

MEMORIES OF MY GRANDMOTHER... PAULINA JULIENNE MORRIS (nee REANDA)

by Marjorie Huntley

Although born in Australia to a mother who was born in England, and happily married to an Englishman, Paulina Morris, the interesting subject of this article, quite clearly identified most strongly with the Italian speaking heritage passed down from her Swiss Italian father. Her grand-daughter, Marjorie Huntley, has been researching her family history for some time.

It is hard to remember that my Australian born Grandmother, or 'Little Nana' as we fondly called her, was actually half English, so deeply was she entrenched in her dream myth of Italy. So much so, that the shadowy figure of her English mother seems almost not to have existed.

Her father, Domenico Reanda was a Swiss-Italian who migrated to Australia from the little Ticinese Village of Moghegno in 1851. He was only 17 years of age when he arrived here with his father on the German migrant ship 'Agen Hensich'.

After what was most probably a long and uncomfortable sea voyage the pair disembarked at the Port of Melbourne and walked to the Eaglehawk goldfields where they hoped to make their fortune and return with it to poverty stricken Moghegno. We have no record of their hopes or fears while they toiled hopefully amongst the scrubby ironbarks and yellow-gums in the Whipstick Forest but it is easy to imagine their response to such an alien environment. The remains of the old Eaglehawk quartz mine where they were finally forced to work as timber splitters can still be seen today.

Domenico married Sarah Rackstraw, an 18 year old English girl who had come from Oxfordshire to the diggings with her parents who failing to find gold, ran a 'pub' for the miners. My Grandmother, their first child, was born in a tent at Wallace Reef on 21 June 1866 and was christened Paulina Julianna. We can only speculate as to why her second name was later changed to the more romantic Julienne. The family eventually moved into the township of Eaglehawk where it appears Domenico prospered in a modest way as a stonemason. Skills of stonemasonry brought with him from Moghegno, would have found plenty of application in the infant colony. There is a story that he did a lot of work on the Bendigo Town hall.

Two years after Paulina arrived, a son was born and named Domenico after his father. Tragically, the handsome little boy, no doubt the light of their lives, died of "inflammation of the bowel" when he was only twelve years old. On that fatal night the broken-hearted Paulina rose from her bed in the early hours, walked in her sleep to the backyard, and picked all the green apples off the tree. Her parents believed the consumption of too many green apples had caused her brother's death.



Paulina Julienne with husband and daughter in 1915 circa.

It is easy to imagine her ghostly little figure clad only in a long white nightgown carefully picking off the fatal fruit. Their last child, another little girl named Rosa Maria, died of diphtheria aged 3 years.

My grandmother must have been an intense and beautiful child who loved and hated with equal passion. She always clung to her Italian background and in old age she described herself proudly as being 'vital, life-giving, of Latin blood'. She dismissed the English with a wave of her hand, 'The English have no souls', she told us.

Our grandmother described her parents' marriage as a very unhappy one and soon after their son's death her beloved father could stand it no longer and officially left his family and sailed back to his home in the Swiss Alps. Perhaps, even then, he knew he was ill, for he died on the voyage and was buried at sea. Sarah re-married soon after but Paulina fiercely resented her new step-father and succeeded in making life so difficult for them that she was bundled off and conveniently 'adopted' by a wealthy friend of the family. From then she lived with this lady in Lang Street, Prahran, Victoria and attended the Punt Road State School.

In her early twenties having quarrelled with her adoptive mother, she left home in a huff and boldly got herself a job as the cashier at the Victoria Coffee Palace in Little Bourke Street. It was there she met one of the newly arrived guests, an 'English Gentleman'!

Alfred Prichard Morris was a Cambridge graduate and a compulsive gambler, the second son of a wealthy Herefordshire surgeon. They were married in Christchurch, South Yarra in 1891. In time, Alfred Morris became a very successful journalist and was well known in Melbourne racing circles of the 1890s. He was the racing editor for the *Herald* under the pen name of 'Blakemere' and also wrote articles for publications as far away as the *London Punch*. They had four children, the eldest of whom was my mother. Despite their diverse backgrounds and interests, the marriage appears to have been a happy one and it occurs to me that such an unlikely partnership could only have taken place in the 'Marvellous Melbourne' of those days.

My Grandmother had great spiritual strength which stemmed from her passionate belief in her children, her church, and her own indomitable

spirit. She had great influence over us, her grandchildren, and died aged 96 having never left Australia or even visited her beloved Italy. She was indeed a rare spirit and an inspiration to the family she loved so passionately.

In order to find out more about my great-grandfather, I visited Moghegno in 1976, but although the village consisted almost entirely of Reandas and Tavernettis (my great-great-grandmother's maternal name) no-one with whom I managed to communicate remembered anything about him. It was to America, they indicated excitedly, the young men from the village had gone to find gold. Sometime later, I was very excited to find Domenico Reanda listed in Dr Gentilli's publication *'The Settlement of the Swiss Ticino Immigrants in Australia'*. Dr Gentilli kindly explained to me by letter that last century many people in the village of Moghegno would not have known the difference between the two places.



Paulina Julienne with her eldest son on her 90th birthday.