

MEMORIES

by Anna Pesticcio

## Chapter 1.

I was born in 1922 in Casalbordino, Italy, and was the ninth child in my family. My father worked on the railway and we lived in a 'railway house'. It was very old and stood on a hill overlooking the Adriatic Sea.

In those days Mussolini was in power in Italy and he ordered everyone to join the Fascist Party, but my father did not like the idea and refused to do so. After a short time he received a letter telling him he was to be relieved of his job, which was a catastrophe for us because we would have to leave the house which went with the job. My father was furious and often spoke out against Mussolini, within the family, telling us that he was sure he would ruin the country.

After he was paid some redundancy money he bought a small house for us to live in, which was on the beach, but the family was getting much bigger and in all we were eleven children, so he had to build on two more rooms for us. I was too young to remember anything about this but my brothers and sisters told me that they all had to help with the building in their spare time. The work in those days was very poorly paid and the family had a very hard struggle to make ends meet.

We had very little money and my father now had to spend most of his time learning to grow vegetables in our large garden as he only received his railway pension and we were such a large family to feed and clothe.

My four sisters used to keep the house tidy and they also learned to knit and sew from a neighbour. In the springtime we would help our brothers to catch squid. My brothers would make special baskets with long cord and drop them about 20 feet into the sea. In the morning, or at night, we would row out to see if we had caught any squid and if we had plenty we would sell some.

In the summer my parents would let two rooms to a rich family for two months (in July and August) to earn some extra money. They came for a holiday every summer and we girls had to sleep in the attic, and my mother and father slept in their bedroom, so my brothers had to sleep in the kitchen. In those days we could not stay in bed on Sunday mornings, and the boys would have to get up so that we girls could prepare the breakfast.

For some years we were the only family living on the beach and there were no roads or neighbours for a quarter of a mile. One day the father of the family who spent their holidays with us asked my father if he would sell him a plot of land so that he could build a holiday home for his family, instead of staying with us, and he offered my father a lot of money. My father needed the money and so he sold him the best piece of land he had, which was right in front of our house. Fortunately, he built a bungalow and we were very glad about that, because if he had built a house we would not have had our beautiful view of the beach.

The years passed by and my brothers and sisters got married and our family grew smaller. As each of my sisters were married my father needed more money and so he had to sell off more of his land, and this is how the beach originally developed.

My eldest brother (Romolo) married a local girl and they settled in town, and my second brother (Alberto) married a girl from Spoleto, which is near Rome. I remember my mother was not pleased about his wedding as he had to leave home to find work. He soon found a job in a coal mine in a nearby town and he was happy living there with his wife, but unfortunately, his wife died after only two years of marriage.

My third brother (Guido) married a policeman's daughter and he worked for the railway, as my father had done, and lived in the same 'railway house' where my family had lived.

During my teenage years I remember my sisters weaving cotton cloth, and sometimes I would try to do it but I used to break the cotton and my mother would tell me to leave it alone, "Your time will come" she would say. When my sisters (Pierina and Elisa) were preparing for their 'bottom drawer' my mother bought lots of hanks of cotton for weaving and my sisters helped to spool it, taking it in turns to work at the loom every few hours. I can still remember the noise of their feet moving the pedal, and their hands pushing the big comb backwards and forwards. The cloth was very plain so we made sheets, pillow cases and towels with it.

Pierina married Joseph who came from America for a holiday and met my sister, and in no time at all they married and returned to America to live. Elisa had met an Italian soldier before the war and eventually they married and went to live near Ancona.

At that time I never thought I would meet a British soldier one day, marry him and settle down in Great Britain, but I will write more about that later.

## Chapter 2.

I often think of my childhood and remember when I was six years old I started school. The village was very small and situated near the beach, and my friend Ida, and I, used to go there after school in the afternoon to swim. In our school we used to learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and gymnastics.

Every year, at the end of term, we were taken to visit a local Cathedral and we would learn about the Catholic religion. We didn't have any buses in those days so we had to walk there. In Italy the end of term is usually the middle of June, and we started school again in October.

Today children can start school at about the age of five, or go to Nursery School from the age of three, but when I was a child we couldn't start school until we were six years old, and that's when I started, in 1928, and I finished school in 1934. Two years passed and I was not able to go to the Senior School as my parents couldn't afford it. The education was free but the school was seven miles away and my parents felt that I was too young to travel such a long distance, and also they could not afford to give me the bus fare.

When I was 16 my mother wanted me to learn dressmaking so I had to catch a bus every morning and travel 9 kilometres into the town, where I stayed with a lady who taught me to sew. The lady's name was Signorina Michéla and I worked with her for two years. After that I went to a school to learn how to make patterns and cut them out and I stayed there for three or four months, and then went as an unpaid apprentice for about two years to a dressmaker.

After my apprenticeship I tried to get work as a dressmaker, but there was no hope of work anywhere around where I lived, so I made clothes for my family and this went on until the war broke out when I was 19 years old.

We lived peacefully in our little village until Italy withdrew from the war, then the Germans turned against us. There were Germans all over the place and we had to feed them and work for them. We lost all our livestock, which they took for themselves, and as they retreated from the British they took our men as well to dig their trenches, and the women were forced to cook for them. One of the men they took was my brother Guido.

One day I was ordered to cook a cottage pie for the German soldiers, which I had never made before, and it was very difficult for me because I had no utensils to make the pie with, only a wooden spoon, but one of the soldiers mashed potatoes with the spoon and broke it. He was very upset about this, and said he was very sorry. We had to warm the pie on the fire as we had no oven, but the soldiers enjoyed it just the same.

Eventually, most of the Germans retreated and only a few of them stayed behind in the village to prevent the 8th Army crossing the river Sanro. We were in the middle of a lot of bombing raids and were scared day and night, because we never knew when the bombers would fly over and drop their bombs. Sometimes they would come during the day and sometimes at night, but we had no way of knowing when they would come. We always took shelter under a railway bridge until the Germans destroyed the railway and the bridge before retreating, and we often watched the planes fighting in the sky.

By October 1944, it was clear that the Germans were losing the war and that they were in retreat. One night no planes came over and the silence seemed very strange. Early in the morning we saw the British Army occupy our little village and the beach. I had a good look around and there were lorries and tanks, and many many soldiers, they were all over the place. The beach was covered and they looked like ants, and I thought to myself "When are we going to have some peace?".

I was still a young girl living at home with my parents and three brothers. We had not heard from my sister in Ancona for about nine months, and we did not know where Guido was, so we were all very worried. Everyone was sick and tired of the war.

One day an Army Officer came to tell my father that they were taking over some rooms in our house. They decided to billet two Officers with us, and I had to clear everything out of my bedroom for them to move in. They also took over Guido's bedroom, which was downstairs, to use as a kitchen to feed the whole Company. Fortunately, I did not have to do any cooking as the Army cooks did all that. The soldiers would all queue up with their plates and tin mugs for their breakfast in the mornings, and they would have egg and bacon, which was very strange to us because we always had egg and bacon for a main meal. The rest of the Company slept in tents on the beach and in the fields, there were thousands of soldiers all around us.

Life was very difficult for us as we didn't have running water and had to fetch water from a well in the garden. It was very hard work filling buckets of water to supply all the soldiers. They would queue all day long with large cans, which looked like petrol cans, and they would fill them with water. One windy day I was carrying a bowl of water from the well and as I came around the corner of the house a gust of wind blew my skirt up. There were many soldiers queuing for their meal and I think everyone of them whistled at me. I ran into the house because my face was bright red, and said to my mother "I am not going for water any more until all the soldiers are gone". I did not know then, that my future husband was there among the soldiers and I was soon to meet him.

After a short time the army was not satisfied with only two rooms in our house and said they were taking over the whole house. I remember my father did not want to leave his home, but one of the interpreters said "There is a war on and you have got to move out, this place is for our convenience now, we need it". We had to move out as quickly as possible, and were given a flat on top of my old school, which was about 500 ~~to~~ metres away. Our house was then used to accommodate all the coloured soldiers, who felt the cold weather very badly and were suffering physically. Many of them became quite ill as it was the winter months. We had to live in the flat for about four months until the soldiers moved on.

I remember that Christmas we had a rather lean time, as our livestock had either been stolen, or was infected with foot and mouth disease. For Christmas dinner we only had spaghetti, there was no meat or poultry for anyone. There were many other families in the same situation as us, but we all made the best of things and were feeling much happier because the soldiers were beginning to move on at last.

The river Sanro had now been taken and crossed by the British and they were heading for the town of Ortona where there was a dock, which was very important to them. This was the time when we experienced the most terrifying part of the war, as the Germans were in Ortona, which was about 20 miles away, and there was very heavy fighting. We could hear the terrible noise of the guns firing from the British ships, the rumble of the tanks along the roads, and the constant bombing of the British Airforce. The British had a very difficult task because there were many Germans in Ortona, and it was built on a hillside.

When the battle was over and the British Army had taken the town there was not one house left standing, the town was now a heap of rubble. This happened to many of our villages, and I remember one in particular, a beautiful village called Francavilla a Mare, which was completely destroyed by the Germans before the British took over.

We were very happy when the British Army came, but there were many dangers for us. They turned the field next to our house into a petrol store, and there were hundreds of 40 gallon drums of petrol kept there, which were visible from the air and an open target for the German planes if they saw them. When I think about it I feel I am lucky to be alive today to tell this story, as I often thought that we would all end up in flames.

At this time my brother Guido had escaped from the Germans and had to get across the river Sancro, which at that time was very dangerous as it had flooded and had very strong currents. He was forced to cross at night so that he would not be seen by the Germans, and he also had to cross "no-man's land" on the British side. He was a very strong swimmer, but feels that he is very lucky to be alive today when he remembers the past.

### Chapter 3.

After what seemed a hard and frightening life the world suddenly changed for me because I met Alberto. The first time I saw him he came to our house to translate for his Commanding Officer. I was making bread that day in the kitchen, and I had to bake the bread in a large, old fashioned brick oven which was outside the house. I would make ten loaves of bread and some pizzas. Alberto was amazed to see me making so much dough and he offered to help me to carry the loaves out to the oven. My mother became concerned when she saw him and asked what he was doing, but I wanted him to help me and I said "He is just helping me to carry the loaves to the oven".

Alberto's Company stayed in the village for about four months and during that time he spent many evenings with us, and occasionally he would ask me to go for a ride on his motorbike, but my mother would never give her permission. He soon became friendly with all of us, and being of Italian descent he knew of our ways.

At that time I could not get needles for my sewing machine and I asked Alberto if he could send to England for some. He wrote to his father who was kind enough to send me a packet of needles in the next post. I was delighted and wanted to pay for them but Alberto would not take the money, so I made him a handkerchief out of parachute cloth and he still has it, after all these years.

One of Alberto's friends asked me if I could make a dress for his little girl and he gave me half of a parachute to make it. The parachutes were made of very good quality nylon and easy to sew with. I smocked the front bodice with pretty embroidery threads, and even if I do say so myself, I made a very nice job of it. I had some left over so I made myself a blouse.

Soon Alberto had to move on with the advancing 8th Army and we had no way of communicating with each other. The Germans were retreating and they destroyed the railways, all forms of transport and communication, and created as much chaos as possible for the advancing British.

After some months went by Alberto sent me a letter with an army lorry driver who was travelling South and passed our village. In this letter he asked me to marry him and told me that he was in Florence. Later on I received a very nice letter from his father telling me not to worry, that his son would come back as soon as he could and marry me, and after what seemed like a very long time he did.

For nearly two years we courted by letter and it was very difficult sometimes because I could not write any English at all, and Alberto could not write very well in Italian, although he could speak it fluently. If he wanted to explain anything to me he would send the letter to his father and ask him to write it for me in Italian, and then his father would send the letters back to me.

When Alberto was due for some leave he wrote and asked my parents if he could come to stay with us, and they were delighted to have him as they liked him very much.

My parents had kept the fact that I was courting a British soldier a secret, but now that Alberto was coming to stay in our house we wondered what the neighbours would say. However, our secret soon came out after he arrived, but we didn't care, we had seven wonderful days together, we just enjoyed ourselves, and we were very happy. When his leave was up he returned to Florence and was based there for a further twelve months.

He wrote to me as often as he could and kept asking me to go and see him in Florence. My mother was not willing, but I kept on asking her and in the end she gave in and agreed that I could go, but she insisted that my brother Guido must go with me to act as chaperone, and instructed him that he was not to leave me alone with Alberto under any circumstances.

Guido and I were able to stay at a friend's house, and we had three lovely days in Florence. While we were there Alberto bought me an engagement ring and a gold watch. I was very happy about this because I didn't know he was going to buy the ring and it was a wonderful surprise. We started to make plans for our future and Alberto had to ask his Commanding Officer for the necessary papers allowing us to get married. It wasn't easy to obtain these papers and we had to wait for months.

I was worried about making my wedding dress, as I could not buy any nice silk or satin in the village, and so I asked Alberto if he would look in Florence for some nice white material suitable for a wedding dress. He did buy some, but what a disappointment, I thought to myself "I've seen better material used for a dishcloth".

However, I had no option but to use it, and I was very grateful that he had tried so hard to get some material for me. I set about making my wedding dress and when it was finished everyone said it was beautiful. The wedding took place at my parents house on the 9th May, 1946, and it was a lovely sunny day. All my family were there, and it was very sad that none of Alberto's family were able to come. Although we were still on rations we were lucky enough to have some chickens and so we had enough eggs to make tagliatelle. This is made with eggs and torta, which is Italian wedding cake, and though we only had a 'war wedding' it was a wonderful day for us and everyone enjoyed it. x

The time soon came for Alberto to go back to England and I returned to my parents home, where I waited for two months for my papers giving me permission to go to England. On the 29th August, 1946, a big army lorry came to pick me up and I remember the driver was Polish, and he had an English sergeant with him. They were to pick up the Italian wives of British soldiers and I was the first, but it was a very difficult journey as neither of them could speak Italian, nor could they speak each other's language, and so we were three people travelling together who could not talk to each other.

I found it very hard leaving my home, and to say goodbye to my Mother, and I still remember today the tears in her eyes. It was worse for her to see me going away with two strange men, and the last words she said to me were "Please write as soon as you arrive". The journey was very long and it took about a week.

After travelling for four hours we arrived at the Falcona Hotel where we met the other wives. We stayed at the hotel for three days and then left Italy for Austria, where we stayed for a further three

days at a place called Villack. When we started the last part of our journey it was in grand style. We travelled by sleeper in comfort, with excellent service, and it was all paid for by the British Government. I enjoyed every minute of it and had a very good impression of the new country I was going to because, so far, they had done a good job. At Dover the Army gave us an escort to London where we stayed overnight. In the morning the escort arranged our journeys and bought our tickets for us. I was put on a train to Cardiff where my husband was waiting to introduce me to my new family.

I had a few hours to think on the train before I arrived in Cardiff and I felt very nervous. I wondered what kind of life I was going to have in this country, and whether I was going to cope with the language and my new way of life, but most of all I worried about learning to cope with married life, as everything was so new to me.

On the train with me was a young Italian wife with her baby and she was going to Swansea to see her husband's parents. Unfortunately her husband had been killed in Italy during the war and she told me how lucky I was, and reassured me. We said goodbye on the train and I never saw her again as we forgot to exchange addresses.

When I arrived at Cardiff station my husband was waiting with his mother, father, sister, and younger brother, who had come to meet me. Because my father and mother-in-law were Italian I had a very warm welcome. At first we lived in two rooms with my sister-in-law and her husband, and I started to learn English. At that time they lived in a large Victorian house in Windsor Road, but now the houses have been pulled down and a fire station is built there.

One Sunday all the family were invited to Alberto's parents house for dinner, and this was the first time I came across "Sunday dinner" which was a completely new experience for me because I had never seen a dish like that before, but it was roast beef and I enjoyed it very much.

My husband came from a large family, in all there were ten children, six boys and four girls, and he was the fifth child. My father-in-law had written to me regularly and I felt that they were very pleased Alberto had fallen in love with an Italian girl.

At that time one of Alberto's sisters had fallen in love with an Italian prisoner of war. His name was Antonio Sciubba and he was a sergeant in the Italian Army. In those days the prisoners who were willing to work for the British were allowed out of the camp, which was based in Wenvoe. Antonio and his friend were in Cardiff one day and got lost, so they asked the way to Wenvoe at a small cafe in Adam Street, which belonged to Alberto's father, and they were very pleased to find he was Italian and they chatted and said they would come again. He did not meet Betty on that occasion, but returned a few days later and she was working in the cafe. They liked each other very much and Antonia saw her as much as he could, and eventually they fell in love. They planned to get married after the war, but all the Italian prisoners were repatriated and Antonio had to apply to the authorities for permission to return to this country, and he had to wait for two years to get the necessary papers.

When Antonio was repatriated he came to visit me as Alberto had told him all about me, and I was still with my parents waiting for my papers from the authorities.

I remember it was summertime and we walked along the beach at my home, talking about Wales and Alberto's family. I wanted to know everything, and he told me how he had come to know Betty and all the family. When I finally received my papers and was ready to travel to England he asked me to tell Betty to wait for him and that he would come to Wales somehow.

It was at this time that one of Alberto's brothers (Billy) was shot down in the war. He was a flight engineer in the airforce and was on a bombing raid over Germany. The family were very upset when they received the news about Billy.

Chapter 4.

I settled down very well and in no time at all I was expecting my first child. I was worried about the language as I was going to the ante-natal clinic with my sister-in-law (Ida) who was also pregnant, and she was translating as best she could.

I was also worried about my confinement and this was when I missed my mother most. I could only write to her and tell her of my experiences and how I was getting along, but I would never worry her and always said I was happy, and, in fact, apart from the language difficulty I was very happy.

When my brother (Giovanni) had finished his service in the Navy he came to see me, and whilst here he met my husband's young sister (Vera) and eventually they married and decided to live in Wales. Later on my eldest sister's daughter (Ines) decided to come and visit me, and she met my husband's brother (Mario) and they also decided to get married, then Ines's brother (Vittorio) came over and met my husband's niece (Angela) and they got married and settled in this country. When my niece (Lina) came to visit me there were no Pesticcio's left, but she met a very nice Spanish boy and they married and settled here as well. It seems strange that I had not planned any of these marriages, but I was very happy to have some of my family settled near me in Wales.

Life went along fine for some years, then in 1969 my father was taken ill and my brother and I left Cardiff by train to go home to Italy, but the journey took 30 hours and we found my father very ill and he died on the day we arrived. He was 92 years old.

My mother had died 14 years previously, but my brother and I were not able to see her because my children were very young at that time and I could not leave them, and the journey was much too long for young children.

My son (Giancarlo) was nearly three years old when I had my second child (Yvonne) and I had quite a lot of work to do with two small children, as we were still living in two rooms. Now that our family was getting bigger we needed more rooms, but we could not afford to buy a house so we decided we would have to rent one. At that time Alberto's brother lived in a small house with a shop in Sanquahar Street, Splott, but he had decided to take over a farm and he asked if we would like to have his house. With no hesitation I said "yes" but Alberto was very reluctant because of the shop, he thought I would not be able to look after two small children and run a business, and, of course, my English was very poor. However, I was very determined and took things into my own hands and after a lot of argument with Alberto I finally won the 'battle' and we went to live in Sanquahar Street in August 1950, and I had to learn the business as well as the language.

After taking over the shop I was kept very busy selling ice-cream, lemonade, crisps, etc.. and in those days we were still on rations, but soon after rationing ended I started selling sweets and groceries. We stayed there for 14 years and during that time I had another child (Susan) and I found that with three children I just could not manage on my own and Alberto had to give up his job and help me to run the shop.

In the meantime we were given the chance to buy the house and business, and were very proud about that as we had saved up £250. hoping that this would happen, but we had to borrow £600. and arranged to have a mortgage for eight years.

After some years had passed life in the shop became very boring and I felt that I would like to change the business for something else, but I didn't know what else to do. One Sunday afternoon I went out with <sup>IMES</sup> Ida and her husband to see a house that they were having built in Ridgeway Road, Rumney. On the way I saw a big house at the top of the hill on Newport Road and it was up for sale, and I thought it would be perfect to run as a Guest House. When I returned home later I told Alberto about it and tried to coax him to come and look at the house, and the next day he gave in and we went to see it together.

We liked the house very much, but Alberto was reluctant to buy it because it needed quite a lot of work to be done, but I was very keen and felt sure that we could make a very good business of it, and finally he agreed.

In 1964 we sold the shop and took over the Guest House, but it needed a lot of work because it was an old house and very run down. My husband liked the house and the large grounds, but he found the prospect of taking on such a business very worrying, and he realised that we had about five years work ahead of us and no money to do it with, but I was looking forward to it. Soon I started taking in people for bed and breakfast, and Alberto continued to work with his lorry, but he was not earning enough money to pay for all the work that had to be done in the house, and we thought we would never be able to start, so we sat down and talked about it and decided that the inside would have priority.

I had to take in boarders while the work was going on as we needed the money, and this is how we managed for a few years. However, the family were suffering through lack of a bathroom of our own, and too many people had to share the only bathroom and toilet in the house, so I had to convince Alberto that it was essential that we should build an extension so that we could have our own bathroom and toilet. As usual it took me some time to persuade him, but after a while he could see that it really was necessary, and he set about hiring a bricklayer to come and do the work for us. Alberto was able to help as he had the lorry to carry the bricks, sand and cement, and soon we had a beautiful new extension with our own bathroom and toilet, and also an extra room. After this we decided to start on the grounds, which had become very overgrown and untidy over the years, so we laid lawns and planted rose trees and shrubs, and soon we had the outside looking very nice too.

As the years went by the children grew up and when they left school they learned a trade. My son became a panel beater and sprayer in a garage, and my two daughters decided to train as hairdressers. When my eldest daughter (Yvonne) was 21 she decided she wanted to go to South Africa to work and we did not attempt to stop her going, but after three months she decided to come home, and soon afterwards she met her husband Malcolm and they were married. Later on my other daughter (Susan) had the same idea but she wanted to go to Canada to be a children's nanny, although she had no experience at all.

We did not attempt to stop Susan going to Canada, but she also returned home after three months, and after a short while she met her husband (Philip) and they settled down in a home of their own. My son (Carlo) married a very nice girl (Marion) and for a few years they lived with us in the Guest House until they could save enough money for a deposit to buy a home of their own. Suddenly my children had all left home, but Alberto and I carried on with the Guest House, and he still worked with his lorry, but his own business was becoming very slack, and I began to feel once again that it was time for a change in our way of life.

Chapter 4.

One day I was looking out of the window, just thinking about our lives and what we would do in our old age, and how much longer I could go on running the Guest House, when I noticed a plot of land across the road and I wondered who it belonged to. I thought it would make a nice plot to build a house, or perhaps two flats, and Alberto and I could settle down in one when we decided to retire and take things easier.

I decided to make some enquiries to find out who owned the land and discovered that years ago there was a Church Hall built there, and that the land was still owned by the Church, so I decided to write to the Church Committee to see if they would consider selling the land to us. I asked my daughter-in-law (Marion) to write a letter for me, as my English was very poor still, but Alberto said it was a waste of time and we didn't have a chance of buying it, but I was soon to prove him wrong! I soon received a reply from the Committee agreeing to sell us the land, which made me very happy, and I convinced Alberto that this was a very good chance for us to prepare for our retirement and so he agreed to buy. After we had bought the land we talked about the best thing to do with it, and we decided we would stay on in the Guest House for a few more years and keep the land until we were ready to give up this business.

In 1976 Alberto started to clear the land we had bought, and fortunately, he still had the lorry so was able to carry all the building materials himself and do lots of labouring jobs. When he had cleared the land, together with the aid of a builder he started to build two flats (one up - one down) and we decided we would move into the downstairs flat ourselves, and would let the top flat to have a small income.

It was quite a struggle for us as we had to continue running the Guest House, and Alberto was also supervising the building of the flats and helping generally, but as we watched the building develop we were very proud, and looked forward to moving into our new home when it was finished.

The time passed quickly and we had to put our house up for sale, but it seemed a long time before we actually sold it. At this time I felt we were missing out on a lot in life, and looking back over our lives together I felt that we had always been working, what with keeping a grocery shop for 13 years, then a Guest House for 18 years, we hardly had any time to spare for a life of our own and we had very little time off during those years.

I had always hoped that one day we would be able to go off for a really good holiday, and we used to talk about the future, and decided that when the children were all married and we had sold the business we would do just that.

Finally, in August 1982, we were able to move out of the Guest House into our lovely new flat across the road, and we felt so free, we had all the time in the world to think about where we would go for our holiday.

Alberto had not seen his brother in New Zealand for some years, and so we decided we would go there, and when we told my brother and sister-in-law (Ida and Bernardo) they decided they would like to come as well. We left Cardiff in January 1983, but, unfortunately, on the day we started our journey to New Zealand Alberto's brother died, however, we did not receive this sad news until we arrived. We stayed there for four months and tried to see as much as we could. We travelled around the country trying to learn about the traditions and culture, especially about the Maori people.

We visited our niece in a place called Matamata for a few days and while we were there she took us to Rotarua where we were able to see a Maori concert, the girls sang Maori songs and the men danced and made the threatening gestures that they had performed in front of their enemies many years ago, and which has now become a regular performance at festivals and rugby games. When Captain Cook first landed in New Zealand the women greeted him and his men, but the men would put on their war paint and perform the Maori war dance to frighten the white men away.

We also visited a town that Captain Cook had named 'Russel' and there we were shown a replica of Captain Cook's ship the 'Endeavour'. In those days Russel was just a harbour for whale fishing and extracting oil from the whales and shipping it to England, and we saw the great cauldron in which the fat was boiled down. There is a story told that sometimes white men would suddenly vanish, and it is thought they went into the cauldron and were eaten by the natives.

The towns that Captain Cook named still flourish today, and we found that the Maori people made us very welcome wherever we went and we had a wonderful holiday.

I still go back to Italy to see my sisters and brothers, who still live in the same village, but my parents house was sold after my father died, none of my family wanted to live in it. I always go to see it, and the last time I visited I asked the owners if I could go inside. It has changed a great deal now, the well has been filled in and they have running water and electricity. The house has been extended and they have four bedrooms and two living rooms. The figtrees and grape vines are gone and the garden is neglected, which made me feel quite sad as my father was so proud of his garden.

The beach has not changed much, but the Council has built roads, a long promenade, hotels and shops, and so now it is part of a modern town. No longer can you walk along the beach, enjoying the silence, and the beauty of the fields and trees, and many people come to spend their holidays there.

When I go back to Italy though, and visit my lovely beach, I don't see the modern buildings, but my thoughts go back to my childhood when the beach was so isolated and we were the only family there.