

PICNICS AT THE BEACH

by

Anna Donchi Scariot



Anna Donchi Scariot and her mother's picnic basket.

The Donchis were more fortunate than many of the other Italian families in Carlton in that they had a car - a red Fiat - which enabled them to pack up their food etc in the basket, and bring along everything required for a picnic at the beach. The guitar which Genoveffa played was an important part of the festivities, and people would be disappointed if it were left behind.

Mostly the picnics were pre-planned and arrangements made to meet other families who relied on public transport, eg tram or train -to Brighton Beach, or Sandringham where there were plenty of trees under which blankets were spread, out of the sun.

Food was planned beforehand but prepared the same morning, so that it would be still warm, and was eaten soon after arrival. Plates, cotton serviettes, (checked - made at home - table cloth -thermos, (which invariably arrived broken) and a spirit lamp to make the coffee in the "Napoletana" were all taken in the basket.

It was quite common to have freshly cooked ravioli or gnocchi or spaghetti. Roast chicken,

roast veal, fritto misto eg veal cutlets, veal chops, rabbit cutlets. Vegetables could be fried - including zucchini and cauliflower. Home preserves of wild "carciofi" and mushrooms sottolio...

In jars were brought fresh bean salad, potato salad or cauliflower salad. Fresh salad of Italian lettuce - endivia and radicchio - home grown. Lemons were an important item to use with fresh shell fish. Lemonade and wine was brought also.

From time to time Genoveffa would organise picnics for everyone, and engage drivers with large furniture vans. At other times the driver from San Remo pasta company would get a loan of the truck he used for deliveries, and everyone would climb into the back of the van for the trip.



Genoveffa Donchi outside the Dalla Toscana grocery shop at 139-141 Cardigan Street.



Genoveffa Donchi with guitar during a picnic at the beach.

Genoveffa was from l'Isole D'Elba and at that time there were several families from the same island in Carlton. This explained the venue.

An important part of the beach picnics was the collection of shell fish under and on the rocks and the pier. Mussels, sea snails, vongole, limpets were plentiful in those years. Some were eaten fresh with lemon and bread - the rest were taken home.

Lidia Bearzato (was Chellini) tells the story of the family's trips to the beach on the tram where they used hessian bags to carry 1) for the beach towels, 2) to bring home the mussels. The food was carried in boxes. One day on the return journey home the tram pulled up suddenly and the bag with the mussels fell over, which caused all the mussels to spread all over the tram floor. This was in the days when Australians had no appreciation of shell fish.

A vital part of the picnics was the sharing of the

food, gossip, telling jokes, games on the beach and playing cards.

When Genoveffa had her guitar, she sang in her rich mellifluous voice the old Italian songs, and "stornelli" which everybody loved to hear, join in and sing along. One of the Australian friends who thoroughly enjoyed these picnics and participated was Miss Helen Byrne, Chairman of the Department at Melbourne University.

There were other picnics organised to the country. As Italians slowly started up their concreting businesses, they acquired vehicles which they used. The Veneti and Friulani said they were more practical with their food in that they brought cheese, salame and bread, and wine.

Other venues for picnics were Fern Tree Gully, Keilor and Rupertswood at Sunbury for the Eucharistic Festival.