

# diary of an immigrant from trieste, 1955

by  
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THIS YEAR MARKS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST BIG WAVE OF *TRIESTINI* TO LEAVE THEIR CITY AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO EMIGRATE TO AUSTRALIA. ON 15 MARCH 1954, THE SHIP *CASTELVERDE* LEFT THE PORT OF TRIESTE WITH HUNDREDS OF *TRIESTINI* MIGRANTS ON BOARD. IT WAS A MOMENTOUS EVENT WHICH COINCIDED WITH GREAT POLITICAL CHANGE FOR THE CITY, WHICH WAS STILL OCCUPIED BY THE ALLIED MILITARY FORCES. THESE EMIGRANTS WERE MOSTLY EX-POLICEMEN - AND THEIR FAMILIES - WHO HAD BEEN INDUCTED INTO THE TEMPORARY POLICE CORPS, ESTABLISHED BY THE OCCUPYING FORCES. FROM 1954 UNTIL 1961, NEARLY TEN THOUSAND *TRIESTINI* WOULD FOLLOW IN SUBSEQUENT WAVES OF MIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA. ONE OF THEM WAS ONDINA DEMARCHI WHO, WITH HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER, VENTURED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD TO BEGIN A NEW LIFE IN SYDNEY. THIRTY YEARS LATER ONDINA WROTE A 'DIARY' OF HER MIGRATION EXPERIENCE, WHICH WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE ITALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

These pages are dedicated to my grandson Dylan, in the hope that they may serve him well and that they make him appreciate this land more than his mother and I were able to because of the homesickness we felt for our beloved Italy.

## LIFE IN TRIESTE

I come from one of the oldest families in Trieste, which had its origins in Venice. Ours was a family that had never emigrated and was fiercely attached to our beloved Trieste, which for us is the most beautiful city in the world.

I remember my childhood with an incredible nostalgia, filled with visions of trees in bloom, surrounded by lilac and the most glorious panorama imaginable. Our home, a simple little house with an immense stretch of land - a gift from my great grandfather to my grandmother as a wedding present - was situated on the outskirts of the city and in the morning, when we opened the blinds, our eyes feasted on the vista of the port of Trieste.

The house consisted of two apartments. My grandparents lived in one and our family, my mother, my father and my sister, who was six years older than me, lived in the other. We were a very close family: my father worked in a bank; my grandfather, in

retirement for as long as I can remember, was a cooper at the port in his day; and then there was my aunt, my father's sister. All of us united under one roof.

In the summer evenings after dinner, we would all gather in the garden and my grandfather would invariably be carried away with telling stories of by-gone days, of his youth, when Trieste was still under the dominion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the city was a free port. This was a time of well being in Trieste, of joy, of people singing in the streets. The simplest thing, then, would make one happy.

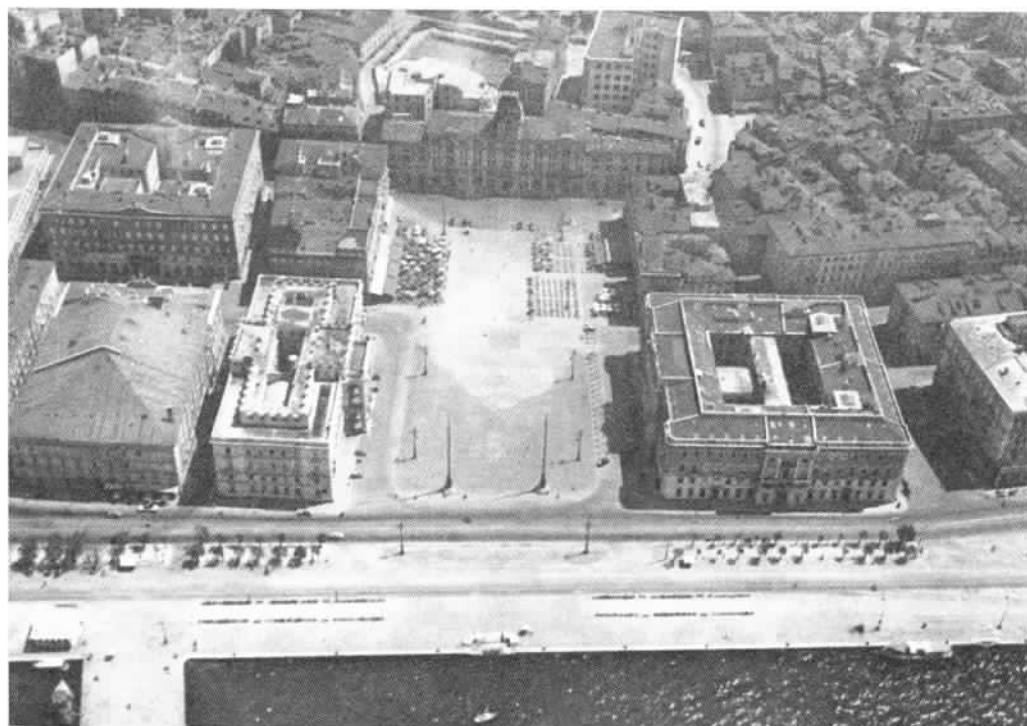
Then there were the sad stories of the First World War, 1914 to 1918. My grandfather was called up, captured and imprisoned in Russia where he remained for five years and more. My grandmother's ancestors were farmers, cultivators of flowers, and so she was able to put our vast land to good use, growing vegetables and flowers and breeding poultry. With the flowers she would make wreaths. Some of the produce from the land was sold and the rest was kept for the family and this is how she was able to keep things going until my grandfather returned, safe and sound fortunately. And with his homecoming, they began to enjoy a life of well being again.

In time, my father married and here we are: my sister was born first and I was born in 1928. I remember the first twelve years of my life as being the most beautiful. They were spent alongside my grandmother whom I adored and who adored me. But afterwards misfortune struck with the outbreak of the Second World War and the death of my grandmother through cancer. I still remember her today with a sigh in my heart. After my mother, she was the sweetest and most wonderful woman I have ever known.

The Second World War... and now it was my father's turn to be called up to fight. I can remember the struggles of my mother trying her best to lighten the situation for us as much as possible and the constant running to the air-raid shelters. God's will allowed that this nightmare, too, should pass and my father returned without a scratch. After my schooling was over, I found work at Stock, a liqueur company where I remained for seven years. When I was nineteen years of age, I became engaged to my current husband, who had returned from the War after an absence of ten years from Italy due to military service, conscription and confinement in a prisoner of war camp in America.

**TOP** United States of America military forces on parade in Trieste during the Allied occupation of the city. In the background is the Lloyd Triestino building. Army Day, 6 April, 1948.

**BOTTOM** View of Trieste showing Piazza dell'Unita'd'Italia and the port in the foreground.



Following the War, employment opportunities were scarce. Trieste, however, was one of the more fortunate cities, because, being under American control, it set up the Civil Police Corps which seconded most of the ex-servicemen, including my husband, who had a great advantage because he could speak English which he learnt as a prisoner of war. He remained in the Corps for ten years. When the ten years were up, America decided to hand back Trieste to

Italy. What followed was insecurity for those in the 'temporary' Police Corps and...mass migration to Australia.

This was a time when women, if they were married, could not find work. I struggled for one year because I did not want to leave my city, my family and all that which I adored. In the end, the prospect of a more secure future, above all security for my daughter, prompted my decision and on the 1 July 1955 we left Trieste on



TOP The ship *Fairsea*, with many hundreds of emigrants on board bound for Australia, about to set sail from the port of Trieste. Photographer: Ugo Borsatti, Omnia, c1955.

BOTTOM Ondina Demarchi with her husband and daughter aboard the ship *Fairsea* bound for Australia.



the ship *Fairsea*. There were 750 of us *Triestini* onboard, all ex-policemen with their families. We were going to a country of which we knew little or nothing. We were convinced that it was predominantly inhabited by Aborigines. At that time there was little news on Australia and the fragment we received was far from the truth.

I will remember my departure until my last days. My husband had to literally tear me away from the crowd that was engulfing me, people who were crying and invoking the names of their loved ones who had

boarded the ship. I had to embrace my father over the gates because he had delayed arriving at the port after having been detained at work. I was sure that I would never see him again. They were cries of sorrow and bitterness against a country that, unfortunate in losing the War, could not adequately provide for its citizens.

The ship remained in port all night because having been formerly a mercantile ship and this being its first voyage as a passenger ship, workers were still on board completing the finishing touches. And so we stayed there anchored all night, which prolonged our agony. I can remember staying on deck all night gazing at my adored Trieste in the distance.

#### THE JOURNEY

I have a most beautiful memory of the trip. For those of you who know the good nature of the *Triestini*, imagine 750 of them under one roof for an entire month. I was even more blessed because the first officer of the ship was my cousin. To this day, I am grateful to him for ensuring that the thirty-two days on board were not like an emigrant's but like a first class passenger on an ocean liner. Fortunately, I do not suffer from seasickness and consequently it was a very pleasant trip. On board with us was a welfare officer of the Australian Government. I remember the words he said to us: 'Australia is a rich land that can ensure your well being but it is barely 200 years old and we are in need of your culture and your willingness to work.' At the time we thought he was exaggerating but how right he was!

Newly arrived migrants from Italy taking a meal in Seymour, one of the stops between Melbourne and the Bonegilla Migrant Centre in north-east Victoria, c1955. Photograph courtesy Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Canberra.



At every port of call the ship never departed punctually, always with three or four hours delay, so during the stopover in Melbourne we and about sixty other passengers decided to take our time (before re-boarding for Sydney). We had friends waiting for us in Melbourne who took us to St Albans, which was about forty-five minutes from Melbourne by train. The ship was scheduled to leave the port at 1 o'clock in the afternoon but at 1 o'clock we were still at lunch with our friends, recounting stories about our adventures and waiting for the gnocchi to surface. My daughter was longing for them and had requested them the whole trip. Consequently, when we arrived back at the port, the ship had already set sail: we had left our belongings on board including my jewellery which my relatives had lavished on me before leaving. I had more sentimental value for me rather than a monetary one. Like a good Italian girl, I had placed the jewellery under my mattress. Fortunately, my real treasures were with me for some people had left their children aboard in the care of friends and were separated from them when they missed the ship leaving some mothers distraught about how and when they would be able to be reunited with their children.

In hindsight, I am grateful to the Australian authorities for being most understanding and efficient in the situation we found ourselves in and for giving us all possible assistance. They tried to arrange a flight

for us to Sydney to meet the ship there but there were insufficient seats for sixty people. First and foremost, they provided us with warm blankets and milk for the children. It was the middle of winter and the temperature in Melbourne was no joke. They booked us sixty seats on the train and then arranged dinner for us. That was my first experience of Australian food. At that time there were three or four types of fish on the market, cooked in a batter and deep-fried in animal fat. It seemed as though this nauseating smell was all pervasive. Oblivious to all this, I, like a true Triestina, ordered fish, which they served in the manner described with a side serving of boiled, canned vegetables... Given that my palate was still all too European, I was unable to take even the first bite.

After dinner we made our way to the railway station and we were put on a train for Bonegilla Migrant Camp where we could stay overnight. As I have mentioned, Melbourne in winter can be extremely cold and furthermore, it was raining that day. We arrived to find a camp covered with puddles of water. As there were three of us, they assigned us a room with three beds, cold, bare and with windows which would not close. To keep warm we decided to sleep together in the one bed and all night we kept waking because of the frightful cold.

Morning...breakfast with bacon and eggs...and then we departed for Sydney to



Sydney as it was at the time of Odina Demarchi's arrival. Photograph taken from aboard a ferry in Circular Quay, c1955.

reach the ship. Twelve hours by train and then finally we arrived in, what must be, the most beautiful city in the world. Sydney is truly stupendous. It is, for all who see it - the port, the bridge and the bay - a unique city. On arrival there, the press was waiting to interview us. It is not everyday that sixty absent-minded passengers miss their ship. My husband, being the only one among us who could speak English, gave a detailed account of what happened, omitting to tell of the discomforts of the camp.

As for me, the first greeting was from my cousin, who, from the deck of the ship screamed out, affectionately, *'stupida'*. Those who had shared the cabin with me had passed on my jewellery to him and had packed up all my belongings. After completing the disembarkation procedures we were again taken to the railway station, this time bound for the Greta Migrant Camp.

Understandably, no one knew where this Greta camp was. We left late at night, thinking that at worst it would have been something like the Melbourne to Bonegilla trip. Instead it was four interminable hours of train ride going through desolate countryside populated by sheep, sheep and more sheep. Finally, we arrived at the camp and were greeted by the interpreter. After the experience of Bonegilla, I was terrorized at what I might find here, particularly for the sake of my five-year-old daughter, who was already exhausted by the long haul from Italy to Australia. Unfortunately, she wasn't as lucky as I was with the voyage and had suffered quite a bit of sea-sickness. On top of this, there was the experience of Bonegilla and the trip from Sydney to Greta: she was in need of a good hot meal and comfortable lodgings in order to recuperate.

By the time we were finally shown our quarters, it was three in the morning. We found that the kitchen was fully equipped and they immediately served us a hot meal, even if it was rice that could have been used as glue for billboards. It was the welcome we received that comforted us. After that, each family was assigned a home, which consisted of a one-room hut with, in our case, three beds, but spotlessly clean and with fresh bed sheets and...windows which could be closed! The wooden floorboards were almost white with cleanliness. I felt cheered up: finally, after three days, we would be able to have a decent night's sleep. Of the 750 *Triestini* aboard that ship, a part was destined for Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. Sydney was the last stop leaving about two hundred of us who, during the month spend together, had all become close friends.

### MY LIFE IN THE CAMP

Fourth of August, 1955: my life in Australia begins. I had brought three kilograms of raw coffee beans from Italy and a container in which to roast them. My dormitory became a makeshift coffee shop, which attracted all my friends. In a month we drank three kilos of coffee. At six in the morning we were served the legendary 'breakfast'... all in line. For us who were used to just a cup of coffee in the morning, seeing steak or sausages served up turned our stomachs, but in time we became used to this too.

The camp was situated at the foot of a hill and surrounded by bush and, since we were waiting to be assigned job positions, we would all take interminable walks in the bush. And so, we became well acquainted with the flora and fauna of Australia. We discovered the strangest species of birds.

Aerial view of the Migrant Camp at Greta, New South Wales, where Odina Demarchi and her family stayed. Photograph taken c1955, from Pino Bartolomè Collection, IHS.



I remember how, on one occasion, we heard what seemed like the sound of a child crying and we were convinced for days that some inhuman mother must have abandoned her child somewhere in the bush until we discovered the bird and realized that its chirp was identical to that of a newborn child crying.

We discovered parrots with unbelievable colours: reds, blues and yellows; the famous rosella; the kiwi [sic], a black and white bird, which, if you call it, comes into the home greedy for meat; the beautiful kookaburra, unique to its species, a bird which when it nosedives, is undoubtedly about to kill a snake - it has a powerful beak; we got to know the kangaroo, a tame and friendly animal which allows you to approach and pat it, if you offer it some food. The grass within the camp was all burnt and when we asked why this was so, we were informed that it was done purposely because the camp was surrounded by snakes and spiders, some harmless, some poisonous.

After a few days, my daughter fell ill with mumps and she was hospitalized for a fortnight. I was not permitted to go near her for fear of infection and each day I made the three kilometer trek to the hospital on foot, through fields, with the fear that with every step it might be a step on a snake, just to see her through the windows of the hospital. My husband was one of the first to be given a job as an ambulance driver for the camp and as interpreter for newly arrived migrants. His wages were 17 pounds (approximately equivalent to forty dollars) per fortnight. Food and lodging were free whilst you were unemployed. You

had to pay seven pounds for a family of three such as ours the moment you found employment, which didn't leave much.

It was difficult getting used to camp food. Unfortunately, my family couldn't do it and three pounds per fortnight would go towards buying eggs and poultry from nearby farms. We did not have cooking facilities in the hut, nor were we permitted to have them, but the authorities knew that everybody did and so they turned a blind eye. I bought a small spirit cooker, for which I paid three shillings and on that improvised stove I cooked the meals for my daughter.

Food in the camp was abundant, but we all wanted some of our own home cooked food and especially some of our gnocchi. We *Triestini* are crazy for this dish. I was the subject of a big joke over this because I had 'missed the boat' all because of gnocchi and it cost me dearly: 17 pounds! The Australian Government charged us all the expenses it incurred in getting us to Sydney. One day, when the inclination got the better of me, I offered to make gnocchi for ten people. I began making them on the famous cooker at nine in the morning and by five in the afternoon they were ready, Bolognese sauce and all. I prepared the dough on a wooden board that my friends had found. I placed it across the base of the bed forming an improvised bench. I kneaded ten kilograms of potatoes. It took two people to help me up when I had finished kneading because my back couldn't support me and my feet were all pins and needles. I used up eight bottles of spirit fuel in the cooking. But...gnocchi have never tasted so good or been so

appreciated. We sat on the steps of the hut and savored them, one by one.

On another occasion, overcome by our 'gluttony', we cooked an entire side of a small calf, always on the same cooker. The men had gone to a nearby breeding farm and bought the half calf. It took us half a day just to section up the beast. The nicest cuts were cooked as stew and steaks. The head was the last remaining section and it too was cooked.

Day by day our group got thinner as people began to be posted to various places for jobs. It was time enough though, given that a month had passed, even though some people had to wait up to two months before they found work. Most of the men were destined for the railways or the foundries in Newcastle, while others went to factories. Even if they were skilled in some trade or profession a good position was impossible without knowledge of the language.

During those periods of waiting, we tried to pass the time doing those things I mentioned above: going on excursions in the bush or going to the only hotel in the area, which was three kilometers from the camp. There was an out of tune piano at the hotel and we had an excellent piano player in our midst so he would try and bring it life as best he could, playing our favorite Italian songs which we sang to with increasing nostalgia. It was a ploy like many others to alleviate our fears of the unknown, which the future had in store for us.

Meanwhile my husband continued to work as an ambulance driver and most of the time he would have to take pregnant women for their check-ups to Maitland, a small town near our camp. After a month or more of doing this work, he was asked if he would like to stay on in the job. He agreed and from that moment we transferred from the temporary camp to the permanent one.

It was to be one of the worst moments of my life at the camp. One day I was alone in the hut, my daughter was at the hospital, this time for a throat infection, my husband was at work and the orders came to shift lodgings. Our friends by now had almost all departed. I was taken, laden with my baggage, to a place about one kilometer from the temporary camp and was left on the doorstep of the new home. By all accounts - and I admit it myself - I am not one who is easily discouraged, but when I opened that door, the suitcases just fell from my hands with shock. I couldn't

believe what was before my eyes: a hut divided in two with Masonite and all the walls...Masonite, making the whole place horribly dark. The previous occupant, whoever he was, had dug a huge hole in his section and had used it as a rubbish dump which created a terrible stench in the place. The bedbugs roved around contentedly on the walls.

I waited on the doorstep until my husband arrived from work and together we set about cleaning and disinfecting the place. I had brought some bed sheets with me, which we used to line the walls with and in this way we made our home half decent.

### A DARKER SIDE

This second stage at the migrant camp was decidedly the hardest because I found myself among all types of people who unfortunately were not the best type. Some had been there for more than five years and they did not want to leave for fear of facing life outside the camp. Most of them did not speak a word of English. They worked in the kitchen, at cleaning the camp and the toilets and other things like that. For the first time in my life, I saw children whipped with the infamous cat-o'-nine-tails and with belts. The police was often called in because whips and belts were also very often inflicted on wives. There were families of every race at the camp: Poles, Russians, Yugoslavs, Germans and a few Italians.

The acts of brutality described above are of course inexcusable, but you can imagine how a human being can be reduced to such points of exasperation when day after day one is surrounded by a barren landscape without any form of pastime. We didn't even have a cinema. And hence, the air was filled with malcontent: unfaithful wives, wives betrayed. At night, if one was game enough to walk along the pathways throughout the camp, one encountered constant movement: the door of a hut just closing or a rustling in the bush. The camp was more animated at night than during the day. It was then that the belts, the whips and, unfortunately, even the knives, came out. It was the poor children, though, who were mostly at the receiving end.

Opposite us lived a family of Polish migrants, a husband and wife and their two children. The poor lady, she was stood over, working from morning to night in the kitchen and when she got home, I'll never know why, but she was beaten senseless. She copped so much one day that they had to take her to the hospital

with a broken arm. I mention this couple because there is a comical little story - to a certain point - associated with them. The husband, every Sunday, would dress up in his best suit, complete with white shirt and tie and he would sit in front of their hut and remain there until dusk. It was his way of celebrating Sunday.

On our first Sunday at the new camp, as I did every morning, I went to the public showers, which were situated in the same complex as the toilets about 100 metres from our hut. The showers had a concrete floor and the door to each was raised well above the floor. That morning when I stepped out of the cubicle having had my nice shower, I found it very strange to see the man who lived opposite us sitting outside the shower. My husband, who had observed the man, asked our neighbours for an explanation of his behaviour. They were a nice German couple to whom I am grateful because their good humour along the way had helped alleviate the tedium of life in the camp. They told him that it happened every Sunday. The man living opposite, whenever he saw a woman heading for the showers, would go and sit outside her shower: the water falling on the concrete floor of the shower reflected the woman's nude body. From that day on my toiletry necessities included a piece of Masonite, which I was careful to place in position before turning on the water.

We had begun our second month at the camp. My husband wanted to stay on a little longer before tackling life beyond the camp so as to become better informed and, in the meantime, to seek employment in Sydney or elsewhere. However, I couldn't take much more, especially since my daughter was spending most of the time in hospital with tonsillitis. One day we received a visit from people we knew who had been living in Australia for five years and who kindly offered us board in a 'temporary dwelling' at their home. We accepted and my husband went to Sydney to look for a job, which he found with the gas company. I could not move as my daughter was again in hospital. I did however want to see the house in which we were to take up lodgings and so one day I caught the train and made my way to Sydney. I have to state that during these last two months, I had undertaken a crash course in English at the camp and this was enough to make myself understood.

### A HOME IN SYDNEY

The trip going to the city went well but coming back was a nightmare because I

was never sure of having caught the right train until I was back at the camp. I asked everybody if the train was going to Greta, but Greta did not have a railway station. Greta is near Maitland and everybody knew where Maitland was but only a few knew where Greta was. Most Australians did not have a clue where it was because apart from a butcher shop, a hotel and a poultry farm, Greta was exclusively a migrant camp. After four anxious hours I finally arrived back at camp and I immediately took a taxi to the hospital where I was told that my daughter could leave the hospital in two days time.

I prepared our luggage and after two days we set out for Sydney, or rather Hornsby. We arrived at our new abode after shuttling from train to bus to taxi. In those days, when people couldn't manage to save enough to buy a house they would buy a block of land and pay for it as best they could, over five or ten years on a monthly rate of repayments, and they would build a type of garage or 'temporary dwelling', which consisted of a single room and washbasin and that was it! Our friends had done just that and eventually had built their house as well and that's why the 'temporary dwelling' was available for us. The facilities therein would have been adequate for a couple like them but things were a little more complicated for us with a daughter. The first night we slept as best we could on makeshift mattresses. My husband was unable to buy us anything because he worked till evening and the shops were all closed by the time he finished work.

We bought all the essentials for our new lodging and we did our very best to make it as comfortable as possible. There was no electricity and so we set up an electric cable that extended from our abode to our friends' house and we suspended it from an enormous tree. The birds, however, took this strange object as some sort of plaything and they amused themselves pecking at it, especially the kookaburras, which abounded in the area, resulting in my meals frequently being half cooked because the birds would snap the cable and hence...we had to contend ourselves with half cooked meals by candlelight.

For bathing, we used giant tubs like in my great-grandparents time and other tubs for the laundry, which was backbreaking. On top of everything, we copped a period of rain, which lasted three months uninterrupted, which meant I did the washing in the open donned in a raincoat

and a hood. The toilet: an enormous tin pot, which the caretakers of this splendid job removed twice weekly.

I was impatient to have my own home and I would have done anything to help my husband in the earnings so that we could muster the deposit to buy own house. I am an accountant by profession but I found it daunting to apply anywhere because my command of English was not good enough. With recommendations from my neighbours, and so that I didn't have to leave my daughter in the care of others, I took up house cleaning for Australian families in the neighbourhood when the child was at school. They would pay me well. I managed to earn six to eight pounds per week. At times I would manage to clean three houses a day. People were very happy with my work, above all because not many Australian woman wanted to do that job. They preferred factory work.

Unfortunately, after some time, we had to leave our lodging, because the Department of Hygiene did not permit such living conditions in cases where children were involved. I didn't want us to leave the suburb because my husband worked at Waverton and my daughter was doing well at school. I asked one of the families for whom I did the cleaning if they were willing to offer us board in exchange for my cleaning work. They accepted wholeheartedly and they offered us a small apartment at the back of their house. There was no running water. My husband, who was handy at plumbing, connected the water and he also made some concrete steps so that we could enter our dwelling directly, without having to go through the owners' house.

At first everything was rosy. The family consisted of parents and five children, from five to fifteen years. The agreement was that, in exchange for accommodation plus two pounds per week, I would have to clean the house, wash and iron the clothes and prepare breakfast; at night, I had to clear the dinner table and wash the dishes. The rest of the time, I was free to use as I wished. After about one month the financial agreement remained unchanged, but the day was almost completely occupied in various jobs including the cooking. At night, my husband was even expected to do the gardening. My daughter's companions, who would not let her play with them because we were immigrants and her mother was a servant, continually humiliated her.

It was I who wanted to leave the migrant camp but in this case it was my husband who made me pack-up. And so, we moved to Kogarah. We rented a house together with another couple, friends of ours. It was early 1957. The rent was ten pounds per week. After the previous experience, I did not want to go cleaning houses again, even though it had not been an altogether negative experience: for one thing, my English had improved dramatically. One day, by chance, I came across a copy of *La Fiamma* newspaper. Until then I didn't even know that an Italian newspaper existed here.

### SETTLING IN

My first two years in Australia had eroded my innate confidence. The people, the language barrier and the situation in general made it difficult to muster the courage to seek employment in a field other than the one I had just left. I owe it to my husband that one day he literally took me by the hand and, together, we went to the offices of *La Fiamma*. It was more to see if we could find a job for me in some Italian firm, than anything else. But fortunately for me, that very day, a clerical vacancy had come up at *La Fiamma*.

One week later I began my job at the newspaper. It was September of 1957. I worked there until 1976. At first I was assigned positions in various departments of the firm and later the position of secretary of the newspaper itself. This position gave me the opportunity to really help people in the Italian community. In those days migrants would come to us for every type of assistance: welfare agencies did not exist and so, the only recourse was to us. No help of any kind was ever refused.

I endeavoured - with the cooperation, one, of my director and two, the owner of the newspaper - to give sound advice to migrants and to lighten, as much as possible, the difficulties of life in a new country. We found jobs for people in various Italian firms, translated documents for them and offered legal, medical and hospital advice. We acted as newspaper, welfare agency and consulate...one door open for all!

After eight years in Australia I had the good fortune of being reunited with my parents. My sister and her husband had already arrived one year after us. Unfortunately, because of circumstances, they settled in Melbourne. My parents came to Sydney originally but the climate

of the city, especially for my mother, was not conducive and after a year, they too transferred to Melbourne.

After Kogarah we moved to Five Dock, where we rented a little apartment and then we purchased a house at North Strathfield, which we sold after eleven years and relocated to our present residence in Drummoyne. Throughout all this, my daughter experienced many changes. She attended seven schools until high school and all these changes impacted on her, even if she was successful in winning a scholarship to the University of Sydney where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in English. After just six months in Australia, having been taunted by her school companions because she didn't speak English and because of her Italian background, she made a vow with herself that one day she would have mastered the language perfectly, a promise she was able to keep because whether at high school or at university she excelled in that very subject.

I was spared discrimination during my twenty-one years at *La Fiamma* since I had contact purely with Italians. Fortunately, my Australian neighbours were all people who would help you in any way they could, in fact, they looked to me to receive elements

of our European culture, especially culinary ones. My husband, after the Gas Company, went to work for Transfield, which was another Italian firm. Hence, it was my daughter who most copped the brunt of any racial insults.

When my grandson was born, she gave him an English name, Dylan, partly because Dylan Thomas was her favourite writer but also because she had bad memories of the bitterness experienced at school and even if times had changed, she did not want to risk a similar fate on Dylan.

My feelings after thirty years in Australia are, I believe, the same as for the majority of migrants, that is...I feel torn in two: I love and am grateful to this land for having given me the possibility of a new life; and I suffer from homesickness for my country of birth. If I returned to Italy for good, I would miss Australia and certain positive aspects of the country, which I would not find there. I have been back several times and many people have told me that if I tried to resettle there I would not be able to make new friends. I am not altogether convinced of this, though there could be an element of truth in it. My city, its monuments, and my memories of it: no-one can take away those things. They are there, and they will always be so.