

I was born at the time of the Empire, at Collina di Santa Maria Nova, a wool-producing village. One could say I was born into wool. My mother was on her own, her husband gone to conquer the Empire. Mamma was a professional knitter and she used to keep me tucked in inside the raw wool until I cried to be fed. I was bonny as a baby: mamma says I kept on suckling for ages. We lived in the centre of the village. The village was laid out in the shape of a cross. We lived next door to the baker's and in winter we used to sit by the common wall to warm up. The arola¹ was the part of the house around which we played and ate. Then Nello arrived, the second born, and then again Ivo. When my father came back, mamma dressed us up with thick woolen vests; they prickled like the devil on the skin. I don't remember my father much. He was a handsome man. Looked like Clarke Gable. Every time he came back from the war, he left behind a new baby. After Ivo, came my sister. I love her to bits though I used to beat her up a lot. I have two brothers, Nello and Ivo and a sister, Elia, who now lives in an old cottage inland from Falconara. When she was born there were celebrations in the village. After three boys had come a girl with a thick mane of curly hair. Mamma had them all in the house, the babies. My father was taken prisoner by the British as soon as he left for the war, but he wasn't a real prisoner in Germany...like in the camps. Nah, he was on a long holiday, he was. Working class lad, my dad, far from luxuries and such like, he learn to play tennis in prison, imagine that! And in his free time he learnt to carve wood. He was the orderly of an AGIP engineer² there and then, once he was back, times were tough and we thought the ingegnere could help us find work. I worked at the Naval Shipyard but dad and my brother were at home. They went to see the ingegnere but he said he could do nothing for us and gave him 5000 lira.³ My father was mortified. He didn't go there asking for money.

I grew up without a father really. I was the eldest with two younger brothers and I had to look out for them, help them with homework, I couldn't muck about. I wasn't made for being obedient; mamma used to have to beat me a lot. I didn't do my military service but if I had I would have been sent to Asinara for disobeying orders, I'm sure. I was so proud of my schoolbooks; I used to keep them to show them to my father. By the time he came back I'd finished primary school. Mamma had bathed us all in the tub that day, a real treat in those days, we were all so poor. Mamma could make herself look like a lady sometimes but at other times she looked like an Albanian.⁴ We lived in a village in the country and we liked playing in the countryside, climbing trees. My father Ottavio worked as a blacksmith but he died before he could retire. I never really loved him, only when I looked after him at the end, maybe, and then... he went. I never obeyed him, he was never there when I was little. I started working when I was 11. I would think to myself: who the heck are you to tell me what to do! We lived in a house in the centre of the village and everyone knew mamma was alone with three children. One night we were all asleep and we hear knocking on the door. Not our door but the house opposite where there was also a woman living alone with her children. Their door was very thick and they didn't manage to open it, so they came to our door, which was less thick though mamma always put a spade across the lock for extra protection. They went on knocking and knocking ever more violently and we could hear the door cracking under the pressure. Mamma went to the window and screamed for help... the door gave way and a German soldier came in and took his belt off, he was about to rape mamma. We kids were hugging each other under the covers in the big bed. All of a sudden from the outside stairs we saw Mr and Mrs Catani looking into our bedroom window and when the Jerry saw them he realized that the other Jerry, his mate, who was on the lookout outside, had scarpered. It turns out his mate had been fought off by one of our neighbours who'd heard mamma scream and had come to our rescue. We learnt later that the two Jerries were tried and punished because they'd been raping women all over the place. I'm sure they had some Italian accomplices because they knew where women lived alone. This is the worst memory I have of the war. Then there were the air-raids

which flattened everything, like at Chiaravalle, it flattened everything, it flattened the hospital. We often went there as there was plenty of fruit to pick but the fields were full of remnants of war. I went into a tank once, I could hear sounds coming from inside and I found a radio. I grabbed it and took it home. At that time I lived in the centre of the village and we didn't have a radio. We were all really poor, dirt poor! Opposite us lived Zaira, who had a radio, and in the summer, when we were all in bed, mamma would lean out of the window and call out: 'Zaira turn on the radio so we can hear it too!'⁵. Beniamino Gigli was on. We all sung together.

My childhood was like this: I went to a kindergarden run by nuns and I soon learnt to write and draw. I'd prepared my drawing book to show to my father how good I was, but when he came back I was all grown up. Despite this, I still think I had a good childhood, we didn't ask for much. Although the rich in the village, the middle classes did flaunt their wealth in our faces. At that time the roads were not tarmacked they were dirt roads and the rich kids who were the first to have mopeds and cars, went to and fro all the time raising clouds of dust that we ended up eating⁶. They were arrogant and thought they owned the world. They know better now they've lost everything, because arrogance isn't enough you need entrepreneurial skills and they ain't got them. Collina at that time had over eleven wollen mills and knitting workshops where my mum worked and I worked too. They produced wool felt which prickled but saved you from the bad weather. After the war the mills were linked to other industries in Biella and Prato but while these went on ours failed and slowly disappeared. Serves them right too, let them learn how difficult life really is. The children of the mill owners at that time didn't care about us and when the first automated machines arrived they left us in the dust.⁷ The attitude of those rich kids annoyed me intensely and I tried to preempt their insolence with mine having little adventures with local girls. As we grew up there was the dancing and car trips out in the country. We had a FIAT 1400, we fitted ten of us in it, like that we all felt super rich. In the other villages in this area we were known as the boys from Collina, the rich mill owners. We used to go to the countryside to have pick-nics and explore the fields around the river Musone. When we got to the farmers' fields we used to wreak havoc.

If you wanted to study you had to go to Jesi. I went to primary school during the war and the school had to move several times. I often ask myself how we coped with it all. We'd just walk on hand in hand. In his letters my father used to say that when he'd got home things should get better, that his children were going to have a better future, but when he eventually came back he realized immediately ... he walked from Jesi to Santa Maria Nuova because there was no public transport. It was Easter. My father was a fascist sympathizer and he hadn't realized that Italy had gone to the dogs. Collina has always been with the Christian Democrats and the Republicans probably because of the mill owners, in any case people remained in the village because there was work while in the rest of the region people left in droves. Street talk at the time was that we've always had bosses and they will always remain. That's why you should never speak up against them after they have fed you all your life. But we realized that the country was in a crises and couldn't carry on like this, especially with the lack of work and seasonal work only. So together with Ubaldo, our neighbor we decided to found a trade union. At the time I had no clue about trade unions, I couldn't tell the difference between CGL CISL and UIL – I don't even know if they were around at the time – what was around was the Camera del lavoro (a meeting place for trade union representatives) which was also the local job centre and you went there when you were unemployed to sign on and get your monthly cheque which allowed me to buy a train ticket for Ancona to study at the Naval Shipyard.

Ubaldo had contacted the boss⁸ of the Christian Democrats of the time, Umberto Delle

Fave, who then became president of RAI9. He told us that if we'd founded a cooperative of workers he would find us 80 million lire – which was a lot of money – so we called a trade unionist from Jesi, called Carletti, a catholic partisan, to help us and together with a lot of other people we held a public meeting to discuss possibilities. The next day the owners knew everything because we had spies among us. Ubaldo and I then went to Ancora to meet the regional secretary of CISL, and for the first time I crossed the threshold of what then became for me like a second home, the trade union building in Via Matteotti. We didn't manage to form the cooperative in the end. We had difficulties. People didn't grasp the concept of what a cooperative was and what it would entail and the supervisors didn't want to have to be in the same union as the workers, there were lots of divisions.

When I started at the Naval Shipyard it was hell. The work is incredibly hard and there's a constant deafening noise, so much so that we were constantly shouting. We couldn't have survived without hear plugs and even with those that noise remained with you all night, in your head, you took it home with you after work. There were dangers at every corner too. because the forklifts lifted tons of cargo over our heads all the time. Then there were the sparks from the soldering iron on our skins and the deadly dust, asbestos dust which killed hundreds of people. Slowly however I got used to it. During the cold war one of our compatriots, his name was Alessandro Tambroni, tried to make a government despite the great friction that existed between parts of his own party the DC (Christian Democrats) but when he saw he had no backing he asked the MSI10 lead by Almirante to join forces with them.

Protests starts. Almirante organizes a party congress in Genoa, city that was awarded the gold medal for its commitment to the resistance during the war. The Genoese rise up and so does Reggio Emilia. There were deaths during the uprisings too. The reaction of the unions was immediate: CGIL calls a general strike and CISL refuses to strike because they say that it's a political strike, That day I follow the directive of my union and go to work between two rows of colleagues among a barrage of insults. I went in, I was the only one in the factory. The supervisors who were seen as owners came near me to talk even the owner came to talk to me. That day I didn't work. I reflected. At the exit noone was there. But everytime I met someone on the way home or to the bus station I was scared he's realize what I had done. From that day onwards Osimani stopped paying attention to what the union said. I made my own directivse and I always did what I thought was right.

In the Sixties and Seventies we fought to improve workers' conditions. From the earlu Seventies to 1982 FIM, FIOM and UIL join forces and become FLM (Federation of Steel workers); these are years of ferment and change, we were the best respected union in our field and the the managers o our firms were opened up to representatives of committes, at the factories , the drains company Maraldi, Farfisa musical instrument producer as well as SIMA and FIAT from Jesi

We had a lot of enthusiasm, we were in conversation with university professors at the faculty of economics in Ancora, we'd got to 14.000 members, our slogan was united we win. During one of our congresses the minister for work and pension arrived, Giacomo Brodolini, he was a socialist and from here, from the Marche region. He entered the hall slowly leaning on a walking stick. He was seriously ill and died a few days later but on that day we applauded him. He replied with a barely audible voice full of emotion an dappreciation 'The statute listing the rights and duties of workers has been approved'. I was moved too.

Whenever FLM was involved the national contract was always respected. In 1984 when

Craxi came to power there was an agreement to freeze contingency funds for workers and that's when there was a split between the unions. The dream ends. At that time being a trade unionist was really tough. The man who took my place hanged himself and nobody knows why. I was down in the dumps because I originally had to represent CISL at the counsel meeting in Ancona together with CGL and UIL and then it all went pearshaped. I was really fed up. I then launched the association of consumers¹¹ Adiconsum and for 13 years I was a volunteer. The national secretary was Paolo Landi who's one of the boys from Don Milani's centre.¹² I won some important battles. We were the first association of consumers that brought civil action in a criminal trial, I designed and printed the flag myself. I, ignorant as I was for six years presented a programme on consumer rights at a local TV station and also on Radio Velluto in Senigallia.

Now I want to tell you about Article 53 of the Italian constitution: every citizen is obliged to contribute to public expenses in direct relation to their income and tax band which means that tax dodgers deserve to go to prison and not be pardoned and if politicians don't remove this legalized theft is just an accomplice and should be the subject of public scorn. It seems to me that the laws made by the state these days, the laws that were approved unanimously in particular, go against the key tenets of the Italian Constitution. But nobody ever denounced their illegality. These people have supported unanimously laws ad personam. The first cause of ruin in this country, and I say this as someone who was born in the shadow of a bell tower, are the priests, the Vatican, the institution of the Catholic Church. We are victims of their culture, which is that of maintain privileges and power. We have a culture of privileges and power. It's in the southern mentality since many of our politicians are from the south, the south and the Papal state go hand in hand. Unfortunately we never became protestants: we have within us a discourse of forgiveness that in some cases turns out to be very detrimental: we believe that any evil can be rectified and forgiven. I can do something wrong but those who cheat, swindle dodge taxes are forgiven. There are things that concerns the human spirit. Some things can be forgiven but others not. Because they are made voluntarily. Forgiveness is ambiguous: the Lord forgives us but here we have human justice, and one thing is the forgiveness of the soul but the laws must not forgive citizens. Forgiveness is a religious problem. Protestant ethics presupposes a great sense of responsibility in all aspects of life. It obliges you to sometimes go against the laws of the land, it forces you to behave in a certain way. This ethics become civic conscience. Take the Shoa for example. I've asked myself how common people could carry out such horrendous acts. Christopher Browning says "we are all capable of this". This is the terrifying message of the Holocaust. We could all become murderers. The only remedy is the formation of a strong individual conscience. If all I do will be forgiven anyway I have a safety net. When you confess forgiveness requires repentance. So forgiveness becomes pardon. And in Italy we pardon everything. But I love pasta and when I grow up I want to die in silence. Free of pain. I often ask for this.