

Letter from a subscriber

Upon receiving this informative and entertaining letter, we asked Mr. Bertola if we could share it with our readers. We thank him for his kind permission and trust our readers will enjoy it as much as we have.

Gardiner, 4.1.92

Dear Friends,

I have enjoyed your publication over the last year, which subscription was by my eldest son Patrick, who is doing a PhD on the WA goldfields - Italians etc.

Patrick has been to Melbourne on a couple of occasions researching on the project. He is due for another visit soon.

My late father Giovanni, came to Aussie in July 1927 on his own. Mum (deceased), eldest sister Elvira, myself and a yet to be born brother Alessandro were left (or rather) stranded in Montagna (Sondrio) for seven years before Dad could call us. Beats me how Mum managed, as we were that poor. Dad immediately got caught up in bad luck and the great Depression. His first job of cutting firewood for the Kalgoorlie water pumping station at Mundaring Weir resulted in no payment for the six months' work. He had two mates in the same boat, luckily one of them had a few bob which were used to keep them in stores. It seems, that there were one or two compatriots of older migration vintage, who cottoned on to new arrivals by promising work. These shysters apparently sub-contracted the firewood work and got the likes of Dad in. Anyway, after the bad start, Dad went on land clearing at Southern Cross. Tough work, all hand stuff, chopping down gimblet and Salmon gum with axe and crosscut saw. I think they were paid something like 25/- an acre to cut down and about the same to stack and burn the timber. Lived in tents of course, no fridges, electricity, or fresh food apart from an occasional roo or rabbit! And the bit of

vino would be of doubtful quality too! Anyway Dad sent Mum a couple of bits of money during this period of work as the cocky (farmer) was honest, paying promptly.

Then one day the farmer came to Dad and his mates' tent with the news of the financial crash. The farmer had no more credit, everything caved in.

Dad and mates gravitated to the township of Jarrahdale some 50 km SE of Perth, a timber town, where Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gianatti acted as family to all these stray Italians who were mainly from the same Montagna.

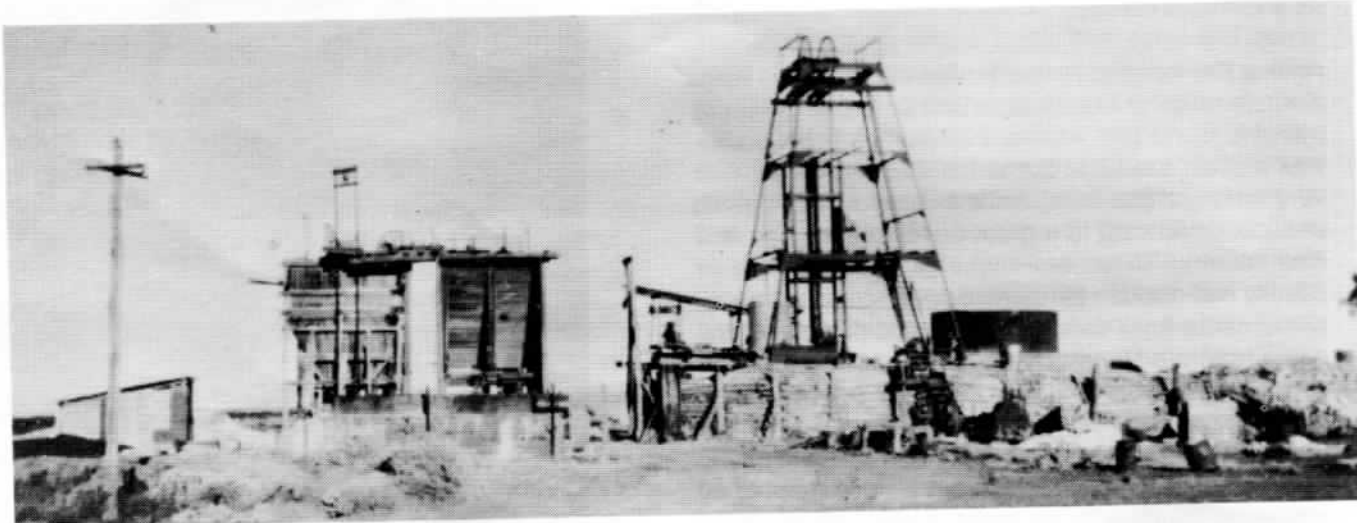
Gianatti and Jarrahdale are synonymous.

Then Dad contracted typhus and peritonitis due no doubt to the living conditions, and was hospitalized for some months at Perth hospital, for free thank God, as then we had real free medicine for those who could not pay (and no insurance).

Sometime in late '32 my father took off to the goldfields in company with a townsman Filippo Muffatti to search for work. An Italian hotelkeeper, Maffina, of the Main Reef, Boulder, grub-staked them for gold prospecting at Kalgoorlie, for a half share: Dad and Phil could work but were ignorant of gold finding. They had no success there so moved to Mt. Monger 60 km SE of Kalgoorlie, where on re-opening some old workings they struck good paydirt.

Whenever Dad recounted the episode of the gold discovery, it was like all birthdays in one hit! He and Phil could not sleep for days!

Anyway, Dad paid off all the people he owed a quid in no time, got himself some fine clothes (which he kept at the **Home from Home** hotel in Kalgoorlie) which was owned by a Mrs. Gianatti. The fine clothes



The New Milano mine at Mt. Monger

went up in smoke during the race riots. (Patrick has done a thesis on the riots).

The goldmine was a beauty. Rich ore. Dad lost an eye in an accident at the mine which was sold to an Adelaide Co. for 50,000 pounds and 50000 shares in ESCROW for two years. It was called **New Milano**.

On July 22, 1934 we were reunited, landing from the P&O, **Oronsay** at Fremantle. My younger two sisters were born at Kalgoorlie. We lived at Mt. Monger till 1940. Our home was made of whitewashed hessian, hessian floor, bush timber frame and the indispensable corrugated iron roof.



The home at Mt Monger.

The school at Mt. Monger was unique. A story in itself. A Victorian, Mr. Jack Cass was my, and the only teacher.



At the Mt Monger school.

Before leaving the 'fields' Dad bought an orchard property on Chidlow, 50 km east of Perth on the railway.

The war years were not happy ones for us, being under continued surveillance and suspicion. Many Italians were interned. A story in itself. Events that brought little credit to all and in some respects best forgotten.

I married a local lass, Alice Hill, who became a Catholic. In 1951 we moved to Mundaring, built and

lived in a house opposite the Sacred Heart Church. We were part and parcel of the Italian-Australian Catholic community. There were many stone cutters (granite) who were mainly Abruzzi in the area which supplied monumental stone to the city.

Seven children were born to us while we lived in the hills, five boys and two girls. Altogether a busy happy time. I worked on my own, stone cutting, plumbing, building, carting, painting, pruning. We had two half-acre blocks, so we kept a house cow for a few years, this was at the instigation of the first Parish priest of Mundaring, Father Tom Linane who came from farming stock himself. I remember our first cow kicking him to billyoh! She was a wild one alright. I soon packed her off to market, had to. A bad buy!

I spent several years (11) at Mundaring, learning the art of stone masonry (not monumental). Always hankered after a farm, so in early 1962 we moved to Albany where we added the third daughter and sixth son to the family. Did salmon fishing and carting from near Bremer Bay, also did general cartage, some building as well.

In 1965 began buying a 90 acre farmlet to where we moved some 6 miles out East on No.1 highway. At the end of 1967 we applied for and were granted a C.P. block of mallee some 12 miles North of Bremen Bay 185 km from Albany. So my hankering was fulfilled!

In early 1970 the whole family shifted to the farm where I had sited an old timber mill house carted from Shannon River near Northcliffe in the Karri country of the S.West. We plugged away clearing, sowing, reaping and so on and by 1978 we had the block pretty well cleared and developed. Everyone bar Mum drives cars, trucks, tractors and can shoot a gun. Mum is a champ with scones! Also cakes, is perpetually washing and ironing! I always planted several fruit trees wherever we lived and here at the farm is no exception, also a decent size vegie garden as we secured a magnificent supply of water as the first priority when we first landed here.

Farming is a great life. We have been debt free for at least 10 years. The key to real independence and security. My life at farming is satisfying, very much so. Our sizeable family are variously employed, all good workers and we hope a credit to Australia. Mum and I hope to have a bit of a look at the rest of Australia now that two of our boys have the farm, so you might see us on your doorstep one day!

All the best for '92. Sincerely,

Peter Bertola

P.S. There are quite a few gaps in my scribes. I did not realise how much we fit into an average life.