

DREAMS FROM A SUITCASE
(SOGNI DALLA VALIGIA)

Recollections of Italian Settlers
in the Yarra Valley

MEMOIRS FOUNDATION PUBLISHERS

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This book is dedicated to all the courageous Italian migrants who left their shores to choose Australia as their new land and home for themselves, their families and future generations.

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The Committee of the Yarra Valley Italian Cultural Group Inc. and the Publishers acknowledge, with thanks, the many people who have collaborated in making possible the publishing of the recollections narrated in this book.

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Our thanks go also to the members of the committee for their vision and efforts in seeing this work completed, many of whose stories are included in this volume. And to Mr Giuseppe Fotia for allowing us to photograph the suitcase he travelled with to Australia some 60 years ago, for the front cover of this publication.

Last, but probably most important, our thanks go to all the narrators whose recollections are recounted in this book, for allowing us to publish them.

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Foreword

As the convener of this historical project, I commend this book to the reader. Its concept is not unlike a colourful jigsaw puzzle, with the narrators' recollections as the separate pieces that come together to complete the puzzle as a memorable legacy for future generations.

My involvement with this project started when I was asked to join a steering committee of the government's Rangers Health. They had found that many older Italians, living on the outer areas of the towns, felt isolated and that one of their needs was their wish to relate their stories to those who would follow. This seemed good therapy for good health. It led to the forming of the Yarra Valley Cultural Group, and to several years of planning the production of this book.

May our endeavours encourage other communities to do the same, in order to keep completing the greater jigsaw puzzle of this nation's growth.

Luigi Fotia
Chairman
Yarra Valley Italian Cultural Group Inc.

DREAMS FROM A SUITCASE

SOGNI DALLA VALIGIA



Antonio and Rosa Arena

RECOLLECTIONS

DREAMS FROM A SUITCASE

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Recollections of Antonio and Rosa Arena

*1985:
Rosa and
Antonio's
official
25th Wedding
Anniversary
photo*

My wife, Rosa Cicconi, and I are second cousins; we came from two different villages, about six kilometres apart, in the region of Calabria. I migrated to Australia in 1951, sponsored by an uncle who needed me to work in his shop in Lilydale. Rosa was sponsored by the same uncle, for the same reason, and arrived four years after me, on the ss Neptunia in 1955.

When I was a boy, my father was a property administrator and so was my grandfather. There were many properties and land where people of my village would share-farm. My father's job was to prepare estimates on the worth of the properties and calculate the amount each property owner and each share farmer would be paid from the proceeds of the sales of their produce. In those fields, they grew all sorts of fruit and vegetables such as watermelons, cucumbers, zucchini, beans, and peas. In the winter, it would be olives, from which they used to extract the oil. As an adolescent, I used to load the produce onto a donkey's back and carry it to the boss' home.

Sponsored by my late uncle Cicconi, my brother and I arrived in Australia in 1951. He owned a milk bar in Main Street, Lilydale, just near the Lilydale station. Many people still remember the Cicconi milk bar, café and bakery. He had wanted us to come to Australia so I could learn to be a pastry cook, and my younger brother could serve in the shop. I was nearly 15 years old and thought it was a great idea. We were very excited about such a big adventure.



Our mother was not at all keen on the idea. She was not happy for her sons to leave home and sail to the other side of the world. However, my dad was more reassuring, “We’ll let you go with your brother, and if you don’t like it, you can always come back,” he said.

On that condition, my brother and I boarded the ss *Surriento* in Messina and began the long journey to Australia. Weeks later, when we arrived at Port Melbourne, our uncle Cicconi was there to greet us. It was 11 o’clock at night before all the formalities of disembarking were taken care of, and we could leave the ship. Then, at that late hour, began the drive to our new home in Lilydale. The drive seemed to take such a long time, we thought we were never going to get to our new destination.

We had a pretty hard time at first, because of the language problem. I picked up a few words of English in the bakery, but most of my education happened when I started working with a couple of old men in the bush. I learned quite a bit from them. Being young, I picked up the language quite easily, including the Australian slang. Some of the older migrants found it difficult to learn any English.

We had landed in Australia to a hell of a life; a very, very hard life. Because our uncle was family, I never would have thought that it would be so bad; he worked us so hard that he made us feel quite homesick and wanting to return home. But, we were here now. We couldn’t turn around and go back without giving it a go. I was too scared to write to my mother and tell that we were not happy with things. We just had to put up with it; and my brother and I would often cry ourselves to sleep.

I remember writing to my mother, “When I’m 21, I will come back and find a nice girl and get married.” I also remember the line she wrote back, “Son, I can tell you what the girls are like, but I can’t pick one out for you. You have to pick her out by yourself.”

And that advice was a marvel, because most parents, in those days, used to choose a girl who would make a good wife for their boy. But I never went back to Italy to find a bride; Mum died before I turned 21, and I lost interest in going back to Calabria and settling there.

My uncle later bought some land in the bush, on Boundary Road in Coldstream. By then, I had been working at the shop for five or six months

and wasn't very happy. I hated being inside all day, so I started working on my uncle's land, clearing it, and cutting down trees. It was very hard physical work.

For four and a half years, I would ride my bike all the way from the shop in Lilydale, to the farm in Coldstream, in order to start work at 7.30 am. After labouring there all day, I would ride home on my bicycle in the evening. And when I arrived, it was time to start making pies, pastries and cakes for the shop. More often than not, it would be 11.30pm before I could go to bed. My uncle was not paying me a wage for any work, he just gave me free accommodation behind the shop, in payment.

Through the arduous physical labouring on the farm, and the daily bike rides, I gradually became very fit. I remember, as I rode to work one morning, overtaking a professional bike rider on his shining racing bike. By the time I reached Coldstream, on my old bike with my lunch in the sugar bags on the back, he still hadn't caught up with me.

There were many Italian boys from various farms around the valley. We all knew each other and enjoyed playing soccer together for the Lilydale Lime Soccer Club. We even played a few matches against the Victoria Police team; they were all tall and would run over the top of our players. We weren't very good at first, but in time and with practice, we improved and even managed to attract some skilful German players to join us from the other local teams.

As I reached 18, I passed my driver's licence and it gave me a lot more freedom. I thought then that the job in the milk bar was not doing me any good in improving my situation or my pocket, and I gave the job up. When I announced my decision to my uncle, he was not at all pleased. I had to pay him back the fare he had paid for me to sail to Australia, and it took me a long time to pay him back.

To earn a living and pay my debt, I started working afternoon shifts at the Hollandia Shoe Company factory in the Croydon area near Hull Road. And after my shift, began working as a gardener for local people's properties, to make some extra money. Mr Quinn, the manager, of the Hollandia Shoe Company, who came to hear of my gardening, asked me one day to do some work for him at his home. So, in the mornings, I would work in his garden,

mowing the lawns, weeding, trimming hedges and other general garden maintenance, and then do my eight hour afternoon shift at the Hollandia Shoe Factory. On one occasion, Mr Quinn had three tons of wood he needed me to split. I was only 19 at the time and I said it would probably take me a whole day's work, and he agreed to pay me accordingly. As it happened, I finished all the splitting by 11 am, and I looked for other work to do, so I started to clear the weeds in the garden. As he was pleased with my work, Mr Quinn suggested I should start working for myself full-time as a gardener. I liked the sound of that, and decided to go ahead with the idea. Mr Quinn then began to recommend me to a number of his neighbours who needed their gardens cared for. And that is how I started working my gardening business.

After I left Hollandia to pursue my gardening venture, I worked at the Croydon Rubber Mill, on Hull Road, to make ends meet while the gardening business took off. At the Mill, they produced rubber mats for cars and many other Dunlop products. They also manufactured smaller items like teats for babies' bottles. We were paid on a piece work basis; sixpence a piece. The boss would say as he passed by our work station "If you see a sixpence on the floor you would pick it up, wouldn't you? So why don't you pick that up?" pointing to a little rubber thing that had fallen on the factory floor.

I was quite good at piece work and at times used to make a £9 weekly bonus. But then the bosses started watching and working out how many pieces you made in a night. They then increased the number of pieces needed to qualify for the bonus. The supervisors would come around and say, "Don't you want to work for the bonus?"

But I was wise to their ruse, I'd answer, "No, because I am killing myself to make the numbers and getting nowhere near the bonus." I didn't work for the bonus any more, just for wages.

Another place I worked at the time was Chapman's cherry orchard. I would start at 7am and pick six or seven cases of cherries in the morning. We'd put the ladder up to the tree and as we picked, we would drop the cherries into a tin hung around our neck. The cherries were then placed into little wooden boxes. I was paid six shillings for each box I filled. There were mornings when I would pick up to 33 cases of cherries before I went to work at the Croydon rubber mill.

While working for my uncle at the farm, I was building a machinery shed one day, when I was accidentally knocked down from a crane. I was injured in the fall and taken to hospital. As my brother was living away with relatives, it was Rosa who, when she was allowed some time off from the café, came and visited me during the four weeks I was in hospital recovering. She visited almost every day. As soon as I was discharged, we started going out together.

Rosa and I knew each other from our childhood in Italy; we are second cousins. We married in Lilydale and lived at the back of the milk bar/café owned by the same uncle who had sponsored us both. Rosa worked long, hard hours in his shop; sixteen hours a day for £7 a week. There were always a lot of customers arriving from the trains, as Lilydale station was the end of the electric rail network at the time. Local buses, such as McKenzie's Buslines, ran from the station to the Yarra Valley to Healesville and Warburton. There were not many other shops where you could buy food in Lilydale. Most of the time, we were so busy serving customers, it was difficult to find the time to stop for a cup of tea and something to eat. We used to cook and serve three course dinners on Sundays. When the shop closed at midnight, all the chairs had to be put up on the tables, the floors scrubbed, the counters cleaned and everything else set, ready for the following morning.

In 1960, when our son John was born, we bought a house in Mt Evelyn and stayed there for about 18 months. One day we were threatened by a bushfire and had to evacuate; so we had all our furniture carried back to the shop at Lilydale, just to be safe.

In 1962 our second son, Peter, was born.

As we became permanent citizens of Australia, we started sponsoring a number of members of our own families. There was a time when we tried to bring one of Rosa's brothers here, we had all the documents signed for him, but then the Government in Canberra stopped immigration for a while. He had to wait until it was reopened before he was the first to join us, followed later by another brother; then one by one all her family came, including her mother after Rosa's father died.

Edna Walling, a most respected landscape designer, journalist and photographer, heard from her neighbours about my gardening work and in the early 60's employed me to work in the garden of her home, 'Sonning',

in Bickleigh Vale Road, Mooroolbark. Miss Walling had many important commissions to design gardens, and she must have been impressed enough with my work, to ask me to accompany her and work in the gardens she designed. My fees in those days were half a crown an hour. As well as designing gardens Miss Walling took hundreds of photographs of flowers and plants and gardens, and printed them all in her own darkroom.

Looking back, a funny incident happened at Miss Walling's. As I was still working at the factory Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, by Thursday that day I was feeling pretty tired. After a few hours tending her garden, I sat down to have my lunch at the table under the back verandah of the house - they named it 'The Barn' - and promptly fell asleep. When Miss Walling found me dozing, she told me to go and have a sleep on the bed, in the room behind the verandah. She covered me with a blanket and went back to work developing photographs in her dark room. I shouldn't have told my uncle what had happened because from then on, every time she called me on the phone, he would tease me by saying, "The lady who put you to bed is on the phone."

Amongst my customers was Sophie Ducker, the distinguished botanist and also author of *The Contented Botanist*, a classic amongst keen gardeners. I worked for her in her Balwyn garden between 1964 and 2002. At the start while the rate was 18 shillings an hour she paid 25, a very generous lady.

I also worked for over 22 years in the gardens of Mr and Mrs Brash, who owned the Brashes' music stores in Melbourne, and with my son John, maintained the garden of Frank Galbally, the criminal lawyer who later became a QC. We also worked in the gardens of the Galbally's sons. Yes we had some well known customers, but in the end I suffered with my back and had to have two back operations. I also had a knee and a shoulder replacement, I was in the hospital for nine and a half weeks and I didn't know whether I'd be lucky enough to come home after an infection from a screw in my shoulder affected my heart.

Rosa has worked very hard all her life looking after the family, as well as working for other people. Rosa used to produce all our salami and smallgoods and still makes sauces and preserves, cakes and biscuits. There were times when Rosa had to bring our oldest boy to the shop with her, while she was working. It was difficult balancing family and work sometimes.

Our two sons, John and Peter, have inherited my interest in gardening. After finishing high school, they continued their education at Burnley Horticultural College and became qualified landscape gardeners. Both the boys have married. When our eldest son was married in 1981 my father came to Australia for the wedding. I wrote to him and said, "This is your first grandson's wedding, please come," so he did. My father passed away about 5 years ago now. Our son John now has six children, four girls and two boys. Peter has two boys. We are very proud of our eight grandchildren. They are all doing interesting things and enjoying their lives. One of our granddaughters has been in Cambodia for twelve months as a volunteer helping children.

We've been fortunate enough to be able to return to Italy a number of times, partly so that our children could meet some of their relatives. I've been back three times and Rosa has been back once. Rosa's mother was living with us in Australia and as Rosa had to take care of her, I went twice to Italy on my own. Rosa promised to go back to Italy to visit her sister, who had come out to stay with us in Australia a couple of times; that is the main reason she went back.

We are glad to be living in Australia. There were better opportunities here for us and for our family. We are not able to get around as much now, but we enjoy living in our own home with our wonderful views across the Yarra Valley.

It's important to do what you can to help people who have less than you, and to appreciate and look after those who work hard on the land, out in the weather every day of their working lives.

If we were asked for our advice by the next generation, we would try to explain how to always be fair and honest in life. My dad always said, "Your good name is more important than anything else. Once you've tarnished it, you'll never be trusted again." ■

*Right:
1938:
Tony, 2 years old
Far right:
1965:
Tony's son John,
aged 4 ½*



*Tony Arena
aged 19,
tending the
garden bed*



*Rosa Cicconi
at 25 years of age,
before marrying
Tony Arena*





Tony, playing the piano accordion, at 20 years of age



Rosa Arena, 27, taking a break, with her cat perched snugly on her shoulder



Tony on a ride-on-mower at Mr Kershaw's property in Kalama. 'Simplicity Mowers' was one of the first companies to introduce ride-on-mowers to Australia

*Tony and Rosa's sons,
Tony and Peter, in
primary school*



*The Christening of Marcus Colangelo. Tony and Rosa are the god-parents,
our other sons, John and Peter are the alter boys. The officiating priest,
was Father Tricarrico (affectionately known as 'Father Tric')*

*1981:
John's wedding day.
Tony is giving his son
the very best wishes
for the future*





1985: Tony and Rosa celebrate their 25th Wedding Anniversary with their sons, John and Peter



John's daughter, Christy, doing volunteer work in Cambodia, at 21 years of age

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SOGNI DALLA VALIGIA



Vincenzina Borrelli

RECOLLECTIONS

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Recollections of Vincenzina Borrelli

*Vincenzina, 12,
with little sister
Marisa,
10 months*

My family lived in Italy in a small village, St. Eufemia À maiella. It was a very close-knit community with only about 2000 people, where everyone knew everybody else. Most people lived off the land, my parents had about 250 sheep and sold cheese, milk and ricotta to support the family.

My mother was a gentle person who kept house and sewed. Dad was the opposite, quite boisterous, but a very loving father. He provided us with everything we needed.

Dad decided to leave Italy in 1938, just before World War II broke out. Mum was three months pregnant with me at the time. One of Dad's uncles in Australia was willing to sponsor him out. Dad sold the sheep and cheese-making business to my uncle and grandfather before he left because Mum couldn't manage them on her own. I was born six months later in May 1939.

Both my uncle and grandfather supported our family throughout the war. We slept in our own home, but we ate together in the main house, 13 family members in all! Food was always very scarce during the war, so we would share everything we had. Even if there was just one orange in the house, it would be shared equally between the 13 of us.

After WWII started, Dad wasn't able to come back to Italy and it was ten years before Mum, my brother, Italo, my sister, Antoinetta, and I were to be re-united with my dad.



Dad couldn't send money home to us until about 1946. That's when we started to receive the first letters from him in five years. Until we received that first letter, we didn't know if Dad was dead or alive! That time of unknowing had been very difficult for my mother. I was very young and had never actually met my dad at that stage, so I didn't really understand it all.

In Dad's letters, he told us that Australia was a land of plenty and he wasn't going to come back to Italy. He had leased and settled on a farm in Wandin East. He had a couple of other Italians working on the farm with him, who would have been interned during the war had they not been working with Dad. Dad was growing fruit and vegetables on contract for use by the army, which meant that they were allowed to continue working the farm, although as Italians they still had to report to the police in Lilydale every week.

When Dad told Mum to bring the family to Australia, she was excited about going and being reunited with her husband. But after the war ended in 1945, the Typhoid epidemic in Italy struck my brother. Italo ended up contracting meningitis and needing expensive medicine. Dad was able to send us money by then, and the only way to save my brother's life was for my uncle to ride his bike to a bigger town an hour away from our village, to buy the medicine, and ride back again. Italo survived, but with some brain damage.

On 19 June 1948, Mum, Italo, Antonietta and I finally landed at Essendon Airport. I was 9 years old. We came on a DC10 that Dad and other Italians, expecting their families, had chartered. There were 38 passengers including us. We had stopped at Colombo, Aden, Jakarta, Darwin and then finally Melbourne. We only flew at night, and I remember us all feeling sick. All the food they gave us were minute sandwiches. We Italians who love our thick bread, cheese and sausages, thought: "What on earth are these?"

Dad met us at Essendon airport with an uncle and two cousins. They picked us up in a big truck. My parents were finally reunited after 10 years! In my imagination my father would be big, tall and handsome. I'm told I expressed my disillusionment when I first met him.

We finally arrived at our house in Wandin East after the long drive. Mum went to switch on the light but there was no electricity, just kerosene lanterns and candles. When we woke up the following morning, there was fruit and eggs for breakfast, and Dad had made some wine.

And everything was good. That is, until I started going to school!

In Italy, my school was only about 50 meters from our house. Everyday, Mum would stand at the front door to watch me walk to school. But from our new home in Wandin East, it was a 3 mile walk to my school in Wandin Yallock! I was exhausted by the time I arrived!

On my first day of school, I couldn't understand anyone, and no-one could understand me. I was the first Italian to go to that school and they weren't sure how to teach me, or to communicate with me. I went home and told Dad, "Where have you brought us! The people are all deaf and dumb!" After Dad said that they spoke a different tongue, I poked my tongue out at a few kids so they would show me theirs. To my surprise, theirs didn't look any different to mine. Then Dad explained that 'speaking a different tongue' meant 'speaking a different language.' There was another girl at school who also spoke a little Italian, but she had been too embarrassed to admit it to the teacher. One morning, she was asked to talk to me, and said, "You are not going to be called Vincenzina any more, but 'Vincey'. Vincenzina is too hard to say for the others." Once home, I sobbed to my parents "They've re-baptised me!" To help me with English, the headmaster told his daughter to take me outside, and she started pointing things out and naming them - 'tree', 'grass', 'birds', 'butterfly', 'sun' etc. I can't exactly remember learning the language; just picking it up gradually.

About eighteen months later, buses started running to the Catholic school in Lilydale, and I was sent there, with many children of new immigrants. A special teacher was there to help the Italian kids and relied on me to take them under my wing and help them. The nuns called me 'the Archangel'! Ever since then, I have endeavoured to help others throughout my life.

My mother did all the housework and sewing, and 16 months after arriving in Wandin East, gave birth to my sister Marisa. Mum became quite sick after the birth and had to spend much time in bed. On reflection, she must have been depressed. Her father had died just before we left Italy; she felt isolated and missed the family she left behind. At 12, I left school to help Mum with the baby and to work on the farm. And that I did until at 19, I was married. Sometimes I feel I missed out on an education, but I don't resent having to leave school. I loved my baby sister and we became very close. I was able to pick things up and eventually, later in my life, to run successful businesses.

My father sponsored many people out from Italy. The last one was a man called di Fiore, and it was through him that I met my husband Carlo. There was an attraction between us, and as my father thought he was a good worker, he approved of the match. Carlo (Charlie as he became known) was an electrician at the Metters factory in the city. We were married in 1958. Our wedding was featured in the local paper as “Wedding of the Year”. My bridal party was made up of 12 cousins: seven bridesmaids, four flower girls, and a page boy. About 700 guests came to the reception at the Wandin North Hall. It was huge! It was open house with two roast pigs, and an entire big roast beef.

After the wedding, Dad gave up the vegetable growing and began to breed pigs. Many Italians used them to make their sausages and hams. It was easier for Dad than working the land. He continued pig farming until his death in March 1991.

Charlie and I had a long married life, but sadly he passed away, aged 75, on September 15, 2007, after a long illness.

In the early days, Charlie had managed to buy a house in Ascot Vale and then sent for his four brothers to come out to Australia. By the time we had been married for two and half years, I was looking after my husband, two children and three brothers-in-law, and I was barely 21!

One brother-in-law worked with Four'n'Twenty Pies, one in concreting, and the other at the meat works. Charlie had been sponsored by the government to pick fruit in places like Rushworth and Shepparton. When the season was over, he came back to Melbourne and was given other work at Metters Pty. Ltd., making electrical appliances. Eventually all of the brothers-in-law married. Then my mother-in-law came out to Australia.

We moved back to a small farm in Wandin as the city wasn't really for me, and we grew strawberries and beans. I ran the farm while Charlie continued working in a factory as well as helping me on the farm after work and on weekends.

One day, my father came to me and said, “Will you ring the fish and chip shop in Lilydale, it's been three weeks since he bought any potatoes from me. I still have all these potatoes in the shed”. When I rang, the shop owner

told me he had closed the shop for good. His wife had left him and gone to Queensland. I asked Charlie, "Do you think we could run a fish and chip shop?" We were a bit scared about doing it, but I went down and had a look at the business. We sold the farm and Charlie left his job at Hollandia Shoes in Lilydale...and that was it, we took over the fish and chip shop!

Charlie would go to the fresh fish market in the early hours of the morning to make sure we had the best fish. He would bring home huge whole fish, some were five feet long, and he had to skin them and cut them into portions. Then I would cook them. By seven o'clock on a Friday morning, we had to have one thousand pieces of flake cooked and ready, and about 15 to 20 trays of potato cakes! I started at four o'clock in the morning. It was hard work, and if you didn't have it ready in time you'd be chasing your tail all day; you would never catch up. We were open seven days a week back then, no days off! I was proud of our business. But it was the long hours and handling the fish that I didn't like, and in those days you had to make your own chips. We had a 'rumbler' to peel them and a 'chipper' to cut them. Not out of a packet in the freezer, like they are today.

We tried to offer the best fish and chips in town and relied on word-of-mouth for customers. It was a hard life in the fish shop, but fortunately, we did well and were able to put the kids through good private schools. We built our house and had it fully paid by the time we moved in. We bought a new car and had some money in the bank. But the only outings we could have were on a Tuesday after lunch. One week, Charlie would take the kids out to the beach or somewhere, and the following week I would take them. We could never all go out together as a family though. Our Tuesday outings were good, but sometimes, even now, I think the kids still resent it a little that we didn't have a less busy life during their childhood.

We ran our fish business in Lilydale for 10 years until the old shop building was condemned. And so we moved a few doors down into a delicatessen business.

The Deli was a welcome change, shorter hours and more time to talk to our customers. We loved it. After eight years in the deli, Charlie began to suffer with problems to his legs, and his back. Then, one day in 1976, he suddenly sold the deli without even telling me! He went back to work with the State Electricity Commission and I stayed at home. The money had

been coming in by the shovelful in the deli, but now it was going out by the pitchfork! Our son was still at secondary college and our daughter had married in 1979, so I applied for a job as second in charge of the deli with Coles supermarkets. I stayed with them for 15 years, later managing their deli at Chirnside. There was a lot of responsibility there though, running the 20-25 girls that worked in the deli.

I still know everyone in Lilydale after running those businesses over 20 years. I remember young school boys coming into the fish shop for some chips and potato cakes. I'd always put an extra potato cake, dim sim or piece of fish in their parcels. They are all men in their 50s now, but they have never forgotten us or the fish shop. They still talk about the extra little surprise in their parcels when I see them today.

Charlie worked with the SEC until 1995 when he retired after a back operation and being very sick. After that he became a semi-quadruplegic, and that was very hard for us all.

Mum's health went downhill after Dad died in 1991, leaving her and my brother Italo on the farm by themselves. I was worried about them as they couldn't run things on their own, so we had to close down the pig farm. I decided to give up my work at Coles and moved them both in to live with me and Charlie. Mum suffered a stroke and passed away in October, 1991 – seven months after Dad.

I have always taken care of my family. I looked after my mother-in-law for three years before she died, and looked after both of my parents and my husband through years of illness. I still take care of my brother Italo, and he enjoys his life now. Dad had kept him a little bit too sheltered over the years. He worked very hard on the farm. Now Italo goes out with various community and men's groups to many different places and he has a carer who takes him to the movies regularly; he has a good life.

Although I'm more of the homely type, I have had four trips back to Italy over the years. I'm happy in my own company, but I like people to visit me. My lovely four grandsons and my granddaughter visit me often. They are all grown up now. My brother and I have bought a little dog and we enjoy his company too.

I started doing voluntary work for an Italian group some years ago through Community Health. It involved some interpreting and taking people shopping. It was a nice respite for me while I was caring for my sick husband. I still volunteer today. A few years back, we had an Italian Cultural Day at Wandin which included storytelling. I told my life story at the Cultural Day and so did a few others. That became the embryo for the idea of this book.

I am privileged to have helped many Italian settlers over the years. Sometimes I would interpret for young pregnant mothers who couldn't speak English. I'd go with them to see their doctor and explain things for them. When I would walk into that medical clinic they would say, "Here comes the good Samaritan". I'm still in contact with some of the doctors that were there 30 years ago.

I'm 70 now and still going strong. I am a Catholic and never miss my Sunday Mass. I'm taking two older ladies shopping next week and enjoy helping the Italian community. We have a new activity group which meets every Wednesday at the Wandin Elderly Citizens Club. It's a social gathering and we have lunch together. They are all older frail people and we pick them up in the community health bus. It's the highlight of their week.

If I were asked what my major achievement in life was, it would have to be my two children and seeing them become wonderful, healthy and happy people with lovely families of their own.

And if I were to give advice to young people about how to have a happy life, I would say "Don't take things too seriously, go on with your life and take it one day at a time, one step at a time. Don't worry about asking yourself how you are going to be able to do something, sleep on it, and the following day it will look more feasible." Some days, I feel, "Aaagghhh !!", but by the next day, things don't seem so bad after all! ■

*1947-49:
Italo on
big Jack, our
Clydesdale horse*



*Fiore Di Giovini
with fellow workers
Michele D'Aloiso and
Pete Del Papa*



*1948:
Our first Christmas
L-R standing –
Italo 22,
Antonietta 18,
Sitting –
Fiore 42,
Vincenzina 10,
Dorinda 38*





1948:
First day in Australia
for Dorinda with
Connie Di Pietro and
Toni Di Pietro



1950:
Vincenzina Di Giovine with
Mary Di Vincentis
on the occasion of their
First Holy Communion



1952:
The Di Giovine
family with our
first achievement,
the truck, a
Chevrolet.
L-R :
Dorinda,
Fiore,
Marisa 2,
Vincy 13
and Italo 26



1968:
*Mum and Dad sharing
a happy moment,
celebrating their 60th
Wedding Anniversary*



1997:
*Italo (seated)
celebrates his
70th birthday,
Standing –
Vincenzina,
Antonietta and
Marisa*

