little old granny sitting on a low chair. Only later did I learn it was a photo of Stalin.

To me the table was a marvel. After being so hungry, to find a plateful of tortellini in front of me was like something out of a fairytale. I was to call them Zio Geppe and Zia Norma; besides them were granny and their son Mario. They kept me all winter and then took me home to Rioveggio. I remember like yesterday, Zio Geppe on his bike and me on the crossbar. Unimaginable nowadays: it was all uphill!

They got very fond of me, and I of them. Whenever she bumped into friends, Zia Norma would proudly say: "This is my little 'un". In winter every year they would come and fetch me and I did nearly all the primary years at San Giorgio di Piano. Though it was a family of non-believers, they knew I was being brought up religious and made me go to church. They even sent me to catechism so I had my First Communion and Confirmation.

We've always kept in touch. Zio Geppe passed away, but with Zia Norma we had a slap-up lunch to celebrate 50 years of our first meeting. I set off by train very early to spend the whole day with her. I was as excited as that January 1946. San Giorgio di Piano was just the same, houses, school, church and the old cinema where I saw my first film. All of us mountain kids had the right to go in free of charge at the 3 o'clock showing. All those Tarzan films, westerns and cartoons; I was so excited, I would have to go to the toilet at least three times.

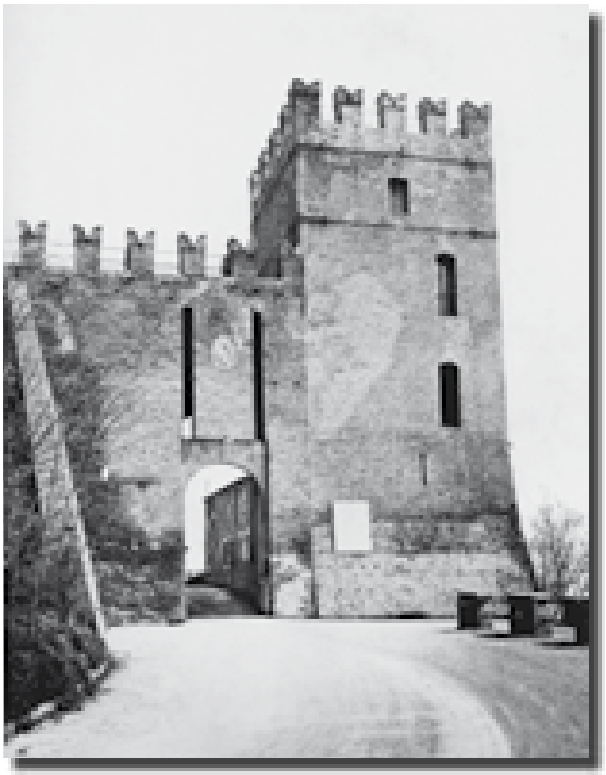
When the moment of parting came, Norma and I were both crying. The train moves out, I wave to her again. Goodbye, San Giorgio. Thanks for giving me a happy day with the woman I loved more than my own mother. What I felt for mum was automatic, spontaneous: she was a marvellous woman. What I felt for Zia Norma was another thing altogether. I couldn't go to her funeral, I was in bed with a bad dose of 'flu. Better that way: to me she's still alive.

My sister Germana went to Garghenzano, a village near San Giorgio. She too has good memories of her foster family.

POGGIOLO - SAN MARTINO
Lucia with her mother, her brother Luigi and sister Germana

GIULIANA STANZANI, aged 5

It all began with Mario, my father, being caught, called up again and deported, first to Modena, then to Germany. Mummy and I were evacuated to a house inside the Abbey of Monteveglio where a German HQ had been set up.
From Sibano where I lived I walked all the way to Monteveglio and got there with my feet all bleeding and full of blisters. A German doctor treated me with ointments and bandaged my feet so that I couldn't get my shoes on. I was crying in pain and the doctor gave me sweets to cheer me up. A good doctor and a nice man: when he was seeing to grandpa's poor feet and Grandpa started moaning, he said: "You, no sweets".
Mummy was run-down and mourning the loss of my little brother a few months earlier. She was terrified of the bombing and never went to bed. To relax a bit she took up knitting and made a pullover in two nights.
When we did get a bed to sleep in, we had no bedclothes, so we put one mattress on top and one underneath to keep warm.
Later we stayed with aunty in Bologna; and later again we went back to Sibano. Mummy had lots of sisters and brothers who helped out. She went to work at the Pioppe hemp-mill, until it was bombed and there was no more work for anybody. As a souvenir she kept a trunkful of linen she had embroidered with the nuns of Pioppe. It got buried where it stood but luckily came to light again.
One day daddy came home with a bagful of presents for us over his shoulder. I was over the moon. Daddy told me his work was in a potato field and they had no food. During his imprisonment he saw many, many people die, so many little children barbarously slaughtered and pregnant women disembowelled. I was a little girl and don't remember so much.
I know my family accepted the offer from Marzabotto town hall to send me to stay with Vittorio and Giorgina Mezzetti at San Giorgio di Piano. There were lots of us from Sibano, including my cousin Anna Marchi who stayed with Vittorio's parents and has kept up with that family to this day.
I was treated royally, but I hardly ever talked. I never asked for anything. At table I just ate what I was given. When I began to go to nursery school, I remember every morning they would buy me an American sweet potato for elevenses. I didn't like the taste but wouldn't say. So on my way to school I used to pick it all to pieces.
Once I had got through first year primary, I returned home. Daddy had found a job and the family began a new life. For a while he worked at the Lama di Reno paper-mill; then he turned to bricklaying and kept it up till retirement.
The nicest memory I have of the San Giorgio di Piano family is how hard they worked to keep us together and to organise parties. We would all meet in a hall and play to our hearts' content. That helped a lot to make it less hard being away from our families. Once the bad times were over, Sibano too put on parties with dancing and singing, which certainly helped us grow up cheerful.



ABBEY OF MONTEVEGLIO

… Mummy and I were evacuated to a house inside the Abbey of Monteveglio where a German HQ had been set up. From Sibano where I lived I walked all the way to Monteveglio and got there with my feet all bleeding and full of blisters …

My parents,
Bianca and Mario

CARLO ANGIOLINI, aged 5

The Germans came to the presbytery at Malfolle where we were evacuated and demanded food. They lined us up alongside the church, about 20 of us: old folk, kids, women holding babies in their arms. I gripped my sister's hand as she sobbed in front of a machine-gun. A soldier began saying *Mangiare o Kaputt* (food or kaput) but food we had none and we were at our wits' end. Then a priest from the Sacred Heart came along – I forget his name – leading a skinny cow. He called out to the soldiers "Hold it, hold it!" and gave them the cow, which saved our lives.

From Malfolle we walked by night to Montasico, Ca' Bortolani, Savigno and Zappolino where we stayed in a cowhouse for a good long time.

After the Liberation we were taken by lorry to the Bologna Red Barracks, and from there we made our way back home. My happiest moment was finding Granny Clerice, whom we had lost track of, and also dad. The SS had rounded him up to drive their looted cattle. Along with his friends "Cicot", "Piroccia" and "Paniga" he managed to escape while they were fording the Po near Mantua. On foot they made their way home through the woods by night.

I stayed with my own family, did secondary school at the Sacro Cuore and then accepted a place as a boarder at the Villa Revedin Seminary in Bologna when Father Nicola Colia found a lady willing to pay my monthly fees. I stayed there till first year of high school.

I was a witness to one gesture of great kindness from a German. They grabbed me away from my screaming mother and sister, took me inside a house and shaved my head since I was full of lice. They gave me food and I couldn't believe my eyes at the jam and white bread. They took me back to the presbytery and gave me a bag with a bit of everything inside.

When I got there I thought: "Better look sharp putting it on the table, or they'll have my arm off". We were so, so hungry!

MALFOLLE
... the Germans came to the Presbytery at Malfolle where we were evacuated, and demanded food…
…a soldier began saying: Mangiare o Kaputt! …a priest from the Sacred Heart gave them a skinny cow, which saved our lives …

UMBERTO POSSENTI, aged 5

My family was composed of my father Possenti Amato, my mother Olivieri Giovanna, my 15 year-old sister Bernardina and me. Such it was in 1942/43 when we moved up to Stanco near Grizzana where father was born.
Our house at Bologna was near the railway. The decision to move to the mountains was due to our fear of the bombing, the railway station being a high-risk zone.
The Grizzana authorities assigned us a room and kitchen in a modern building (which was at the time called Cà Novi in dialect) near Monte (Stanco) where there were already four families from those parts.
Father had served in World War I (1915-18) (he enlisted at 18 years of age). He fought at the Piave and on Monte Grappa. The Austrians captured him and kept him for about two years in a concentration camp in Austria. Released at war's end, he was declared a WWI invalid in recognition of the beatings and deprivation he had received in prison. Right at the beginning of October 1944 an SS reprisal took him away from home where he was convalescing (his state of health was so precarious, he spent more time off sick than fit). That was the last we saw of him. Mother hunted high and low for him, but to no avail. A few days after the reprisal we learnt from neighbours that people had been shot by the River Reno near Carbona–Prada. At the time the Reno was in spate. Pregnant, frightened and despairing, mother went to the place described and came back with father's blood-stained clothes and documents. His body was never found. Two local people in the know gave evidence in Grizzana town hall that Possenti Amato was shot at 4 p.m. on 7th October 1944.

ANCIENT HAMLET OF STANCO (GRIZZANA)
…in 1942/43 we moved up to Stanco di Grizzana where my father was born. Our house at Bologna was near the railway. The decision was taken from fear of the bombing…

In the months that followed, the Grizzana authorities cleared our building to billet the Allies. The inmates moved into their old houses at Stanco. The only ones who stayed on, having nowhere to go, were ourselves. We found ourselves sharing lodgings first with the British Army HQ and then with an advance post of the American Army. Months later a grenade landed in front of the house. My sister and I were on the doorstep and were struck by shrapnel. I got away with a few scratches, but my sister was hit in one hip maiming her for life, and in the chest and one hand by about 40 fragments. An allied army doctor staying on the floor above drove her to the military hospital in Florence. My heavily pregnant mother and I, a five year-old, followed. Just imagine a military hospital in wartime. A nightmare!

There was no room for us anywhere, so after the first night we were forced to leave my sister there. A military truck gave us a lift as far as Castiglione dei Pepoli. From there we made our way to Stanco di Grizzana on foot, crossing the Farneto scrubland. It was a long weary march and night fell midway. A farming family who saw us took pity on a small boy alone with a pregnant woman and offered us a makeshift couch for the night.

The front was advancing, the Germans falling back. The officers of the allied army in the adjacent rooms upped and left. We were all on our own. At nightfall one evening an advance party of allies, South African troops, engaged the Germans in hand-to-hand fighting and captured Monte di Stanco. The same night or the one after, mother heard groaning coming from near the house. She plucked up courage in spite of her fears, went outside and, guided by the groans, found a young wounded soldier cowering under the bread oven. He had a great gash from an incendiary bomb. She managed to drag him into the house, dress his wound as best she could and keep him hidden under the stairs for a couple of days. Via a young partisan she notified the allies who came by jeep in the night and took him away. We never knew if he came through.

On 1st March 1945 my baby brother was born and was given the name Amato after father. In June 1945 we returned to Bologna, minus father, with my sister injured, the new baby only a few months old, and no source of sustenance. Until we began to receive our widow and dependents' pension, we lived on charity.

Grizzana had brought us no luck.

I was there during a round-up in July 1944 when a deaf elderly neighbour, Mingarelli Tullio, failed to hear a "Halt!" from a Nazi soldier behind him and was machine-gunned on the spot. As a child of five, familiar with death, frightened by bombing and Nazi squads knocking at the door, I reacted by anxiety symptoms and fear at the sight of a uniform, even when worn by British and allied soldiers. The whole experience left its mark on my character, above all, and cast its shadow on my capacity for joie de vivre, a gift all children are entitled to.

After father died my family was composed of my mother Giovanna, my brother Amato, myself and my sister Bernardina

CATERINA FORNASINI, aged 6

In July 1942 my uncle, Don Giovanni Fornasini, took over the Parish of Sperticano and Granny and I went to live with him. I remember our arrival at Marzabotto Station. A trap was sent to meet us and I felt like a queen. Mummy was working at Porretta and only came to see me at weekends, while daddy was called up as a soldier in Sicily.
Life was fine: there was a wonderful garden behind the presbytery where I used to play with all the tiny toys my generous uncle would always bring me back from his short trips. Then everything changed.
Refugees started to arrive and the presbytery filled with people, whom I would talk to and get on well with. Dario Minelli, the butcher of Pian di Venola, rigged me up a swing and I was so happy at all these attentions. All around, terrible things were going on, but we had still been spared any such violence, until 8th October 1944.
On that day the SS came to the presbytery. Uncle was away. The SS straight away cleared everything out of his study into the corridor. Then they ordered us to free our bedrooms for their officers, while the simple soldiers moved into an outhouse beside the presbytery where uncle taught evening classes. We were left with the kitchen and one sitting room where we made up our beds, while uncle slept in the pantry. He lost his temper at this high-handedness, and was never afraid to show the SS his disapproval when they bullied people, whom he was constantly defending.
On the evening of 12th October, birthday of the Captain commanding the SS company, a big party was arranged with special invitations to the women. Previously they had been forced to cook loads of food, particularly desserts. Uncle took two refugee girls to the party and never let them out of sight.
On the morning of the 13th October the SS Captain told granny to wake up the Pastor, as he called uncle, because he wanted to meet him at Monte Sole. Granny implored uncle not to go, but he said he had to go up to San Martino to bury the dead, and off he set alone.
He didn't come back for lunch, or dinner, so my mummy, Corinna, asked the captain: *"Pastore?"* And the answer she got was: *"Pastore Kaputt"*.
At that point the SS started partying and calling for wine. It went on all night and as they finished bottles mummy was sent down to the cellar for more. The SS dressed up in drag, played the harmonium and danced on the tables. Granny was stony-faced, dumbstruck.
I was a witness to all this and couldn't bear granny's silent grief. I had two dolls with china heads and, on impulse, I broke their heads on the iron bedstead. The gesture brought granny to her senses and she started crying. From that moment I saw her crying all the time.
On Christmas Eve an order came to evacuate the area and we had to get out of the presbytery. We left Sperticano on foot and went down to the junction with the Porrettana highway. There at 6 p.m. and open RSI[7] truck awaited us which we all boarded: us and the refugees. I was crying, so to cheer me up they let me ride in the cab with mummy. We drove to Pragatto

near Crespellano and were put up in a cowhouse. It felt like heaven: there were cows in it, making it warm.
A few days later the farmer gave us a room to sleep in, and we were glad to be together. Daddy was still missing; he had been having a whole lot of painful adventures in the meantime.
On Christmas Day mummy went to Mass and met a man who had been a colleague of grandpa's. She told him what she had been through, and that she'd had no news of daddy ever since he got a leg wound on Monte Sole and was taken to the Castello de' Rossi to be operated on. Mummy and granny did manage to see him for a few minutes, before the ambulance took him away, but since then not a word.
I can imagine how mummy trembled to hear that this man worked as a hospital orderly at San Giovanni in Persiceto where so many Marzabotto wounded had been taken. He asked her for a photo of her husband and promised to look for him.
On 6th January the man came back with daddy perched on the crossbar, crutches and all. At long last we were all reunited. Then the Cardinal of Bologna wanted to see us and offered us a room in the old Seminary on via de' Mille.
After the Liberation, daddy set off on foot to find out about his brother. The fields and tracks were still mined, but he managed to find the body of Uncle Giovanni behind the San Martino graveyard. It was 22nd April 1945. Uncle Giovanni was buried at Sperticano, first in the graveyard and then, in deference to his wishes, inside the church itself, below the altar of the Madonna Addolorata. The occasion was the first anniversary of his death, 13th October 1945. For the exhumation of the remains, Alfredo Palmieri, custodian of the cemetery, came down from Porretta. My husband Giovanni Bosco Ricci told me that he met Mr Palmieri

SPERTICANO
...8th October '44. That day the S.S. came to the presbytery where so many evacuees were living with us …

many years later and was given the details of Don Fornasini's death. With his forefinger and middle finger Alfredo touched his chest to show exactly where uncle's body bore two bullet holes from the weapon that killed him.
Not going to school throughout those years I missed him a lot, but the most painful things I still remember were granny's constantly grieving face and the sound of the German tongue. I still get goose bumps whenever I hear a German speak: the nasty bullying SS faces come flooding back.

Cemetery of S. MARTINO
...On 22nd April '45 my father found the dead body of my uncle, Don Giovanni Fornasini, behind the cemetery of San Martino

ANNA LIPPI, aged 6

I used to live at Susano near Vergato, on a smallholding called Plita. I lived in the farmer's cottage, not far from the big house which at the time had become a German army headquarters and in due course that of Walter Reder's SS Command.
In that house there was a cellar dug almost completely into the hillside. For better protection the soldiers lined it with bits of cloth stolen from houses all around. When the SS returned home after one of their raids, they would force my 17 year-old sister to wash their blood-stained "sabres".
In November 1944 the SS turned up with a group of civilians rounded up from nearby farmhouses and we were to be part of that group. They halted for a couple of hours and in that space of time mother managed to free my brother, hide him in the hayloft, dress him up as a girl with a scarf on his head and mix him in with the group.
I was a bit too young to keep up with the others and ran the risk of being shot on the spot according to SS rules. So mum stuffed me in a sack where they'd hidden a ham, afraid that they might go hungry. She simply hissed: "Don't breathe, whatever happens, don't breathe." She hoisted the sack onto her shoulder with a little help from my brother and we set out for Tolè. An SS group in front and one behind were collecting people from the houses along the way. Once we got to the muster point, they would ship us off to concentration camps. Anyone who was too tired or stopped would be shot there and then.
Mum was born at Tolè and knew the area inside out. There was thick fog that night so, checking on the guards' movements, she told us children: "When I open the window, we'll throw ourselves out".
She knew the spot, and knew we ran no risk; and so it was. We rolled part of the way down a bank and no-one noticed our escape. I didn't dare to breathe, even when mum asked if I was hurt, begging me to answer as it was too dark to see a thing.
Another moment of panic my mother and sister went through – this one I do remember – was when we left our home and daddy stayed on behind. My sister clung despairingly to his trousers and the SS thrust him downstairs with a rifle butt.
Daddy wasn't killed by the SS: he was needed to fetch firewood and do odd jobs like making up parcels to send to Germany full of all their plunder from our houses. Every day, just to remind him his life hung by a thread, they would say: "Today your comrade Kaputt". It was daddy's turn next.
He wanted to run away but he still had his old parents with him whom he couldn't leave. An Austrian soldier let him escape that night after promising he would save his parents. At midnight they were taken onto the main road where a munitions cart was due to pass. This picked up my grandparents and set them down in Tolè square at 4 o'clock in the morning. When mum heard about the old people, she guessed they might be grandpa and granny

[7] Repubblica di Salò, Mussolini's puppet republic).

and went to get them. My family and I were taken in by a Tolè family, along with our grandparents, and daddy too when he joined up with us at the beginning of April.
Having succeeded in escaping and crossing the river at Vergato bent on joining up with the Allies, daddy realised the front was falling back and decided to make his way to Tolè where he imagined we would be. First he stopped off at our home to get some pears. Ours were 'Scipio' pear trees whose fruit keeps right through until April. He found three pears and brought them for us. When he came we were overjoyed about him – and the pears, which no-one had eaten since autumn.
We next went to Zocca to stay with an uncle. It was after the Liberation that we returned home. Everything was gutted. Mum washed a bit of floor so she could mix some flour my uncle had given her and cook up something. Only one room had been left, and that was full of wheat; but everything had to be thrown away since the SS had used it as a toilet. Daddy took an electricity pole to prop up the ceiling of the only room we could live in. When our family learnt there were families prepared to look after us children in difficult circumstances, they jumped at the offer.
Departure day came and I set off in tears towards San Venanzio di Galliera. I got there towards evening. I was bashful and crying without my parents, but I found this big family: Armando Stevani, his wife, two sons and two daughters who asked me as soon as we met: "You coming with us?" I said yes through my tears. They got me to talk about my family and one of the daughters said: "You can pretend I'm your sister". At night-time we went to bed together in a big bed, me between the two sisters.
The morning after, they got out two new towels and told me they were mine to keep and take away with me. I soon cheered up, they were so nice and considerate.
They invited dad over, and he was pleased to see me fitting in well and being looked after. I went to school and stayed on a lot longer than planned. One day Armando, the father, and one son took me back home. When he saw our house in ruins and how we had nothing, tears came into his eyes. I'm still moved, whenever I remember.
In 1948, now back home, I resumed going to school in my own village. The schoolroom was a metal shed; for a satchel I had a metal canister where soldiers kept mortar bombs. Daddy built me a little stool as there weren't any chairs. Only the odd desk had remained and an old stove where, to keep warm, we had to bring some firewood from home every morning. At break time we would go off into the woods to fetch some more.
I always kept up visits to my San Venanzio family and we never forgot one another.

My relatives harvest the wheat under the watchful gaze of a blackshirt making sure they don't steal

CHIARA ELMI, aged 6

My family lived at Cedda between Stanco and Grizzana. Every evening there would be fighting between the Germans on Monte Stanco and the Americans opposite.
The bodies of various Germans and Americans were buried in a chestnut grove I used to cross on my way to school at Grizzana every day. It was autumn time, and when I had an afternoon shift at school, it would be getting dark as I walked home. I was afraid since dogs came out at night and scratched at the shallow graves, leaving bits of corpse showing.
We were staying in a shelter built on a farm Vergato way. When the Germans passed they did nothing to hurt us but stole everything they found.
One day we all set off for the Refugee Centre. Our Nannetti relatives from Camporonzo were also heading for Florence after the massacre and general destruction. They were leaving a granny and an aunt with a little baby, and we left brother Ezio to lend a hand. For one night we also had Aunt Giannina staying but her daughter Anna Rosa, my cousin, was very ill and aunty's plan was to hurry on to Florence to find a doctor. My brother Luigi (who was 15 in 1944) relates that in the evenings Ezio was forced to take the cart down to Vergato to fetch ammunition for the Germans. He was always at their beck and call, fetching food and things.
It may have been towards the end of October when we went to Castiglion dei Pepoli and then on towards Tuscany. It was the Americans who ordered us to leave. We went from one place to another: Castiglion Fiorentino, Zoccoli and eventually Cortona where we stayed in a church from December to April. We kept moving on when there was no room left as other people moved in. We would be put up in great big bedrooms and corridors, all together with palliasses on the floor and a few bedclothes. At mealtimes we used to queue up with our saucepan and wait for our rations. Dad found some work with the railwaymen at Cortona station, my brothers Mario and Luigi went and picked olives for the peasants and were given a little oil in return. I had to go to school.
When we finally got home, we found part of the house bombed flat. There was no aid to be had, so we all buckled down together and bit by bit returned to normal life.

My brothers Mario and Adolfo

CEDDA DI STANCO (GRIZZANA)
...The Americans ordered us to leave. We went to all sorts of places: Castiglion Fiorentino, Zoccoli, ending up in a church at Cortona

ANTONIETTA SASSI, aged 7

I come from *Serra di Sopra* near Pioppe di Salvaro. My family and I moved into the cowhouse when the Germans took over our house for a military hospital.
Near us there lived an elderly schoolmistress and one day she finished under shellfire from the SS who were still up on Monte Salvaro. Daddy and the cobbler rushed over to rescue her. She was still alive and whispered that underground in the vegetable patch there was money for her nephew. Shortly afterwards she died, and when daddy and the cobbler saw that all was quiet, they went into the vegetable patch, found the money and went back to the cobbler's to count it in front of witnesses.
At that point a shell landed, the cobbler was killed instantly and daddy was badly wounded. All the lower part of his stomach was blown away, and he would die three years later at 37 years of age, having had plastic surgery twelve times.
Little by little people were moving up towards Creda since the Americans had reached that point. Mummy and I were left on our own, without a soul around. Mummy was looking after my father with nothing but a few warm bandages, so one night she decided to hitch up the cows to the cart and carry him up to Creda.
Mummy led and I pushed from behind. Then a shell exploded and killed the cows. We dashed back into the cowhouse and two days later set out again. The road was deep in mud and mummy lost her shoes, but when she realised she had left a suitcase behind with the few things we needed, she went all the way home again. On the way back she was stopped by a German who had been hiding in a hollow chestnut-tree, and he robbed her of everything she had.
Meanwhile I was on the cart helping daddy who needed to reach Creda if he was to get first aid. We were put up in a large room without any ceiling and no lighting. Daddy was getting worse by the hour, so the Americans decided to take him away in an ambulance. Left to our own devices, mummy and I crossed the front and were taken in by the Refugee Centre at San Casciano dei Bagni, which was where we heard that daddy was in a hospital in Florence. Mummy went down with nephritis and she too was admitted to hospital. A kind San Casciano family volunteered to look after me and not leave me all alone at the Refugee Centre, as well as nursing me through a painful bout of whooping cough that I'd caught on top of all I'd been through.
Later the family took me to see mummy, who was in the same hospital, Santa Maria Novella in Florence. She didn't recognise me, I was so wasted by whooping cough. She just lay there looking, without the strength to lift the bedclothes. Two children of the family had to tell her I was Antonietta. We stared at one another and all we could do was cry.
Those people were so kind to me, as were my second foster family. When we all got home, daddy was taken to the Bologna Sant' Orsola Hospital. Our home had been stripped bare and it fell to the chef at the Pizzardi (now Bellaria) hospital to look after. He took me to a great big hall in Bologna where people came and chose their children. I stayed three months with that family; they were nice to me, sent me to school, fed me very well and, boy, did I need it!

CREDA

…father was badly wounded. Mummy was looking after him with nothing but a few warm bandages, so one night she decided to hitch up the cows to the cart and take him up to Creda where the Americans were.

CARMEN SPINNATO, aged 7

The phone rings: *"Hi, it's me, Virginia, your mum. How are you?"* Virginia is not my mum. On the phone I too say: *"Hi, it's me, your daughter"* (I know she likes to hear it). I met Virginia, or rather, I was taken to Virginia when I was 7 and she was 21.

It's winter 1945, the war finished a few months ago and the survivors are trying to make a new life for themselves among the rubble. Our family has fled from the war-ravaged area of Marzabotto, Vergato, Pioppe di Salvaro, Grizzana, Gaggio Montano and other small villages, and made for Bologna. We own nothing: nothing to wear or eat. To live in, we've been allotted a single space carved out of a laboratory by an improvised brick wall down the middle. My mother goes and waits on the 'gentry' who live above our bed-sit. They pay her a pittance and a little food, leftovers from their numerous parties – what the Lady has let her take away. Every morning father goes in search of work with a gang of unemployed while my two year-old brother and I stay in bed all morning to keep warm and not feel so hungry. The biggest problem is the children, who need everything from food to schooling and a warm house. The Labour Office is set up and, together with the town authorities, appeals to such farmers, farmhands and workers of the Bologna hinterland as the war has spared to take in one of the "mountain children" to their homes, where at least there is no shortage of food. It's all organised in the space of a few weeks. Every family gets a card inviting them to an assembly in the Town Hall. On the cards they write the name of the family that will be hosting us: mine is Passerini from Rubizzano and my kid brother's is Baccilieri from Maccaretolo.

I set out on the coach one Sunday morning to San Pietro in Casale. Lots of men have gathered to welcome us in the town hall. The women are at home making the place ready. Placement operations begin. They call out the child, the foster family name and the village.

Mum is crying at losing us and realises late in the day that our two families live in quite different villages. The boy who is already carrying my baby brother tries to console her: "Don't worry, miss, we'll cycle over with him to see his sister every so often. It's under half an hour by bike."

Amid the tearful mums, wailing children and gulping men, the placement business comes to an end. The parents go off again by coach, promising their children "see you on Sunday". A promise they can't keep, not having the busfare and, above all, not having warm clothing or shoes without holes in, it being mid winter.

The man who has come to fetch me is called Ezio – a gentle giant. I hop on his crossbar and let him wrap his cloak round us. At the house I meet the whole family, a farming family: Virginia, her husband Dante, brother Ermes and their parents. Waiting for me is a cup of hot milk with sugar. It's ages since I drank any.

It's only a few days to Christmas and the family are busy making me some warm new clothes. They also buy me a pair of stout shoes. On Christmas Day Virginia does my curls and takes me in front of the crib like the other children to say the "Sermone".

Naturally it's in dialect. I can still remember it:

-cus'el cal quel chle là in cla paja?
(what's that thing there in the straw?)

-ela la mi vesta ch'a m'imbarbaja?
(are my eyes deceiving me?

-el un diament? El un rubei?
(is it a diamond? a ruby?)

-ste zet, ste zet, l'è Gesù Bambei!
(hush, hush it's the infant Jesus)

Two months later mummy came to see me and my brother's family were invited over. The whole family came, but my brother started crying as soon as mummy picked him up; he didn't recognise her and wanted the other 'mummy'.
Mummy was crying, the other mummy too. She apologised, saying they'd always talked to him about his mummy and daddy, she hoped she'd understand – and the two women hugged each other.
After a big tea for everyone, baby Mauro starts playing with me and in the end lets mummy hold him.
When the time comes to say goodbye, I burst out crying, I want to go home. They persuade me to stay and I was so unhappy, I wetted the bed for some days. I stayed at that house right to the end of the school year. Until I was 18 I always spent my holidays with my second family. We never lost touch, and above all remained really fond of one another. None of us ever forgot that test of solidarity among poor folk[8].

[8] Taken from *I bambini della montagna* by Carmen Spinnato.

BENITO ACACCI, aged 7

I came from Malfolle, a very poor place. One afternoon we heard the Germans were coming up and mother said straight away: "Clear out! Clear out!" My brother and I hid behind the hedge and watched as the Germans lined up mother, granny, my sister and about twenty other people. Women, children and old men, locals and refugees.
Lucia, a young woman of about 22, knew a bit of German and assured an officer there were no partisans there. He took her word for it, gave us one hour and said he'd be back. We took to our heels with two cows my cousin gave us, and headed for Monteveglio. When we got there we found they already had things well in hand and you could feel the warmth of fellow feeling. They'd made a cowhouse ready with some straw and sacks of corn where we could sleep, and arranged a way of keeping us fed. With an old man and some other children, I used to go and see the farmers: some would give us a slab of polenta, others apples and other things to eat.
We only had to go on two days as there was enough to eat.
Up there we met another German who came to see us in our cowhouse and wanted to teach me to count in German. Then one day the Germans moved out and the Americans arrived.
From our building on the hillside above, we heard that the Americans were occupying Monteveglio down below. We children set off at a run and saw the jeeps and behind them their trucks with all the equipment, including machine-guns.
There were only black soldiers in those jeeps and they kept throwing us chocolates. At the time I didn't know what chocolate was. Wonderful! The jeeps drove dead slow and we children ran behind, ready to catch or scoop up the bars of chocolate. That was how our war ended.

One day word came from the Marzabotto authorities that we could live with farmers at San Giorgio di Piano, along with 29 other children. It was 1946. We left by lorry and on reaching the town square of San Giorgio we found quite a crowd in front of the Town Hall waiting for us and cheering and cheering.
Then came the placements. When it came to placing me and my brother Romano (9 years old), a Mr Poggi, the local bell-ringer, stepped forward and said: "I'll take the two brothers". I immediately piped up: "I'm called Benito, but I want to be called Primo."
We rode to the house in a horse and carriage, and found the whole family waiting to give us a warm welcome. After we'd eaten and had a nice bath, they showed us to our bedroom which had a fabulous bed. On waking next morning, Romano and I were so overjoyed we started singing Bandiera rossa la trionferà. For us it was the beginning of a period of good cheer and respect. I never heard a cross word.
Next, the Poggis decided to send us to school where I had to cram two years into one, the first and secondary primary. What with the war, I hadn't started school.

At San Giorgio di Piano I used to go to the cinema. To gratify me, I was given a money-box with a few coins in each time, and I would sell lupin-seeds.
Romano and I were well-loved by the whole village. Above all, we lived in an incredible family. I think the Poggis were born to make all youngsters feel like their own children. I stayed seven months with them and then went home, but whenever I had time, I would go and see them. They would let me work in their shop and give me responsible jobs to do. The Poggis were there for me on the day I got married.
I have fond memories of all the folk at Sibano with whom we could share what little we had and give parties, which soon made us children forget our wartime fears. I did have one recurring nightmare, however, until I was 38. Every night I would dream of the Pioppe bombardments I lived through with my granny coming back from Vergato: from the first bomb falling at Camugnone and all the rest. I prayed like mad that day, my hair stood on end, and for a long time afterwards I wetted the bed which I would try and hide so as not to upset mum and granny. Every night I dreamt of the drone of aeroplanes, and imagined I was flying.
I was only 13 when I had to solve the job problem. There wasn't enough work to go round, but I had to keep myself and my family. For a month I got a job at a carpenter's in Casalecchio. I was an apprentice so I got no pay. I didn't even earn enough for the bus pass, so I straight away looked for another job.
I went to Bologna and worked as a navvy for a builder (paid 10 lire an hour), until Gabusi from Marzabotto decided to take me on at the Etruscan museum where the work was less tiring for a boy of my age. Gabusi liked me and never failed to bring me a ham sandwich every day. I still feel grateful to my village and folk where, after all we suffered, we managed to grow up together with love and solidarity all round. We knew how to live, many many moments of happiness.

I'd like to end my story by thanking the authorities at Marzabotto and Monteveglio, and the people of San Giorgio di Piano who managed in next to no time to help me and brother Romano forget our mother's apron strings at a time when mothers' legs were what counted most.
I'd like to thank Switzerland since, on my return, I was able to embark on a normal life in what we called 'huts', though they were fine wooden chalets with all found, cutlery, furniture and linen. Every object had a red cross printed on it. Next to every chalet each of us found a vegetable plot ready and waiting. Thanks to Switzerland my family and I got away from the cellar our relatives cleared out to make room for us. It was enough to survive, since it had a hearth we could get warm by. In that cellar my sister was lighting the fire in the hearth and failed to notice that there was explosive among the firewood. She got badly burnt and it took us eight hours to get her to Vergato hospital. She didn't make it. She is another one I want to remember.

PIOPPE - CAMUGNONE

...I had a recurring nightmare until I was 38: every night I would dream of the Pioppe bombardment I lived through with my granny coming back from Vergato, the first bomb on Camugnone and the rest...

MARIA PASELLI, aged 8

I lived at the farm called Tomba at Pioppe di Salvaro in the district of Grizzana, with my father Augusto, my mother Fulvia Nannetti, my grown-up brothers Arnaldo and Giovannino, my 13 year-old brother Mario and little brother Quinto who was 3.
On 29 September 1944 father got word of an SS raid from a man who lived at Fornace so he took to the woods with Arnaldo and Giovannino.
The hours passed and all was quiet, so father decided to go back home and feed the cows. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when he was captured by the SS and, along with two or three Tuscans rounded up along the way, he was taken to Pioppe where the Stables already held other prisoners.
He and his companions were left by the SS at Tiramolla, a house near the Stables, until some other soldiers could come and fetch them. Father succeeded in escaping by hiding behind some brushwood, and made his way to Camporonzo where mum's family lived. He hid in the wood and granny Zaira brought him food.
A few days went by and granny didn't show up, so father crept up to the house. He heard the sound of crying and sighing and learnt of the la Botte atrocity in which Grandpa Adolfo and Uncle Guido were shot. Also, that the other prisoners, including Uncles Alfredo and Giannino, had been deported to Germany.
His plan was to go straight back home, crossing the river. He couldn't sleep there with the SS still around, so he decided to hide up in the wood with his brother Angiolino.
Arnaldo had meanwhile taken refuge at Carviano, while Giovanni was taken by the Germans to carry away ammunition by night from the front line near Carviano.
When the Americans fought the battle for Monte Salvaro we could clearly hear the shellfire and the cries of Germans getting wounded. I saw injured Germans going by on ox-carts driven by Salvaro folk down to Vergato hospital, and I also saw columns of American prisoners guarded by Germans.
For three days we were cut off. The Americans didn't make the progress we were all hoping for, and after three days the Germans moved back in and restored the telephone lines.
Our family were ordered to quit by the Germans on 10th November. The plan was to go down to Bazzano, but after a night at Calvenzano where a farmer put us up, we decided to cross the river and head for Creda, which the Americans had already reached.
Crossing the river had to be done by night and the least dangerous point was opposite Campiglio. If you didn't know that, you could drown. Many people did, including a lady from the Vignudelli family from Lastra, a farm above Calvenzano di Vergato. As they forded the river, father carried me and mother, though pregnant, carried my kid brother Quinto. When we got to Creda there were black soldiers to meet us, perhaps Brazilians or South Africans, who then took us to Grizzana, from which point army trucks drove us over to Florence.

Our first port of call was a church, then the Refugee Centre at N° 24 via della Scala. Being pregnant, mum was given a camp-bed, but the rest of us slept on the ground. Arnaldo worked in the kitchen and was given a little wage. Mario took a wooden box and shoe polish down to the station to shine the Americans' shoes.

Brother Quinto went into hospital for an emergency throat operation and died there. When mum asked a nun for a garment for the child, she was told there weren't enough clothes to go round the living. So she wrapped the body in a cloth for burial at a Florence cemetery.

A few weeks later mum went into hospital to have her baby. Next to her bed was a lady from Florence whose baby girl had died at birth. The lady volunteered to share the baby clothes with mum and other room-mates who had just had their babies; which is how mum managed to clothe my baby brother Pietro.

On our return in an open army truck after the Liberation, Pietro caught pneumonia. We couldn't find a doctor at home to prescribe medicine so Pietro, who was born healthy, died soon after.

On 21st June 1945 my brother Mario was blown up by a mine and died. The accident happened between the wood and the house. Mario was laid on a ladder for a stretcher. They had to wade the river as bridges were down. He was carried along the Porrettana road to Madonna del Bosco and taken from there to Porretta hospital on an army lorry. His body was badly mangled and he couldn't be saved. Father brought him home, having stayed with him all the time. When the accident happened, mum was away from home. She went to see granny, and never set eyes on Mario again.

What with all her sorrows and exhaustion, mum was no longer a young woman. Only as an old woman do I remember her face carefree and youthful. She was younger at 80 than at 40.

The first to come home from Florence, on foot, were my brothers and Uncle Angiolino. The house was outwardly intact, but inside the first floor had been demolished.

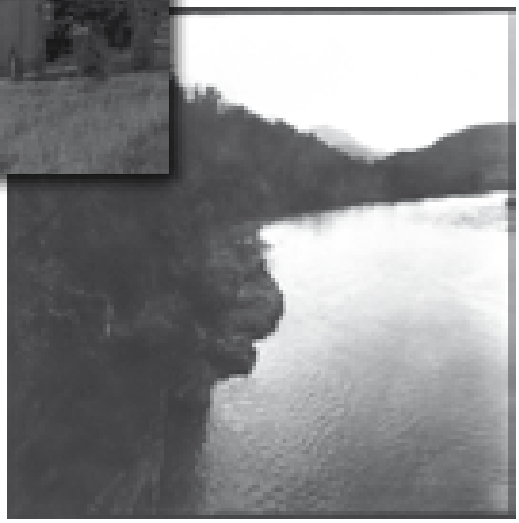
Fulvia, my mother, with my brother Quinto who died at the hospital in Florence, after we sheltered at the Refugee Centre in via della Scala

Sacks of corn all cut open, with wheat among the rubble. We picked it out and cleaned it, our only form of nourishment. For a fortnight we lived off biscuits left by the Americans. Like every other family, we had buried chests full of linen, gold objects and food that would keep. Like everybody else in the village, we found nothing left. The "jackals of war" had passed our way.

After all we experienced in the war, we children were left with our fears. I remember one day as we came back from school we heard an aeroplane overhead. All seven of us acted crazy and nobody could calm us down.

After the war my family and I stayed in our home and began to till the fields again, though every day there was the danger of treading on a mine. There were official mine-disposal people. We had maps of the mined areas, but destruction was everywhere around and every day someone was blown up.

Ourselves, we came through that permanent danger. In due course my sister Palma was born, and together we rebuilt the family.



CALVENZANO

...we were ordered to quit our home by the Germans on 10th November... after a night at Calvenzano where a farmer put us up, we decided to cross the river… Crossing the river had to be done by night and the least dangerous point was opposite Campiglio…

VITTORIO ROSMINI, aged 8

I lived at Rocca di Malfolle in the district of Marzabotto, the last house before thick woodland. I realised the war was on when I saw them bombing the hemp-mill at Pioppe di Salvaro where mum worked. Some men were killed in a reprisal at Faggiolo. People were getting out fast and mum came straight back home.

There were about 14 of us in the family. Dad, uncle and grandpa had dug a shelter: three separate holes beneath a track that led through the wood. It was only 20 cm from the ceiling to the track surface, so in wet weather anyone passing overhead might well have sunk into the hole. Inside you couldn't stand up. There was clothing and food. They leaned brushwood against the bank as a hide. They just looked like bundles of sticks drying in the sun.

One day dad came out of the shelter to visit us at home. There was a raid and, luckily, the Germans didn't notice him hiding on the first floor, so he wasn't sent to Germany with the other men found in the yard. Dad lay up in the wood and the family used to say he was in Germany.

On various occasions our lives were saved by Don Fornasini of Sperticano, where I did my confirmation. Anyone being bothered by Germans would take refuge with Don Fornasini who had the authority to get them to go away.

My family and I moved out. We hitched up the cows to the cart and, taking bags of bread with us, we set out towards Ca' Bortolani, Santa Croce and Montasico, and when we did get home again, there was nothing left.

That was why my family accepted the short-term foster placement; their only concern was that I didn't go to a peasant family since I was always one for riding on the back of any animal and they were afraid I might get hurt.

I caught the coach from Marzabotto and rode down to Bologna where I was fed; then in the afternoon I went on to San Giorgio di Piano and was placed with the family of Mayor Felice Vecchietti (known as *Felizein*) and his wife Dolores Triggia, who straight away took me to the municipal school canteen for dinner. It was cold and snowing. The only warm thing I had was a lambswool scarf, handmade by mum and dyed red. I was proud of my red scarf and greeted the mayor with the words: "I'm called Rosmini, the partisan".

The mayor's wife Dolores immediately noticed I had flimsy shoes on, and since her husband was a clever stylist and Director of the Shoemakers' Cooperative, she asked him to cut me a pair of boots and a belt, my trousers being held up by string. I used to think the world of myself in those boots. I was an urchin but people liked me. The family took me to their hearts and called me *"al putein d'la muntagna"*[9]. I did a whole school year there and got on well from the start with classmates and teachers. I may say I was a well-loved kid. Every year I used to go back and see Felizein and Dolores and now that they're gone I go to San Giorgio

[9] The mountain kid.

di Piano every year to place a flower on their grave. I remember it wasn't a rich household, but every day some poor person knocked at the door. There would always be a plate of pasta for everyone.

ROCCA DI MALFOLLE
My mum Olga in front of our house

ROCCA DI MALFOLLE
My family and I moved out. We hitched up the cows to the cart and, taking bags of bread with us, we set out towards Ca' Bortolani, Santa Croce and Montasico, and when we did get home again, there was nothing left

FRANCA VENTURI, aged 8

I lived at Casalino, a large country house (possibly a convent once) between Pioppe di Salvaro and Calvenzano, in the district of Vergato.
My family consisted of mummy (Elisa Nannetti), daddy (Virginio Venturi) and seven children: three boys and four girls.
In the round-up all over our area on 29th September 1944 my father, brother Mario and 14 other men whose families were evacuated to Casalino were taken prisoner. They were conducted to Pioppe and held in the Stables and the Church, which stand opposite each other on the same square. The SS picked who was to be deported to workcamps in Germany and who should be shot.
Father died at la Botte, Pioppe, on October 1st 1944, while brother Mario was taken with many others to Pioppe Station where a train would take them directly to the Red Barracks at Corticella near Bologna, the sorting house for Germany. Before they left Pioppe, tired and humiliated after three days' confinement, these men were ordered by the SS to form a long chain from the hemp-mill to the station, remove the bales of cloth and packs of hemp thread from the warehouses and pass them down to be loaded onto railway trucks bound for Germany.
My brother succeeded in escaping from the Red Barracks, and walked home, sticking to the hills since the Porrettana road was still too dangerous.
Living with us was Augusta, Mario's young wife. When our house became a German headquarters (30 or 40 men), Augusta and Mario hid in the cellars. We all hoped the Americans would soon liberate the area, being on Monte Salvaro near Grizzana already; but it was not to be.
Casalino was constantly under shellfire from the Americans opposite.
The Germans began mining the area in order to slow down the American advance, and when the situation grew extremely dangerous they ordered mum to quit Casalino with her daughters, me, 17 year-old Anna and Maria who was 14. We were forced to reveal our secret, that we were harbouring Mario and Augusta in the cellars. The person we told was a soldier who had always protected us. This was a medical NCO who had often cursed the war as a *"scheissen guerra",* which means "shitty war". He was also homesick for his family and told mum: "I have also mummy in Germany. Don't know if I see again." Sensitive that he was, he felt bound to reassure mum when she worried about Anna having to cook for the Germans every day. He would say: "I protect Anna, nobody offend her". So it was Anna who told him about Mario.
At that point it was his duty to tell his Company commander at once, and Mario would have been shot on the spot. Once again the NCO intervened on our family's behalf. He asked the CO not to kill Mario but punish him with forty strokes of the cane. Then he got the soldier detailed to carry out the punishment to spare Mario from the pain.
The whole company heard the thwacks of the rod which actually fell on wooden grape

crates, not Mario. Our benefactor also ordered the mule train orderly carrying provisions to the front to stow away Mario and Augusta, let them sleep where they camped for the night and set them free the next morning. Mario and Augusta were duly released and, after days on the march, eventually reached Maranello where all Augusta's family were anxiously awaiting them.

The next day the NCO hoisted me onto his shoulders while other soldiers helped mum and my sisters to move to a safer spot. We came to a smallholding called Pusadur near Malfolle. The soldiers accompanying us turned back and we were afraid because the locals kept saying: "They'll kill the lot of us". We slept one night there and next morning set off again on foot, heading for Tiola near Castello di Serravalle. We would halt when we got tired and ask at any farmhouse on the way for a bottle of water and a piece of bread. At long last we got to Tiola where a farm family put us up. The farmer made up a straw bed and said: "Stay here as long as you like". We'd brought granny's quilt with us and, fleas or no fleas, were able to rest at long last under the warm bedclothes.

Anna noticed that the post was delivered to Tiola so she decided to send Augusta a postcard to let her know where we were. As soon as she could, Augusta sent a card to her brother Bruno, who came for us in a carriage and so at last we got to Maranello.

Augusta's family gave us generous hospitality. We found a tiny apartment there too, and the bare necessities to get by, hoping it wouldn't be for too long. Every day Bruno brought us fresh bread and every Sunday he gave us meat to make stock with.

A really exceptional thing happened while we were there. My brother Aldo managed to send his family a message over a radio programme. We heard from a family nearby who owned a radio. Aldo said: "Mamma, if you hear me, this is Aldo speaking, just to let you know we're all alive and well."

My brother Mario was bent at all costs on getting back to Casalino. When he learnt that the route inevitably meant going via Florence, which was already a liberated zone, he set off on the long journey without a second thought, again in the company of Augusta. After a few days they got to the Refugee Centre in Florence and learnt from friends in common that brother Aldo and his wife Feridia were up at Fiesole with their daughter, staying with the Capuchin friars. Mario, Aldo and their families were finally reunited, an emotional occasion for all.

Meanwhile our other brother Armando and his wife Elena, with their four under-age children, together with our sister Eleonora, her husband Renato and a young daughter, had crossed the river Reno which was still dangerously high. That very night, unfortunately, a lady with their party drowned. They made it to the Creda farm where the Americans drove them by army truck to Castiglion dei Pepoli and, after staying the night there, on to the San Casciano Refugee Centre. They wouldn't get back home till after the Liberation.

One day there was important news on the radio: the American offensive had advanced and our area was free. Aldo decided not to set off straight away, while Mario and Augusta immediately made for Casalino.

After the Liberation Mummy, Anna, Maria and I left Maranello and found hospitality at the Seminary on via dei Mille, Bologna, which was a gathering point for many people. When Mario and Augusta reached their home, they found it occupied by strangers, but these moved out when the owners arrived.
The wheat store was deep in rubble but possible to save. Of the furniture there was just a heap of ashes. All that remained was the bedsprings, mattresses and some blankets left by the soldiers. The entire area was booby-trapped so they couldn't work the land or fetch wood from the forest.
To help us through for a while, until the ground was de-mined, the Vergato National Liberation Committee offered us a horse. We had made it home and were trying to make a new start: a kind of normality after what had happened, but at long last I was back home. I lived with mum and my sisters, to begin with at Mario and Augusta's, and then with brother Armando and his family.
One source of money came from my father's extreme act of generosity. At the round-up, with sixteen men lined up against a haystack, just as mummy and I were approaching the SS daddy slipped his wallet out of his trouser pocket and flung it, calling out "Elisa!". Mum caught it in mid-air. That money was our lifeline and couldn't be touched. I remember one day when Anna asked mum to buy some small object, she was answered: *"Caveren e ninmetter, l'è una cosa da smetter"*[10].
Every time daddy was mentioned it caused mum a pang that she couldn't take a flower to put on his grave. Some person unknown, without letting the relatives remove their dear ones' bodies from the sludge at the bottom of the cistern, thought fit to open the sluices so the water would wash all the corpses into the Reno and avoid an epidemic. This was a painful trauma for all the families involved and to this day no-one knows the full truth of the matter.
One day Aldo found a scrap of jacket wedged in a riverbed slab at Pioppe. He rushed home to show mum as some small consolation, but the cloth wasn't father's.
I'd like to end by remembering that German medical NCO who came to say goodbye before returning to Germany. He asked around about our whereabouts and turned up at Tiola carrying a rucksack full of our linen which we'd left at Casalino. He gave us a map of our farm showing where the tracks were mined and the ones we could walk along. He told us not to go in the cellar because there were anti-tank mines down there. Before taking his leave he said: "If I get home alive to Germany, I'll come and see you when the war's over."
He never did come back. But I'd like to remember him today, since he too is part of my family history.

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[10] *"To take some out and not top up is something we just have to stop".*

CASALINO

The house where I lived stands on a rise, slightly off the Porrettana highway – a generous-sized building that was said to have been an outpost of the Duchies. Apart from its size, the house stands out for its four-five storey tower with arrow-slits looking various ways.

The local people living along the main road grew alarmed at the to-ing and fro-ing of vehicles of all sorts, and began to ask my father if there was room in the house for them to shelter. He never said no to anyone, and we ended up 14 families in all.

(Mario Venturi)

LORENZO CUCCHI, aged 8½

I was evacuated to a house in the parish of Malfolle as they'd started shelling the village of Pioppe near where we lived.
On the morning of 23rd July 1944 we and other refugee families were woken by SS shouts and blows, and forced to assemble in the farmyard, separated into men, women and children. My father had hidden in the wood along with the farmer, about ten metres away from us. Mum asked the soldiers if she could go and get my 18 month-old sister who'd been left in bed. This she was allowed to do, but when she got back to the threshing floor, the baby started howling. Father heard his baby daughter crying and came out of hiding. He was seized with the rest of us as we left our home, Blegnà, and were moved to Faggiolo where others from round about had already gathered.
The SS packed us under the outhouse portico, weapons raised. The minutes dragged by, filled with the soldiers' shouting.
Huddled together, we awaited our fate. I was standing beside father who crammed some treasury bonds down my shirt. He'd managed to pocket them before running into the wood, and he told me they were family matters.
We were divided up: women and children at one end, men at the other.
A soldier conducted us at rifle point down a track to the main road. When we were at the bottom of the track we heard shots, explosions. Everyone was stunned: it was all over.
In the space of a few hours tragedy was enacted with the murder of those peace-loving men, but that was only the beginning. The consequences would continue to bite into the flesh of the survivors – wives, children, parents, siblings: lives wrecked for ever.
We were trucked down to Bologna and when we got into town they herded us into a room. There it seems that Father Cattoi, who was one of us, intervened with the Germans and begged then not to send us to Germany as planned.
From Bologna we made our way on foot to Pontecchio and were put up by a farming family. Meanwhile a lorry came down for us from the hemp-mill company, nearly everyone being workers there. We were made a fuss of by our relatives and learned bit by bit what had happened.
Things then went from bad to worse and we all moved into the surrounding churches. I was up at Malfolle, about a hundred of us occupying the church, a cowhouse, huts and lofts. From up there we could see all the shelling and house-burning from Pioppe to San Martino. It was now up to the women alone to find food and it was thanks to them if we were fed.
The Germans came and we were turned out of our shelters, forced to set out again northwards. We got to just below Zappolino on the way to Bazzano, and stayed for a long time in a cowhouse, though later we put up with a family. Every day mum, aunty and I went begging (it was winter 1944). One day the Germans moved us on again since the war was hotting up with constant engagements. I remember a young German soldier helped me. Grandpa and I were going very slowly as grandpa had a leg injury. That soldier pushed me down into a

ditch to save us from the shelling. We soon took refuge in a shelter and stayed there a few days with nothing to eat or drink, just a few dried chestnuts.
One day all was quiet. We came out of hiding and from a knoll saw tanks marked with a star passing on the main road. It was the Americans. The women hung out white sheets to greet them, which provoked an instant salvo of mortar fire. Then it was all over: the Liberation.
When we got back home there was nothing left: nothing to eat or make a new start with. Our houses were gutted, doors missing, windows, beds, furniture: every day was a struggle to survive. To begin with, we ate food left by the American and Brazilian camps; then aid came from the Swiss Red Cross.
Grieving and despairing after the murder of their husbands, our mothers had to shoulder the daily burden and bring up their children in the direst poverty. Adults could fend for themselves, but the children needed everything, including schooling. This drove mum to take up the Marzabotto authorities' offer of a placement for me and my sister with other families. Mother was reduced to letting herself be separated from her own children.
When I plucked up courage to talk about this years later, she couldn't speak, but the tears rolled down in silence.
I went to Bologna, I don't remember where exactly. People came to adopt us and our names had already been allocated by those in charge of the scheme. To me, separating from my mother was the worst wrench.
I was sent to via del Rosario outside Porta Lame to stay with a family of smallholders who had three children of their own.
For two days I didn't speak and, with great delicacy, they never pressed me with questions. Now I can say it was a fine experience, since we grew very fond of each other. I went to school there for six months. You needed a bicycle which my good family gave me, and they also bought my books. Every day when homework was finished I lent a hand on the farm like the other children. I did a bit of everything: in the cowhouse and in the fields.
Meanwhile my sister Lele had been taken in by a family of bakers in via di Corticella. When I went to visit her with mum, I found she had put on weight: she could eat all she wished at the bakers', and above all she was happy.
Every summer I would go and stay with my second family for two months. We only began to see less of one another when I had to study hard and then go to work. We never lost touch and even today we often see each other. When most of my generation went to work as bricklayers, grandpa decided I should study, because I was slightly built and not strong. I did middle school privately at the Pioppe parish fathers, and then went as a boarder first to high schools in Latium and Abruzzo. Then I came back to Bologna after winning a scholarship to Irnerio College, and took my degree in Medicine. Far away from mum and everyone else, I would apply myself to my books as an escape, so as not to dwell on the present. She too had to move away from her parents (the last refuge of human kindness) and go into home service in Bologna. We met pretty rarely: she didn't get days off work. So that's how we got by. My mother was a home help for twenty years until the day she retired.

As for me, thanks to being thin and never having any appetite, I never went hungry: I just didn't feel it. I often left my hungry schoolmates part of the rations we received, but there was no merit in it: it wasn't an effort. Maybe I didn't consume energy. I used not to speak for months, didn't play, didn't run.

When I came home from school for the holidays, I would stay cooped up indoors for days on end. I was terrified of being pitied by friends and villagers (though it was kindly meant). But the worst thing was the thought of going back to boarding school at the end of September. At the end of August when granny's hibiscus was in flower, I already felt a nip of melancholy, and nothing was fun any more.

When my mother lay dying, she looked at me the same as all those times when I left for boarding school.

My father Fernando, his brother in revenue officer uniform, and myself aged four. Pioppe Church is in the background.

Not just one man
David Maria Turoldo

Now you are dead, oh mother,
I know the times you generated me.
In silence, all unseen.
When barely born I first began
to pain you, chucking stones
at the game on the forecourt,
you put me back inside
the womb for reconception.
Perfect you wanted me
like Mary's son.

And when hardship
and an empty board
would drive the brothers from home,
or death reap them defenceless
in poverty beyond imagining,
new nails we all
and God himself would drive
through your hands as you hung
before us, gaunt with years,
you would not weep for that.
The tears only welled
when cold and hunger
made us fractious, and with maize
stalks and marsh reeds
you heated our meagre fare
and the house black with soot:
windowless, open to the snow and
the north-wind galloping from the sea.
That made you cry,
if we skipped our evening prayers
along with all the village dead
who once trailed through the garden plot
to gather round hearth and table
or sat upon the stairs.

In the end, oh mother, you brought forth.
not just one man. Not just your own
your children, but all mankind.
Dressed in your Sunday best,
always in the back pew,
from up there I can see you when
I stretch my arms over the people,
you generate me still
in tears and virgin birth.

Translated from: *Poesie, Neri Pozza Ed.,* Vicenza, 1971

MARIA TIVIROLI, aged 9

In our family there was father, mother, five children and grandpa. My brother Leonardo used to call me Princess because I could get everything I wanted out of everyone. The only one I was afraid of was Leonardo.
Staying with us were various evacuees from Bologna, and next door lived the Grani family, father, mother and three children.
On 29th and 30th September 1944 we were in the hideout above our house at Steccola. The SS arrived and told us to go to Prunaro di Sopra where there were already machine-guns set up on tripods. They told us to walk in Indian file along the track and there they mowed us down. I got shot in one side, mother and my sister were killed. Grandpa, who was 82 and shuffled along slowly, was picked up by the SS and thrown alive into a blazing heap of straw. There were sixteen or seventeen of us, all dead except for me. All women and children. Before running off into the wood to look for my brother and father, I looked at my mother: she had two holes in her forehead. My 12 year-old sister Gina was under water in the ditch. I could only see her hair. Eleven year-old cousin Giuseppe was dead sitting bolt upright on the ground with his hands in his pockets. He was wearing his confirmation suit with a little cross on the breast pocket. A baby girl of forty days, one of the refugees from Bologna, was torn from her mother's arms, tossed in the air and shot at like a tin can.
Before leaving, the SS shot everyone in the head. I kept dead quiet and got away with it.
I hid in the wood with a farmhand from Cadotto, Mario Cioni, who was wounded in the legs and a shoulder. After two or three days with him, I went back to the Steccola shelter to get some cheese and an eiderdown which was green on one side, red on the other. As I was going back with this quilt dangling red side out, the SS saw me from Scope and opened fire, but didn't hit me.
The next day I went back to the hideout to get some scraps of cloth to bandage Cioni and to pick some grapes from the vineyard. We ate chestnuts picked in the wood, and I went to the ditch to get water to drink.
After searching for three days my brother Leonardo found me. He called out "Maria, Maria", but Cioni told me to keep mum, it was the Germans. Once together again, my brother and I went back to Steccola where we found father and my other brothers. They too were living in the wood as the house had been burnt down. All together we moved over to Felci near Sibano and stayed at Leo's fiancée's house.
In the woods around Felci my father and brothers Giovanni and Antonio were caught by the Germans and taken to somewhere near Bologna, but they got away.
One day we all set out by night for Steccola as the front had already got as close as Monte Termine. Some black soldiers picked us up and we went via Volte on the Setta side and from there by army truck to the Florence Refugee Centre. At Volte a black doctor wanted to check the wound in my side. He filled me up with chocolates to try and get me to show him, but I wouldn't. I'd never seen a black man and I was afraid.

At the Refugee Centre we slept on the ground until they gave us a camp bed and a blanket. I found some other relations there, above all a favourite aunt whose bread I used to steal from where she put it under the bed. I was hungry, and thinking I wouldn't be found out, I picked out the crumb from inside the roll. One day we set out on foot for Porretta. With us was Leo's wife who was pregnant. On the three-day journey we stopped one night at a farm. The people gave us chestnut polenta and let us sleep in the cowshed. From there we went on to Castel di Casio where we were put up by my brother's in-laws, the Guidotti family, and stayed there till the Liberation.

Then we went back to Felci where the house was still standing, and then on to Rioveggio to stay with a cousin, and finally to Steccola. We lived in what little of the cowhouse had remained intact. Leonardo and his family moved over to Quercia and I stayed on, the only woman in the house, with father and brothers at Steccola where little by little our house was rebuilt.

Sometimes even now I remember at nights what I went through then. When that happens, it's hard to get up in the morning; everything is so painfully vivid, I feel tired and wake up with tears in my eyes.

STECCOLA

...Staying with us at Steccola were various evacuees from Bologna, next door lived the Grani family.

....the S.S. arrived and told us to go to Prunaro di Sopra where there were already machine-guns on tripods…

FERNANDO PIRETTI, aged 9

I was an evacuee, and so were my parents, 13 year-old sister Teresa and about 60 people up at Cerpiano, staying with the Ursuline nuns at the Oratorio della Chiesina.
The schoolmistresses warned us that the Germans had already killed a family of seven, including five children, and were on their way. We all gathered in the yard to decide where to go. The teachers thought it was better if the menfolk went in the shelter (though not all could fit) since they ran the greater risk. They might be taken for partisans, whereas we children and women wouldn't be harmed. While the men and one family gained the hideout about 50 metres away, the SS arrived. The schoolteacher begged them to let us go but they shoved us inside the Oratory saying: "In five minutes everyone kaputt!"
The SS set up machine-guns at the entranceway, unstrapped some cases (possibly hand-grenades) and began shooting and tossing grenades into the Oratory.
I think I must have fainted since I only woke up next morning. I got up and wanted to run away. At that point I saw Paola Rossi, a 5 year-old girl, who was still alive. She was wounded in the eye and her legs were trapped under portions of bodies (those nearest the door were all cut in half). I couldn't pull her free. I went to the door and then darted back, seeing an SS patrol. I lay down, hands on the floor getting all bloody, and in my despair I put my hands to my face and then lay dead still. I could hear people coming in, I don't know who. They fired seven or eight shots and began rummaging among the corpses, possibly looking for gold and stuff. They came over to me. I had my head resting on a suitcase and they lifted me up by the hair to take the case, then lowered me gently and went away.
After a bit I heard a man outside calling "Mum, Mum!" I could tell by the voice it was one of the ones who went to the hideout, so when Signorina Benni started saying "Keep quiet, it could be a fascist", I said we could safely trust our ears.
It was that man who helped us free Paola Rossi. Signorina Benni had a wounded leg and I had a shoulder wound. All the remaining 25 women were dead, including my mother. All 18 children were dead, including my sister Teresa. The children's ages ranged from two to fifteen. The youngest was Anna Gherardi. All my playmates from the Pirini family were there: Damiano, Giorgio, Giuseppina, Marta, Martino, Olimpia and Rosanna; and the Oleandris, Domenico, Franco, Giuseppe and Sirio; and the Valdisserras, Antonietta and Mario; and last of all Giuseppe Rossi.
We went into the shelter where I found father. By night the men tried to bury the copses left in the Oratory as a terrible smell was starting to rise. We stayed in the shelter about ten days and then went back to the Ursuline house. Another ten days and Walter Reder turned up with his Company to commandeer the whole building, leaving us to bed down in the cellar.
Some women who survived the massacre didn't survive the violent goings-on in that house. For days we were at their beck and call, and then we left. The SS loaded up the men with ammunition, though I was spared that labour, being too small. From Cerpiano we went to Campolungo, Caprara and then Gessi where I saw some hanged partisans. At Mongardino I

saw a boy being dreadfully beaten up; they said he was a partisan, but he was only a farmer's son and a few years older than me.
At that point the SS told us to be off. Meanwhile I had tracked down a brother of mine and together we accompanied our father to Sant' Orsola, he being a diabetic, and went on to my sister's house at Medicina. Over the last few months father hadn't been receiving his medicine and had been overtaxed. His condition got worse and shortly afterwards he died. I was left with my brothers and agreed to go and live with the Bonara family at San Giorgio di Piano. They had a mill and a shop where they sold their produce. I was treated well and sent to school. I was already in the third form but they put me in the second since down there they were ahead of us with the teaching. After three months I went back home. At 15 I worked for a year as a carpenter in Bologna. I was an unpaid apprentice, so I changed to another carpenter who gave me 2,500 lire a week. Then I was taken on at the Bologna Post Office, commuting every day from Gardelletta.
My wife, Lucia Monari and her sister Germana, were themselves foster placements. Lucia went to San Giorgio di Piano and Germana to Garghenzano.

CERPIANO

The remains of the Chapel after the massacre....

…we'd taken sanctuary in the Oratory Chapel of Cerpiano… along came the S.S. tossing hand-grenades and firing machine-guns.

The three survivors from inside the Oratory: Sister Antonietta Benni, Paola Rossi and Fernando Piretti with a friend.

MARINO MARZARI, aged 10

It was 9th September when I saw Uncle Quinto appear in the farmyard. He'd made it back by train from military service in Russia. I ran to hug him and he went inside to say hello to everyone and then left for the farm Creda near Pioppe di Salvaro where his fiancée Elena Cardi lived.
On 29th September the SS turned up at Creda, uncle was herded with about 100 others under the portico. The Germans opened fire, threw hand-grenades and incendiary bombs into the barn and everything caught fire. The SS were going round shooting people in the back of the head. Just as they got to uncle, the cowhouse roof fell in. Uncle managed to get out, carrying his fiancée. Elena was terribly hurt and although he did get her out of the fire, she died in his arms. Though himself wounded by shrapnel, uncle made his escape towards Grizzana where he met up with allied soldiers who took him to Florence. We were farming folk at Sibano, a farm called "i Bruni", and everyone went hungry.
A platoon of about 30 Germans were billeted in our barn and I used to play with them. Sometimes they called me to look through a telescope and I could see partisans on the mountainside opposite.
One day a German told my father and uncle and me: "We tomorrow go away, SS come and kill everybody". The whole family decamped to Nuvoleto near Montasico.
It was October 1st when an SS came in the house, threw me out of bed and led father away. I started crying and clinging on to father's leg, but a man in mufti pulled me off and pushed me to the ground. I was bleeding from a cut on the head and father saw his son covered in blood as they took him away.
I won't forgive that.
Father was taken to Pioppe and kept prisoner in the Church with lots of men. On 5th October mum said: "Come on, we're going to Pioppe to take daddy a cape and some winter clothes." When we got to a farm called Spintona, a lady we met told us the prisoners had been moved down to the Bologna Red Barracks. Father Basilio was among them, but he would be saved by the Curia. From Bologna my father was sent to Germany to work in a factory where they manufactured aircraft parts. They had very little to eat and at night, when everybody was asleep, they would go and steal potatoes from the field. They ate them raw, sliced up peel and all.
After being evacuated to Nuvoleto, my family moved to Vignola di Luminasio where my grandparents lived. There was nothing to eat at Nuvoleto, but my stomach shrank and I no longer felt hunger pangs. At Vignola di Luminasio it was different: a farmer's wife called Signora Gelsomina kept killing hens and rabbits every day, knowing that the Germans would take away anything they found. So there was plenty of food to go round.
Then the Germans sent us away from there too, and we decamped to the refuge called "Le Vaglie" past the farm Vignola. It was full of lice. I remember grandpa brought away a bag of bread and a sack of apples. There were five of us and he would give us a little bread to

eat every day. Then he would cut up an apple five ways. We did have plenty of apples but grandpa believed the war would be a long one and we needed to economise.
Two months later a relative of mum's helped us move to Medelana where at long last I tasted *minestra in brodo*[11] - two bowlfuls. It was so good, I wept!
There I slept in a cowhouse for a few days before moving down to Poggio di San Chierlo near Monte Pastore. The priest turned out to welcome us and found a house not far from the Church, the presbytery being full up already with four families. The very next day Poggio di San Chierlo was bombed and everyone killed: 24 people. We escaped by a miracle.
Inside my jerkin I had a rind of bacon and would give it a lick from time to time. A boy from Vergato stole the jacket and the bacon; a mean trick which I've always held against him.
Meanwhile granny went sick and a car was sent to take us to stay with an aunt in Bologna. Later we moved to via Marghera (now via Fratelli Rossi) in a bomb-damaged house. To keep warm we burnt whatever we could find. We would go to the railway station and get wood from abandoned carriages.
On 21st April I heard that the Americans were entering town along via Mazzini. I ran happily barefoot to see them and caught up with them in Piazza de' Martiri at 11 o'clock. Every day I would go to Porta Galliera, the gate where I'd been told all the returning deportees arrived. I was hoping to see my father, but someone told me he'd already come back and was billeted in the old Seminary on via de' Mille. Father returned home before the Liberation because the factory where he was working in Germany got bombed and his foreman gave him a pass. On foot in a pair of boots nailed like a horse, he crossed Munich, reached the Brenner where people were baking bread by the ovenful to feed the passersby. In due course he got to Padua where the front was, but thanks to his pass he wasn't shot. He walked on as far as Ferrara, where a lorry gave him a lift to Bologna.
Reunited at last, father and I set off on foot for Sibano. Passing Colle Ameno I saw some men strung up. At a certain point a lorry full of black soldiers overtook us, stopped and let us ride between the cab and the body. I'd started wearing shoes at long last, but they hurt my feet and I took them off. There was a hole in the lorry and, with the vibrations, my shoes slipped through onto the road. The lorry stopped and I went back to look for them, but they'd vanished.
We returned to Sibano and the same poverty as before. That's why my parents agreed to my staying with a Bologna family, Ernesto Veronesi and Erminia Marani, who lived in via Battindarno. I stayed with them for about six months and attended the fourth form at the 'Albertazzi' primary school. I got on brilliantly with the family, I calmed right down and stopped swearing. They would take me to the Marconi cinema. I remember my excitement when I saw "Tarzan's son". I used to go dancing with them at the "Calzoni" dancehall where Ernesto was employed as a workman. We have remained firm friends. As it happens, their nephew is coming to stay with me at this very moment in time.

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[11] Pasta in clear soup.

When I went back home I did the final year at primary school and then went to work: tailoring, navvying and many other jobs (I was in at the inauguration of the new telephone exchange at Corticella).
Some time ago a journalist asked me if I would forgive. I told him I can't forgive people who flung me to the ground and took my father away.
In May 1945 as the Germans were retreating, some chums and I threw a stone through the window of an Opel Blitz lorry. A German got out, we ran off, but my uncle came out and shouted *"rauss!"*.

SPERTICANO
September 1942. Me at my confirmation.

NINO AMICI, aged 13

30th September 1944 was the slaughter of the innocents.
I lived at Taglidazza in a large country house occupied by two families: ours, the Amicis, and the Zagnonis. On that day of death, horror and fear, those in the house were my sisters Iris (15), Anna Maria (9), Marisa (3), my mother Livia Rubini (43). Of the Zagnoni family, those present were Maria Negri with her two children, Rina (13), Sereno (12) and her sister Emma Negri.
The SS soldiers came up from Colulla di Sotto, rounded us up and took us all to Cà Roncadelli, a neighbouring property. The Negri family lived there. On that day there was Gaetano Negri and wife, daughter Vittoria (25), daughter-in-law Olga, wife to a brother of Vittoria's, and a 16 year-old niece who managed to come through. A family of refugees were also staying there, fleeing from Bologna for fear of the bombs. They were the Tomesanis: Egle who was 35, his two children Anselmo of 13 and Marisa of 12, and a niece of 3.
We formed a group of 26 people, who they put all in one room and went away. Some time passed and other soldiers came, set fire to the barn and cowhouse with the animals inside. They made us come out and threw a hand-grenade in the house. We set off along the road to Sperticano. After a hundred metres I heard shooting behind me, turned round and saw the bodies of grandpa Negri and daughter-in-law Olga on the ground. I heard a voice saying: "They're going to kill us all now". A little way ahead the road was crossed by a small stream with two little waterfalls: one of about four metres on the left where the wine vats were placed under the fall, the other a smaller one on the right, about one and a half metres.
On the road flanking the stream and leading to Sperticano village some soldiers with machine-guns began opening fire. I jumped down the little waterfall and hid among the hazel bushes behind it. The machine-guns went on mowing down those innocent people; I put my head in my hands and may have fainted. I came round to the noise of hoof beats on the road at my back: the animals someone had freed from the burning cowhouse.
When I poked up my head I saw something I shall never forget. The stream was flowing red with the blood of my mother, my two sisters and all the rest. The poor things had taken refuge behind the vats. Amid the bodies a few survived: Maria Negri with an eye wound, Marisa Tomesani wounded in one shoulder, Sereno Zagnoni who had hidden among the bushes around the higher waterfall, and Vittoria Negri who ran on over the stream and hid among the fields. Before quitting the scene, the SS stripped any personal valuables.
The Christmas that followed was one of fear. A day or so after the Marzabotto massacre, the Wehrmacht Germans at Sperticano picked some men to carry provisions and munitions by night up Monte Sole where the front line was. Among them was my father, 17 year-old brother Silvano and Uncle Mario, my father's brother. They slept fully clothed, partly because they had no other clothes, and partly since from one moment to the next they would have to climb Monte Sole with ammunition. The men were sleeping at the Sperticano hostelry. At the nearby property called Casa Zappoli the German HQ had moved in and I was living there with them.

One day my brother Silvano, forced to be fully clothed all the time, found blood oozing from his shoes. The Germans sent him away. The days passed and Christmas drew near. Billeted at my school was a Salò fascist command. My uncle prevailed on the fascist soldiers to take us with them. On Christmas Eve they were leaving for Verona, so they covered us in a tarpaulin in the back of their lorry and they rode behind. It was snowing heavily and bitterly cold as we set off for Casalecchio di Reno towards 11 p.m. When we got near Sasso Marconi the American army started shelling the place from the Gothic Line.

Everyone got off the lorry to take cover, while I stayed on board to keep out of the cold, thinking that somewhere in the world the bells were ringing to announce the Redeemer's birth. Sasso Marconi had artillery shells instead.

We got going again for Casalecchio and when we reached Ceretolo they set us down. A brother of my father's had married a woman from a farm above Ceretolo; we walked a full hour in search of that house among the snowfields but couldn't find it, so we took shelter in a barn, all of us soaked to the skin. On Christmas morning uncle asked the farmer who came to feed the cattle where the house was. He pointed it out, 300 yards away. At home we found uncle and aunt, cousins, aunty's family. They gave us bread, cheese and milk to eat. We three plus aunty set off for Bologna. When we got to Casalecchio there were Germans on the Reno bridge, checking documents. Father and uncle headed for Casteldebole to cross the river there. Aunty and I got on the tram to Bologna. When we got near Croce di Casalecchio I saw two people crossing the river and thought to myself: "We used to be a family of nine and here I am left alone."

We arrived in Bologna, got off at via degli Orti N° 25 (now called via Turati) where our relatives lived. There I found my brother Silvano, the grandparents on father's side, uncle and aunt, and my cousins. Then along came father and Uncle Mario.

The house was a big one but there were so many of us, it felt small. All around were lots of empty houses abandoned by the owners for fear of the bombing. Anyway, a few days later we split up: we were too hungry, with hardly any money. Father and I queued up every day with our billycans for a bit of pasta that a nearby barracks dished out. One fine spring day, 21st April 1945, Bologna was liberated from the German invader. I went into Piazza Maggiore and saw all the people cheering the liberators, the tanks and jeeps full of soldiers. A soldier gave me some sweets and later a chocolate. It was the first time I'd tasted chocolate: it was delicious, I ate it all for myself.

To this day I dream I'm somewhere where they're going to kill me and I can't move my legs, I can't get away. For years I used to wake up at night all out of breath. I still dream that dream, though I'm less tense now.

TAGLIADAZZA
The Amici family.

RONCADELLI
I lived at Tagliadazza in a large country house occupied by two families: ours, the Amicis, and the Zagnonis. When the S.S. came they took us all to Roncadelli, a house near mine, where the Negri family lived…

GIANFRANCO LORENZINI, aged 13

It was 29th September 1944 when the SS arrived at San Martino where I lived. The SS of the 16th Explorer Unit commanded by Reder looked at us and said "All Catholics, now we go to Casaglia".
It was a Friday and they kept us in church for a whole day without going out. I was scared. We weren't locked in the church; they left the door open with a guard and one who may have been a warrant officer, from his three stars, kept saying: "Be quiet. You talk, we kill."
There were 14 of us Lorenzinis: grandmother, Ersilia Marchetti with her daughters Nerina, Rita, Pia, Luisa: my mother Maria Righini with two daughters: Anna Augusta aged 9 and Marcella aged 2. Then there was Emma, Uncle Giuseppe's wife, Carlo's wife Maria with their 9 year-old daughter Clara, and the two 3 year-old twins, Pierino and Augustino, sons of Uncle Giuseppe.
All the women and children are dead. On the next day, Saturday, about midday I think, they brought us out into the forecourt in front of the church, but the forecourt was too small, long and narrow, and we couldn't all fit. So they made us walk round the edge with a machine-gun in the middle. It must have had a thousand rounds.
An hour and a half went by and then the butchery began. As we circled round and round, the babies like Marcella who could be carried were in their mothers' arms. The first burst of the machine-gun aimed at cutting their legs. If any groaned, cried out or moved, they were given the coup de grâce: a pistol shot in the forehead.
The little ones howled and were immediately finished off. When they shot Marcella the poor thing moved her mouth like a fish; she was wounded, with great gashes. First they killed those in front of the church; then they went onto the forecourt opposite the cemetery.
I was at the foot of the church steps in front of the cemetery as we couldn't all fit on the church forecourt but outside the cemetery there was a bigger open patch and a track winding through some big chestnuts. They're still there; they haven't been chopped down.
I got away because when they started shooting I took to my heels and went rolling down until I came to rest against a chestnut. I was hurt, maybe by a branch, but I was alive.
I cried out, but then kept still. They shot over my head but suddenly stopped. The SS never went off the road; they were afraid of the partisans. They would shoot from the roadway, as long as you were in sight.
The wood was full of partisans but it wasn't clear where. Anyway, I don't think they could have rescued a crowd of people in the circumstances.
Luisa too ran into the wood behind the cemetery. She was bawling her head off at all the things she'd seen, and instead of running off where I was, she went the other way towards home, which was back towards the Germans, who killed her, away from the others.
There was also Luccarini's brother, an altar-boy like me. He made a break for it, perhaps seeing me, but they stopped him in his tracks.
It was a miracle I came through.

Once the SS moved off towards Casaglia, I ran down through the woods. I got to Sibano or thereabouts, where there's the underpass towards Sperticano. There I found Imelde, Aldo Luccarini's married sister. I stayed there till the war was over. Their children went to school near Marzabotto, but my school was at Quercia.

My father Aldo was a coastguard at La Spezia. Over there he heard what had happened at Marzabotto but he couldn't come home. He came back one year after the war had ended.

Checco (Francesco) was living with his wife in an apartment of the Curia's at Caprara, and Beppino had a room. Checcho could see the shooting at San Martino. So he went through the woods from Casaglia to San Martino and found them all dead. When he got home, his wife and children were dead.

Mario and Gino were partisans hiding in the wood, holed up in a cave towards Calvane on the edge of a crag, where they stayed in hiding for forty days. They only had berries and chestnuts to eat. In front of that place there's a fine apple-tree. When they came out they weighed 30 kilos.

Before the war, we were doing all right; we had bread, and kept sheep and goats, 200 of them, and then ducks. Don Fornasini used to come over from Sperticano on a mare belonging to the Curia. When Luccarini held the mare all wrong, the priest pulled his ears, joking like. When we bickered during Mass, he would shake his fist and chop with his hand as a warning.

Luccarini and I were altar-boys. We were ignorant, all right. Ah, when you don't know how to read! Three or four times a year on a feast day, for the Epiphany or St Martin's, we would go the rounds of the farms where they would give us eggs: six for the priest, three for the altar-boy, and four for the sacristan. When Don Fornasini tested children on the catechism, sometimes I couldn't answer, but what with hearing the others answering, I got to learn them myself. Don Fornasini gave me a medallion of the Lourdes Madonna. Since I'd never had anything at all, I thought it was really something.

The brothers Gino, Mario, Carletto and Isoro (Angelo) used to ring the church bells. Beppino was the grave-digger. The choir consisted of Lucia, Pia, Nerina Checco's wife, and mum, though she sang a bit out of tune. Some choir!

It fell to the altar-boys to pump the organ. Depending on how we pumped, it made different sounds, more or less loud. If we got it wrong, Luccarini used to blame it on me.

All these stories, I dream of them at night. I see the scene of the machine-gun slicing the children's legs, and I'm crying.

Church of San Martino before and after the killings. Monte Sole is visible in the background.

On the willow-tree boughs
Salvatore Quasimodo

And how could we sing
with a foreign foot upon our hearts
among corpse-strewn squares
on the frost-hardened grass, to the lamb's bleat
lament of children, the black howl
of a mother encountering her son
crucified on a telegraph pole?
Votive on the willow-tree boughs
hung our lyres, they too
gently swinging in the desolate wind.

(translated from Giorno dopo Giorno*, Milan, Mondadori, 1947)*

Guercino - Landscape with wayfarers under the rain - Florence Uffizi Gallery

LEO GABUSI, aged 14

On 29 September 1944 I was sheltering in Salvaro Church with the nuns, Don Elia Comini, Father Martino Capelli and about 30 other people. It was Michelmas and the priests said a Mass lasting four hours to keep up morale.
On the day of the round-up and killing of all those people up at Creda, who should turn up but Panzetta and Casturein. They'd managed to save their skins and get away through the wood. They were really afraid and kept telling the men to scarper.
The nuns hid part of the men in one of the two sacristies, shutting the door and sliding a wardrobe in front of it. Another part went into a cellar under a trapdoor. They spread a jute sack over the trap and sat me on top with a hand-mill to grind the wheat.
When the SS got back from Creda and entered the church, they looked around and found no men, so they left. I kept on grinding away as long as the SS were in the church. Meanwhile Don Elia and Father Martino rushed up to Creda to help the people there, fell into the round-up and were held in the Pioppe Stables and later killed at la Botte on October 1st.
I stayed on there for a few more days. The last German patrol was hanging on in the neighbourhood and every night you could hear exchanges between Germans and Allies. Then my family decided to cross the front. We set off one night, about a month after the Creda and la Botte killings, and headed for the top of Monte Salvaro. From there the Allies took us to Grizzana and then Florence. We went to the Refugee Centre in via della Scala. I'd caught typhus when I was still at Pioppe, but I was spared from the epidemic of diphtheria which broke out in the Centre and killed many people, like the Chiari family from Pioppe.
At the Centre I spent the first two nights sleeping on the ground on a newspaper; then I was given a blanket. We slept in large rooms holding thirty or forty people, together with our families.
Every day we would line up for soup and a roll. I was hungry so on the Epiphany I queued up eight or ten times for the bag with chocolate and other things to eat. My father and brothers went and helped the Americans unload supply vehicles, while I used to polish the Americans' boots. I was a "shoe-shiner"[12] on Florence Station.
The Americans did help me a bit, though nobody else did. When I got back after the Liberation I worked as a builder from the word 'go'.

Sciuscià

[12] *Sciuscià* was the word for this they used in Naples.

SALVARO CHURCH AND INSIDE THE CHURCH
...I took sanctuary in Salvaro Church... the nuns hid part of the men in one of the two sacristies, shutting the door and sliding a wardrobe in front of it. Another part went into a cellar under a trapdoor…

FERRUCCIO LAFFI, aged 16

I lived at Colulla di Sotto. It was 30th September 1944 when the SS came. They'd already passed by on 29th September; I saw them coming over from Sperticano.
You could hear shooting and shellfire but it was a long way off. I went up to Caprara to warn the partisans, but they were already on the move and told us we'd have to fend for ourselves. My brother and I took to the woods, while the women and children stayed indoors with my dad, who was getting on in years. That day nothing happened. We crept back home and slept the night there. Next morning we saw a group of Germans heading down the mountain, so my two brothers and I decided to hide, together with some evacuees from Pian di Venola. As far as I can remember, it was about half past two in the afternoon: we hid ourselves without worrying about the women and children since we'd been told they were only looking for men. We heard shooting and when all was quiet towards evening, we came out of the wood and saw the house burning, all the cattle outside, and deathly quiet. I thought: "That's odd, nobody about".
When we entered the threshing floor we saw they'd killed everybody: 14 members of my family and 4 evacuees. From my family there was: my father Giuseppe, my mother Clarice Donati and 10 children, my 11 year-old brother Armando and my two brothers' children with their mothers, my sisters-in-law Marina (13) and Dina (11), Fernando (9), Primo (7), Italo (6), Demetrio (5), Pietro (3), Massimo (3 months), and Giovanni (29 days). The refugees killed were two kids of six and nine, and two women.
We buried the dead and then took to our heels again when we saw some Germans approaching. After a bit we saw that our chimney was smoking, so my brother crept up to see. The house was full of Germans who grabbed him. My brother called out: "Come on out, or they'll do me in". I and my other brother came out of the wood. They took us all down to Sperticano. In the evening they loaded us up like mules and made us carry ammunition and provisions up to Casaglia where the Don Dossetti Community now stands. It kept raining and raining and the weight on my shoulders made it even more heavy-going. My brothers were also given a cart to take stuff up on. I never saw my brothers again. It was 1st October '44, and it wasn't till February '45 that I learnt one brother was killed by a shell at Sperticano. The other brother went on carting stuff, while I and some other men made a plan to escape.
One evening while the Germans were unloading ammunition from the carts, we ran off and got as far as Ronzano. Some sort of relations of mine, the Baluganis, lived there and we knew they were hiding in a gully down in the wood. There was a stream and a great rocky overhang and they'd piled some brushwood, and brought the odd blanket and there you could sleep. The women used to bring food. After a while there was nothing left to eat as the women had been driven away, it being a military zone.
We gathered chestnuts in the wood. There was still a bit of bread left, but the Baluganis had their own children to feed. So one evening we made up our minds to go back towards

Bologna. We crossed the river by a little bridge just before Marzabotto. The bridge had been hit by a shell and we had to cling on and scramble across, but we made it. We set off towards Bologna and at Sasso we were stopped by a German patrol and taken to Colle Ameno. A friend who had served in the army tried to cheer us up. The next day a German chose us for a work party. That evening two prisoners got away. My friends also managed to slip through a tiny window which was hidden by some furniture. An officer wanted us to tell him where they were and threatened we'd all be "kaputt" if we didn't speak.
They stood us up in front of a pit outside, which we'd dug the day before. Someone said he knew where the two who'd got away lived, and they could search there, and so they didn't shoot. My thought at the moment was: "It'll be a relief if they kill me", so bad was the situation. There were people crying to think of their children and anyone crying got kicked for his pains. I wanted to say to the ones crying: "Show that you're men!"
From Colle Ameno about 15 of us were taken to a tumbledown little house at Sasso. By day they made us cut down trees and carry them up the hill for their emplacement. They moved us from there to Badolo, again working on material for their defences. Next we were taken to Ganzole where we sheltered in a dilapidated house and then by night to Palazzo Rossi, Pontecchio, from where we set out towards Lugo. We had to walk the whole way: there were carts pulled by animals, on which the Germans rode.

COLULLA DI SOTTO
...I lived at Colulla di Sotto. When the S.S. came, my brother and I took to the woods, while the women and children stayed indoors with my dad who was getting on in years…

VICTIMS OF GERMAN ATROCITY IN THE MARZABOTTO MASSACRE
14 members of the Laffi family (ringed) died at Colulla on 30th September 1944.

As we crossed Bologna, many made their getaway; we were down to four by the time we reached Lugo.
We'd lost all sense of time, but we could tell from the celebrations it was Christmas. There were some Russian prisoners with us who warned us that the SS had been recalled to Germany. Profiting by the confusion, three of us managed to get away. The other man, who was a 1915-18 war invalid, didn't come with us and we heard no more of him.
On the way to Bologna we asked various people if they could put us up for the night, but we had a job managing to find a cowshed to doss down in and we would leave as early as we could, since people were afraid of the fascists – and above all at the idea of finding themselves between both partisans and fascists, since hatred was still running high.
When I got to Bologna I got on a tram. I was in a bad state and one of the German police got on. I was trembling but he left me alone. I got to the main square and bumped into someone I knew there who told me where the two friends who escaped from Colle Ameno were living. One of them, Mario Marchi, went down sick after crossing the river; it was he who told me my brother was staying with a cousin in via Frassinago. I made my way there and stayed with them till the Liberation. Then I changed house and began work at once as a builder's mate.
I didn't return to Marzabotto until 1980.

DEDICATED TO "THE CHILDREN OF '44"
WHO DIDN'T SURVIVE

Guido Reni,
The Slaughter of the Innocents, detail, 1611
Bologna, National Picture Gallery

Ancient Christian epitaph for a martyred youth
Elena Bono

Here sleeps Albinus
hugging the gentle lamb
that played with him
that slept beside him
that licked his lifeblood,
still beside him,
when the wolves rent
his innocent body.

(translated from Opera Omnia, Genoa: Le Mani, 2007)

"He was like a lamb led to the slaughter"
(Isaiah, 53:7)

Francisco de Zurbaran,
Agnus Dei, 1635-1640
Madrid, Prado

The children of Sant'Anna di Stazzema
"G.Matteotti" primary school, Gubbio 2007

A rag doll
sleeps on a lawn
bathed in red.
The hands
that cuddled it
now lie cold.
Other
innocent faces
have met with pain
and slumber now at rest.
Stark silence and smoke
wreath the hamlet
where once was
carefree laughter.
Trembling, a dumbstruck hand
picks up the doll
to tell other children
about the sleepers on the lawn,
and pour out scorn
against all war
that ruins
and obliterates.
A rag doll
sleeps on a lawn
bathed in red,
while many children lie in sleep,
wilted flowers plucked
by ruthless hands.

June 1944. The children of Sant'Anna dance in a ring to celebrate the end of school.
All these children died in the massacre on 12th August 1944.

Poems by children who lived in the Terezin ghetto (Prague), before being deported to Auschwitz.

The Garden

Franta Brass (Brno 1930- Auschwitz 1944)

The tiny garden is
rose-perfumed,
and narrow the path
where the child runs:
a pretty child
like an opening bud.
When these buds open
the child will be no more.

Farewell

Anonymous

All the happy times
are lost for ever,
I lack the strength
to tread my path.
Once more, one single time
to clasp my head,
then close my eyes, and go
in silence towards the dark.

I wish to go alone

Alena Synkovà, Auschwitz survivor

I wish to go alone where
other better people are
and no-one kills.
But lots of us may go
towards that dream,
a thousand, maybe.
And why not straight away?

In memory of children not mentioned in the full accounts who didn't survive

Colulla di Sopra

Whenever I think of my father Pietro, who died a few months back, I recall the pain of remorse that dogged him to his dying day.
One afternoon at Colulla di Sopra, Pietro and his father caught sight of the SS coming and started off into the wood. Just then his 19 year-old sister Bruna, who was pregnant, called out of the bedroom window if they would take her with them. Pietro answered No, she was pregnant, the Germans were looking for young men to send to Germany.
The SS came, and told everyone to get ready for a long journey. Everybody put on the best clothes they had, their party outfit, and assembled in the yard. They were all slaughtered: young, old, children. Bruna was killed twice over since they tore her child from her womb and bayoneted it.
That is the remorse my father could never rid his mind of: that No to his sister Bruna, the No to his baby niece. (Bruno Zebri)

Prunaro di Sotto

The Sassi family lived at Prunaro di Sotto. Together with the parents and two brothers lived two grown-up sisters, Adele and Graziella, who had two little daughters, Gianna who was five and Annarosa three.
Aunt Adele told me that on the day the SS came into the house and massacred the whole family, she was saved by her mother falling on top of her. Gianna and Annarosa were screaming like mad and were killed straight away. Graziella was pregnant: she too was killed (Antonietta Sassi)
Maria Martina Sassi found a hiding place near Cà di Piede, not far from Prunaro di Sotto. On 2^{9th} September at 3.30 p.m. her labour pains started. She came out of hiding and made for the house with her mother-in-law Amalia Bondioli and her five year-old child Franco. The Germans opened fire from the high ground at Pian del Prete and killed Maria Martina Sassi, her not quite born baby and her mother-in-law. Franco Leoni was hit in the back but survived. (Franco Leoni)

Creda

29 September 1944. It was still dark when the SS came and ordered all who lived there, their friends and those caught in the round-up to gather in the coach-house. A flare was sent up from over Rovina di Pioppe way: it was a signal and the SS began machine-gunning the people and lobbing hand-grenades.

There were 90 in all, some of whom managed to escape into the wood; others were saved underneath the corpses. 79 people died, mostly women and children, the youngest being 14 days old. He was called Walter and it was his father, Uncle Carlo's, wish that I should have his name in memory of him and all the totally innocent children who were so barbarously mown down.
Uncle Carlo was there that day. Though wounded, he dragged himself to the cowhouse door and saw his wife lying dead with Walter beside her, while all around they were slowly beginning to burn the bodies.
16-month Alberto, Walter's brother, died in Aunt Elena's arms. Sixteen members of my family died; my father Mario and Uncle Carlo came through alive. (Valter Cardi)

Maccagnano

I come from Maccagnano. On 29 September 1944 my brother-in-law Ruggero Acacci, who worked at the Pioppe Hemp-mill, came rushing up and told me to clear out into the wood: down at the mill the SS "were creating mayhem". To me he said: "You go with Edoardo Rossi, 'Frabet', I'll join you in a bit". I set off for the wood but after 100 yards 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 hideout I'd made.
About midday I went for a look around and found a little girl from Creda all bleeding. I took off my jacket and bandaged her up in it, and then handed her over to someone who lived at Rovine who passed her on to a woman who lived at Case Nuove.
By evening there was no-one else to be seen, the house was on fire, I could hear machine-gun fire and guessed that something bad had happened. My father came back home in the evening and on the morning of the 30th September told me they were all dead: 12 of them, all women and children from the Bevilacqua, Righi and Moruzzi families. In my family that meant mum, my sister-in-law, two sisters and a baby niece.
After some days hiding up with no food and feeling awful, it stopped raining and I decided to go back home. That was October 2nd, and I said to father: "I'm going home to my folk. If the Germans come, let them kill me, I can't stay here." Father said: "If you're going, I'll come too." At home I saw little Luisa, my niece, lying between mum and aunty. Her cheeks were still drawn by their hands as mum kissed her to shield her from the machine-gun. The other children too were being hugged by their mums or grannies.
I just sat there in silence. (Primo Righi)

On 29 September 1944 my husband Amedeo and I got up without having heard anything. We lived at the back of beyond, nothing but land and sky. Someone knocked and we were afraid it was the Germans, but it was Amedeo's father, crying "They've all been killed at Maccagnano". 'They' were his wife, a sister of just under 30 with a little boy, the son of a widowed sister who'd been evacuated up to Malfolle.

From his hideout in the wood he could see it all. They brought them out and lined them up in the yard. The little boy was holding his aunt's hand, and they ordered her to pick him up as he was to die as well. Towards evening Amedeo's father laid out the bodies and left.
When he returned in May there were no bodies. The snow, the cold and animals had just left the bones. These were gathered into a common coffin and buried. (Lina Bevilacqua)

San Giovanni

At San Giovanni fifty in a hideout were barbarously mown down. They included the numerous Fiori family, excellent Christians. One daughter, Sister Maria of the Bologna Maestre Pie, happened to be home visiting her folk, and shared their horrible fate.
Sister Maria's six year-old niece was still alive. She clung to her dead mother's neck for three days, calling and kissing her and sobbing.
The only survivor, her father, found her like that, dead of starvation and exhaustion[13].

Casaglia Cemetery

A nine-month infant, Laffi Giorgio, had survived while his mother and nine members of his family lay dead. The child had fallen to the ground. He was seen crawling among the dead and waving his arms and legs, unable to walk. It was pouring with rain and the little creature wailed and wailed for hours before dying of cold and hunger.
A boy of six, Tonelli from Possatore, was unhurt. On coming out of the gate he saw his mother, with five little brothers and sisters all dead, and opted to stay there with them. A hand-grenade killed him shortly afterwards.

[13] Account taken from *Sull'eccidio di Marzabotto* by Mary Toffoletto Romagnoli, ed. by the *Regional Committee to Honour the Fallen at Marzabotto*.

A foster family relates

FRANCESCO FRANZONI:

At the time I was living at Zello near Imola. Our family was one of those invited by the National Liberation Committee to host mountain children among whom there was terrible poverty.
My family had a young girl to stay, Alba, who came from a large family with a number of daughters up at San Benedetto Val di Sambro. She lived with us for three months and then went home to start school. Later we had her sister Maria who was 14 and helped my sister-in-law Maria around the house, while every so often the elder sisters would come. They were all beautiful.
We kept in touch for many years. My brother and sister-in-law used to go and see them at San Benedetto.
I'd like to add that our farming family always shone when it came to helping poorer folk. We'd had the foresight to bring in a lot of wheat that summer '44, expecting difficult times, which is how we were able to take in needy people and sell wheat at a normal price just when it was only to be found on the 'black market'.
I'm proud of my family; it deserved its honourable mention by the National Liberation Committee.

Now the scent of gardens says
Elena Bono

Now the scent of gardens says
the rain is over.
Folk appear on terraces
to breathe the air.
A strange strange silence
like the start of time.
Here and there a drip is heard
from off a branch
and squelch of water
down the gravel drive.
It's dark towards the mountains
where lightning flickers:
soon night will come
and with the night returning storm.
But now we know
the sad sweet solace
of this togetherness
once the rainstorm,
who knows where,
has rumbled off our hearts,
this lingering together
before another
parting.
Now that dark is coming,
now alone
our eyes take in
the light of every face,
the gleam of every leaf,
and in the hush before the thunder,
what new magic
in the sound of someone's voice,
the rustle of the plants
that sigh a long
and painless sigh.

(Translated from: Elena Bono *Poesie-Opera Omnia*, Ed. Le Mani)

Guido Reni,
Dawn, detail, 1614
Rome, Palazzo Rospigliosi Pallavicini, House of the Dawn

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