



Dr Soccorso Santoro ashore in Adelaide during his voyage to Melbourne on the "Orama" in 1930.

Dott. SOCCORSO GIORGIO SANTORO, M.D., M.CH.O. - 1902-1961

by Cav. Uff. Dr. Giorgio Romano Santoro, A.M.

My father, Soccorso Santoro was born, the eldest of five children, in Serino near Avellino on the 17th of September 1902. His father was Giovanni Santoro, a local land owner and his mother's maiden name was Giannattasio. She was a primary school teacher who was teaching locally. My father attended local schools and subsequently the Regio Liceo Colletta in Avellino. Later he attended the University of Genoa and lived with his uncle Barone Vladimiro Giannattasio. His family around that time had moved to Solofra and when he went to Genoa his family was under the impression that he was studying law, but he enrolled in medicine. After passing first-year medicine he advised them on his change of course.

On the 22nd November 1926 he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine with a total of 92 marks out of 110. His professor was Commendatore Mattia Moresco. He did his internship at Alessandria, north of Genoa. He became an officer in the Italian army and developed a great national pride which he maintained for his whole life. In later life he stated that he was a true son of Italy and would never relinquish his passport or his citizenship under any circumstances.

In keeping with many students of the time, he was very involved in university politics and his favourite sport was boxing, at which he became proficient.

After his graduation in 1926 he was immediately drafted into the army and he joined the Battaglione All. Uff. Medici e Farmacisti di 2a Compagnia and on 27th December, 1926 he was issued with a military rifle YN6681 which was manufactured in 1891. He was issued with a bayonet, a gun belt and two cartridge pouches which were manufactured in 1907. He was also issued with a peaked cap of grey-green cloth, a water bottle, three shirts, three handkerchiefs and three ties.

After his military service, he made a decision to travel around the world and in so doing he took the sensible precaution of registering his Genoa medical degree in London, therefore making it acceptable throughout the English speaking world. He registered in London on 10th June, 1930 and he sailed to Australia on the Orient Line's 'Orama' which left Naples on 29th June,

1930. With him was his colleague Dr. P. Bianchi. He intended to go to America via Australia for a "giretto d'ispezione, di scoperta, di piacere e d'avventura". On the same ship was the young Vittorio Picchi, subsequently of the company 'Mei and Picchi'.

He arrived in Melbourne well equipped with the appropriate medical, surgical and obstetrical instruments. Surprisingly, he also had a set of dental instruments as his basic degree gave him the rights to also practise dentistry, which of course he never did.

When he arrived in Melbourne he initially took up residence at 154 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy and commenced practice at 'Professional Chambers', 110 Collins Street in August, 1930. His practice slowly built up, but not adequately for both practitioners and so eventually Dr. Bianchi went to Innisfail, Queensland and later returned to Italy. Dr. Santoro's decision to remain was based on the fact that he had a weak and painful knee which precluded travel. This knee gave him trouble for nearly 20 years.

On December 24th, 1932 he married Mrs. Vida Ryan, widow of Mr. W.H. Ryan, a Sydney solicitor, at St. Ignatius church, Richmond and they went to Lakes Entrance for a honeymoon. I was born on 3rd May 1935 and the total cost of the confinement was £10.15.6. My sister, Mirella, was born on 5th February, 1942.

His gross income in 1934 was £761 and in 1935 was £791. In 1935 he deducted his car expenses from his gross income and he noted that he had driven 14,400 miles on business and that petrol was 1 shilling and seven pence per gallon (15 cents), this works out at less than 3.5 cents per litre. He also stated in his tax return "I am a general practitioner and my practice consists mainly of Italians. They are scattered in all suburbs of Melbourne and therefore the average monthly mileage is 1200".

In 1935 the British Medical Association had its 103rd Annual General Meeting in Melbourne, the first such meeting in Australia. It was to commemorate Victoria's centenary in the same year. My father, a member of the B.M.A. Victoria Branch attended.

Practice in Collins Street was not easy. Most of

the patients were working-class Italians who would on occasions sit down along the corridor, to the surprise and amusement of the watch-chained specialists dressed in three-piece suits from other rooms in the building. There were frequent complaints, but luckily Saturday morning was the busiest and the specialists were resting! He spent a great deal of time translating for patients. Frequently, if he sent a patient to a surgeon such as Mr. Tom King or Mr. Ted Prendergast, he would attend the specialist with them to translate and arrange the operation.

Dr. Santoro found it difficult to obtain competent nursing staff to assist in the unusual practice, so eventually Vida's sister, Sylvia Clancy, a trained nurse from Sydney was encouraged to assist. She did this on a temporary basis in 1935, however she remained for 26 years until my father's death in 1961. Zia Sylvia did countless extra hours of taking minutes of the Italian Red Cross, Dante Alighieri and other meetings. By 1945 his gross income was 1,966 pounds 17 shillings and threepence.

Dr. Santoro was President of the Dante Alighieri from 1931 to 1959 when he resigned due to ill health. At that stage he was made an honorary President of the Society. He was then presented with the gold medal 'Societa' Dante

Alighieri". During the war years most of the Dante library and some other items were safely stored under the family house in Molesworth Street, Kew and were retrieved at the end of hostilities. From 1933 to 1940 he was a delegate of the "Croce Rossa Italiana" - the Italian Red Cross. He was responsible for the collection of donations on behalf of the Italian Red Cross and he arranged this with vigour and, in fact, on at least one occasion he arranged for the distribution of a small newspaper which encouraged donations. After the war, he was again named as delegate for the Italian Red Cross. From 1931 to 1940 he was the representative of the "Touring Club Italiano" in Melbourne. He was the President of the Cavour Club on different occasions, including 1934. This was the year that we waited in vain for the arrival of Signor Guglielmo Marconi in Victoria.

He was the official doctor of the Italian Consulate General in Melbourne and also the doctor for the Italian shipping lines. On a lighter vein he wrote a comedy "Alla Corte di Addis Abeba" around the life of Haile Selassie. This play was produced at the Cavour Club on 15th March, 1936 in aid of the Italian Red Cross. The cast consisted of S. De Marco, P. Menara, B. Canestra, F. Adorna, F. Conti, Z. and D. De Marco, P. Magi and Dr. Santoro. The play was

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VOL. V

MELBOURNE: MERCOLEDI, 19 AGOSTO 1936-XIV.

No. 24

Per la Patria: Sempre ed Ovunque

*L'Appello del
Dott. S. Santoro
agli Italiani
del Vittoria*

Connazionali del Vittoria!
Tre anni or sono voi rispondete all'appello che io vi lanciai a favor della Croce Rossa Italiana, come solamente i figli d'Italia sanno rispondere in tali occasioni, ed una somma non indifferente fu raccolta.

Oggi, mentre il nostro paese sta aumentando ancora di più la sua potenza nel mondo e sta dando prove luminose del valore dei suoi figli, in tutti i campi, io mi rivolgo anco-



*IL PLAUSO DEL
REGIO CONSOLE*

Signor Dottore,
Il risultato della campagna pro Croce Rossa Italiana da Lei organizzata e condotta fa onore a Lei e a tutti coloro che La coadiuvarono in questa nobile iniziativa.

Voglia partecipare anche ai membri del Comitato e a tutti coloro che si sono incaricati delle raccolte l'espressione del mio plauso e del mio compiacimento.

Con distinta considerazione.
IL REGIO CONSOLE.
(E. Anzilotti.)

Dott. S. Santoro,
Delegato della C.R.I.
110 Collins Street,
Melbourne.



A scene from "Alla Corte di Addis Abbeba", written by Dr S. G. Santoro.

well accepted and the costumes took many months to prepare. I recollect it even involved the family dog, a female cocker spaniel named Lorla. He also wrote another play, a two act comedy "L'incoronazione di Cornelia".

He was the President of the Association of Italian Reserve Officers in Australia. He did not relinquish his military commission. He was active and there were meetings at the Latin and Italian Society Restaurants. Frequent heated debates occurred with university Italian teacher, a professed and uncompromising socialist, the Bolognese Prof. Omero Schiassi.

When war was declared he was interned in a camp at Tatura in Victoria and was there for approximately six weeks. My mother was an Australian citizen and it was due to her efforts that he was interned for such a short time. Other Italians were interned for the duration of the war. He was released on condition that he reported to the Kew Police Station three times a week and did not travel more than 25 miles from Kew. He was warned that he would not be allowed to buy a house on Port Phillip Bay as there was a possibility that he would signal to

enemy shipping! His shotgun which was used for quail and rabbit shooting was confiscated and eventually returned after the war.

He was allowed to continue the practice of medicine at 110 Collins Street. However, he was advised that while he was seeing a patient, no more than two other patients could be in the waiting room. For this reason Sister Clancy had to advise any other Italians to "go for a walk around the block". This was to stop any conspiracies or planning occurring. He was also advised that tennis could not be played at the family home if it involved other Italians as this, of course, could be the beginning of yet another conspiracy. On at least two occasions the house was searched by the Australian authorities, but they did not find the complete Dante Library hidden under the house.

This was an era of great respect for the family doctor who was the confidant of many families with their problems. The migrants had to turn to someone who could understand them and their family ties. When their children mixed with local children, then the family strictness and unity tended to break down and the older members



At a Dante Alighieri Society meeting, in the front row are Shirley McLean, Dr Santoro, Cav and Mrs Boffa, Vittorio Picchi and others.

were unable to deal with modern problems. My father gave generously of his time to assist and on occasions had to break the news of elopement and death to the rest of the family.

Many children refused to speak in Italian and were desperate to be considered Australians. This rejection of the older migrants became very upsetting especially as the young had to be relied upon as interpreters.

My father was welcomed into many families especially as he had high ideals of patriotism and language and morality. He never spoke to his children in English, he did not use bad language and he was considered by all to be a cultured gentleman. Many a time he took me to houses around Carlton where the Italian families were roasting coffee or making spaghetti, ravioli, salamis or prosciutto. All work would cease and the whole family would become involved in prolonged quiet conversation with my father regarding some family difficulties. It was unusual for him to complete a home call in under one hour.

When my sister was only one year old, my father moved mother, sister Mirella and myself up to Charlton in central Victoria for 12 months because of the fear of enemy bombing. We stayed with the Paino family and my father frequently drove up at weekends in his Ford V8, when he had enough petrol ration coupons.

I especially remember once when he arrived with a bootful of ripe tomatoes from the garden in Kew.

The family then obtained a property in the Dandenongs at Sassafra, within the 25-mile limit, but not in his name as enemy aliens were not allowed to own property and we moved there for six months. Things got better on the war front and we came back to Kew, where by that time my father had successfully started numerous grape vines in the back garden. We soon started sending food parcels to his family in Italy.

After the war, in 1948, my father made his first trip back to Italy. The plane trip from Melbourne to Rome took approximately 90 hours.

He had been given the honorary position of Outpatient Surgeon at St. Vincent's Hospital in Mr. K. Hadley's clinic, a position he proudly held for twenty years, every Monday afternoon and Thursday morning. In those days many reputable doctors gave part of their week in an honorary capacity to treat the public.

In 1953 St. Vincent's Hospital had a building programme and my father gave his time to mobilising many of the Italian Clubs and individuals to give donations. On 29th May, 1953 and on 5th June, 1952 he arranged dances for the Italian Community at Brenan

Hall St. Vincent's Hospital. I still have the original lists of donors - well-known names throughout the community.

Our social life evolved around numerous Italian families and we frequently saw the families of Ballini, Poli, Tibaldi, Mei and Picchi, Cardosi, Borghese, Viganò, Negri, Vaccari, Sperani, Adami, Valmorbida, Gobbo, Boffa, Pagliaro, Gallichio, Arcaro, Cavedon, Borsari, Nibbi, Zarro, Father Ugo Modotti and Father Nazario and all the Italian Consuls. On Thursday nights, Messrs. Dimattina, Demarco and Conti would come home and play cards with my father.

How fondly do I recollect the annual Italian picnic days, going around the oval from car to car, tasting veal at one and melanzane at the next and a nip of home-made wine at another. The camaraderie and the concept of "one big family" is not understood if one has not been part of it.

Ingegnere Luigi Benini of Meldrum Street, Kew had a Bell and Howell black and white projector and he used to hire 16mm films over the weekend and on Saturday nights we would all go over to Benini's and watch films where all the baddies went to jail and all the goodies lived happily ever after!

In 1956 the 'Squadra Olimpica Italiana' arrived in Melbourne for the 16th Olympic Games and he was nominated as their official doctor. On 7th December, 1956 the Dante held a meeting on the cruiser 'Raimondo Montecuccoli' which was here in port. About 50 people attended and toured around the ship. This was not the February 1938 controversial arrival of the 'Montecuccoli' in Melbourne. On 10th December, 1956 a ball was held at the Royal Ballroom (at the Exhibition Buildings) by the Dante Alighieri Society for the Italian Olympic team. Frank Selleck (later Sir Frank), the Lord Mayor attended.



Dr. Santoro, family and friends relax after tennis at home in Kew.

On the 2nd March, 1956 Dr. Santoro presented the Lending Branch of the Melbourne Public Library 200 books by Italian authors. These books were presented on behalf of the Melbourne Branch of the Dante and they were presented to Dr. C. Irving Benson (Later Sir), Chairman of the Public Library Trustees. This, of course, demonstrated the increasing importance of the Italian language in this city.

My father was particularly proud of the Dante and as it was the peak Italian Cultural organisation, he always watched and jealously guarded protocol of seating at official functions and felt he should be placed above the geographical and sporting clubs. The Dante was a great link with the Italian and the Australian Community and was treated on the same basis as the 'Alliance Francaise' and attracted many of the cultural and educated luminaries of Australian Society. This communication was of enormous value to the Italian Community.

1960 was a great year for my father as the Italian language was accepted as a tertiary language at the University of Melbourne and my father also received his honour as Cavaliere Ufficiale from the Italian Government. In commemoration of my father's work with Italian Culture the Dante Alighieri Society still donates an annual 'Dr. Santoro' prize to the best student in first year at Melbourne University. Mr. Tom Hazell, the current president of the Dante, very kindly asks me to present it. The Dante records show a motion on the books in 1935 to strive for the acceptance of the teaching of the Italian language at the Melbourne University. It had taken 25 years. The Dante had a cocktail party on Saturday, 20th June, 1959 at Union House, Melbourne University 'to celebrate the establishment of the teaching of Italian at the University of Melbourne'. The Italian Ambassador, Dr. Eugenio Prato, attended and the guests were welcomed by the honorary President, Dr. Santoro, who was presented with a gold medal for his 29 years service as President. He was succeeded by Professor Sydney Rubbo.

In November, 1958, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Councillor F. W. Thomas received from Dr. Santoro a bust of Dante Alighieri which was placed in the Treasury Gardens. The marble bust rested on a pedestal of granite from De Marco Brothers.

He suffered a heart attack in 1956 at the age of 54, one night when he was dining out with Professor Rubbo. After some weeks in the Mercy Hospital he improved and returned to medical practice. Whilst in hospital, Professor

Chisholm called to see my father and on behalf of the Dante my father presented him with a camera in recognition of the work he had done and the great assistance he had given to the Italian community, in particular in furthering the recognition of the Italian language at the University of Melbourne. In October, 1959 he transferred his medical practice to Coates Building, 20 Collins Street, a new building. He was very proud of his ultra modern rooms and his 'Clinica Medica Italiana'.



Dr. Santoro and son George who also became a medical practitioner.

In April, 1961 he left for a trip to Italy and in Genova he had another heart attack and was admitted to hospital, the same hospital where he had studied in his medical course and on 10th July he died. He was buried at Solofra Cemetery, near Serino, his birthplace. He had flown across the world to die, back in his beloved Italy.

In the months prior to his death, he had contacted many of the 1926 university of Genoa Medical School Graduates and was well on the way to arranging a 35-year reunion. He was very interested to renew his acquaintance with his colleagues and hear their stories of medical practice throughout Italy's turbulent years; it was not to be.