

Buongiorno Signore (e signori). My name is Jordana Ubaldi and as many of you know I am the daughter of one of the members here, Vera, and I've been invited to speak about my experience as an Italo-Australian and the women in my family who served as my inspiration.

It is not a unique story, but one that, I believe, resonates throughout the Italian community in Australia, particularly among the 2nd and 3rd generations of migrant families.

My parents were both born in Italy, but had very different paths here. My father emigrated in his adulthood, with a full understanding of the choice he was making. My mother, on the other hand, emigrated as a child with her parents. For her, the experience was very different. A suitcase, a long and uncomfortable journey by boat and a sudden change of surroundings left her and my grandmother in a foreign world.

I think often about that image, of a young Italian girl stepping off a boat with her small framed but strong-willed mother and facing the daunting thought that they were strangers in a foreign land. One that at times was wary, if not hostile, proven by the legislation and policies in place to keep Australia 'White'. Nonetheless, they adapted as they settled down and, my grandmother in particular, maintained a delicate balance between embracing her new surroundings and preserving her culture and traditions.

She was kind-hearted and good-natured and beloved by everyone in her life, from the Aussie women she worked with to the Italian friends with whom she traded eggs and stories or shared a café. I can still remember the sweet melody of '*tu scendi dalle stelle*' drifting from the kitchen, as she rolled the gnocchi. I have few regrets, but one I certainly have is not spending more time learning from her, not just the recipes that I can never seem to replicate, but also learning her resilience, her patience and her courage. *Piu che altro, avrei dovuto imparare l'italiano prima che morisse la mia nonna. Sarebbe stata orgogliosa.*

My mother was the oldest of 6 children which meant a great deal of responsibility. She was raised in an era of changing ideology that conflicted with her cultural identity but first and foremost, was her commitment to family. To contribute to the household she got her first job at only 12 years old, at the iconic *Mario's Deli*, a hub for the Italian community of Adelaide's North East. Between her home life and her job, she was exposed to a wider Italian network, which she embraced despite her formative years being in Australia.

She often jokes that when she was at school, she was teased for her lunches of marinated vegetables on continental bread, but now they are considered gourmet cuisine. Despite her experience at Australian schools, and never getting that vegemite sandwich, her identity was unshakeable. She was Italian and she was proud. I am thankful for that every day because facing such societal pressure, many others would have opted to fit in and adopt the Australian traditions. Instead she went the other way and embraced her heritage, joining clubs and community events

throughout her life. That's how she met my dad, a new arrival to Australia, joining a small Italian theatre group.

I am the youngest of 4 children, born in a different time. When I grew up multiculturalism was starting to be accepted and Italians were no longer considered 'other'. My parents decided to keep culture alive in our house by teaching my older brothers and sister to speak Italian first. Unfortunately the school system had not caught up with immigration and growing cultural diversity so the broken English presented problems for my brother at school. To rectify this English became the spoken language in our home so all the kids caught up.

By the time I was born, English was all we spoke. While that was normal for my generation of Italo-Australian families, it was always a regret in my household. However, I was lucky to have parents that were determined to keep me connected to my roots, through stories and traditions that bonded us not only as a family, but as a community in Australia. Mamma used to talk about the smell of the castagne on the fire that reminded her of home. Pappa used to show us classic Italian films. Lunch on a Sunday was always at Nonna's house. And, of course, we made the sauce every year.

All of these things were just normal to me at the time, the 'done thing'. It took me years to realise that these were ties to the old world, to our heritage, that, were it not for the women in my life, may have been long lost.

For various reasons, it was predominantly my mother and grandmother who raised me. My mother, in particular, who made indescribable sacrifices to give my siblings and I every opportunity for success. I believe her devotion to our family is truly a reflection of the best part of Italian culture.

While at university, I received a postal ballot for a referendum happening in Italy. My parents had the foresight to make us all dual citizens when I was still a child but this was the first time I was being asked to vote. I then became acutely aware that I had still not learned to speak the *madre lingua* of my parents and grandparents, and I felt ashamed. So I researched language schools in Firenze and a few months later I left. I can't compare my journey to that of my nonna, to start with, I didn't have to take a boat, and I did not have to leave behind everyone I knew and loved forever and face the unknown. However, I was 21 and nervous, and it gave me great comfort to think of the courage and determination of the women that raised me.

The months I spent living and studying in Italy were transformative. So much so, that when I returned, it was only so I could tell my mamma that I was moving to Europe to become a tour guide, a job I have now had for 9 years and counting. I felt at home in Italy, at peace, because my family raised me to understand both who I was and where I came from.

Many of my friends are from a similar background and we laugh and joke all the time that we still uphold the traditions of our nonni because we couldn't imagine doing it any other way. We still trade *panetone* at Christmas and *Colomba di pasqua* at Easter. We still make the sauce. We still visit each other for *caffè* and *biscotti* to catch up on the news of the week. But mostly, we still feel connected, an unspoken

bond of shared experience and understanding because our families had the same journey and taught us the same traditions.

Clorinda Fantasia and Elvira Ubaldi are the two most important women in my life. Without them I would not be who I am. Without women like them and like you, all around Australia, we would not be here today.