

To my parents with gratitude

Gabriella's Journal

Aromas and flavours from the rustic culture

A route conceived and constructed by Cecilia Ercolani:

*the main legs in her parents' life
which gave rise to the numerous family*

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Introduction

A familiar saga in contemporary Tuscany

A familiar saga in contemporary Tuscany? Perhaps someone may deem an exaggeration referring to it as a “familiar saga”; it is, indeed, just thinking how such an expression has been used for famous literary works like *The Forsyte saga*. But without presuming to make literature, something similar I feel is to discover in the story of the Ercolani family, which has been going on for over fifty years.

It’s a typically Tuscan story, as the two protagonists are one from Valdichiana, and the other from Chianti.

The idea to look back on Sergio and Gabriella’s family and enterprise story came some time ago to Cecilia, one of their daughters who, among the various activities of “Pulcino Farm”, helps running the Farm restaurant. Cecilia also had the idea to make her mother tell her memories under the form of a diary.

The tale, whose writing up was in charge of the family friend Josella Mozzini, is uncommonly interesting and sometimes touching. It tells the story of Gabriella who in 1955 moved from Chianti to Montepulciano to take part to the Handicraf Exhibition, and later on met and married Sergio. Rapidly their family enlarged and they started running a small business, a tavern that Sergio called *Porta di Bacco*.

But the turning point of their life was the purchase of a country house, nearby Villa Bianca, that is nowadays the typical restaurant of the Farm. But the story doesn’t stop here, since Sergio, Gabriella and their children are thinking about other enterprises for the great family business, which even includes eighteen grandchildren.

I, myself grown up in the country, was given the charge to introduce this “journal”, also because some parts of the story correspond with my infancy memories; the farm work, the seeding, the thrashing, the grape harvest are little, but indelible experiences and adventures in the mind of a country boy of many years ago, like I tell in a little book that I have recently published. In my book, key-characters of a recent past country life are portrayed: the foreman (*capoccia*), the peasant (*bifolco*) and the housewife (*massaia*). Some of these portraits are used as examples in the appendix at the end of the journal.

The second part of the Journal is made of many recipes of Valdichiana and Chianti traditional cookery, the same that Gabriella, a not less excellent cook than the ancient Tuscan housewives, is used to prepare.

Remigio Presenti

Gabriella's journal

10th September 1955

I left Radda in Chianti this morning with the 7 o'clock coach and I arrived in Montepulciano around 11.30 a.m..

Last night I couldn't sleep for excitement.

I'm so young, just 19 years old, and it's the first time I've left my home and family to go all alone to a foreign place.

I spent the whole travelling time wondering how it would be like, what effect it would feel on me, whether I would get on well.

But what is important now, is that I want to make an impression and a fine piece of work, with the embroidery that my friend and I will show at the Handicraft Exhibition.

At the bus station Sigliola was waiting for me. We hugged each other and she led me to her house, near Via Piana.

What a beautiful town Montepulciano is! It's all built uphill, which is a novelty for me, I'm not used to slopes, but it's really beautiful! I passed under a massive gate called Porta al Prato and from there we climbed up to her house, in a narrow street in the town centre. At once I had

a good impression of the place and of the people I saw in the streets, I had the impression to be welcomed.

Gigliola had prepared herself some Pici for me; I had never tasted it before, but I found it delicious. In the afternoon, I arranged my little stuff in the small room that my friend had given to me and now I'm ready to go to bed. I'm exhausted; it was a busy day.

Tomorrow Gigliola and I are going to start embroidering our tablecloth. She likes the colours I have chosen .



Porta al Prato

11th September 1955

Today we began working at the tablecloth and I realized that the work is complicated and that many months will pass before we have finished it. Gigliola said it didn't matter and that I would have been her guest for all the time.

In the afternoon she took me to see Montepulciano. At a certain point of the high street there is an enlargement opposite St Agostino Church, and there I noted a clock, an unusual clock : over the clock face, on the top of the tower, there was a bell with a sort of Punchinello which beat the hours. With our noses up to the sky we waited for the strokes . Later we started walking again and, after a hard slope, we arrived in Piazza delle Erbe. Gigliola explained that it is so called because each morning, just there, under the portico, there is the fruit and vegetable market. Going along the high street, after turning on the right, we passed over a very tall building, the Politian Theatre and climbing up and up, we got the centre of the town, at last. I was tired but what I saw repaid me: Piazza Grande was magnificent! Over there the Cathedral, a fine well and the town hall that really reminds me of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. I

saw it some years ago when my dad took me to Florence with a gig. My father was a middleman and that day he had to go to the Cascine animal market, in Florence, for his job. Gigliola told me that it was allowed to get the top of the tower and that the view was wonderful from up there, from Val di Chiana to Val d'Orcia. I want to go, one day, but after such a climbing I was too tired for that!

Going straight on, between the Town Hall and the Cathedral, we arrived at an open gate beyond which a wooden path led to an ancient fortress dating back to the Mediceans. Gigliola informed me that it was exactly the place of the Handicraft Exhibition, where our tablecloth will be shown. It had a severe appearance, I was a bit afraid of it. We will have to work hard, I don't want to cut a poor figure. Let's hope for the best!



Punchinello's Tower



St Biagio Church

10th November 1955

Dear diary,

November is almost over, and it's two months since I have arrived here in Montepulciano. I wish I had written more, but in the evening I'm tired and I've nothing special to say: all days go on monotonously, dedicated to work. We embroider all the day long, sitting by the window of Gigliola's bedroom, face to face, the tablecloth on our knees. The work requires a lot of attention and it's slow to develop, but it's a fine embroidery and we are satisfied.

Sometimes, in the afternoon, to stretch our legs, we go and walk among the streets of the town.

Gigliola loves cooking very much and she has taught me some local dishes: the Pici, the Soup of Bread and Chicken in Galantine. Today I went out alone while she was preparing our dinner. I was going down Piazza delle Erbe, when a good-looking young man approached me and in a very polite way introduced himself. He said that his name was Sergio Ercolani and that he lived in Montepulciano, working in a bank.

I immediately liked him for his manners and his green

eyes. As I was handing some chocolates, which I had just bought, I spontaneously offered one to him, then we started to speak. He asked me where I had come from and what I was doing in Montepulciano. I answered I came from Radda in Chianti and I explained the reason of my staying there. From a chocolate to another he accompanied me under Gigliola's house, we said good bye to each other, and I entered. I was very happy I had met him and Gigliola immediately realized my excitement: she said I had red cheeks and bright eyes.

I really hope to see Sergio again, I like him!



Piazza Grande

8th December 1955

This morning Gigliola and I went to midday Mass in Jesus Church. While we were leaving the church, after the Mass, I could see Sergio among the crowd. My heart leapt for the emotion. He himself saw me and approached us. He said hello to Gigliola, whom he had already known by sight, and asked her the permission to visit us at home. Partly to please me, partly because she had known him as an honest person, she gave the permission.

As I saw him again I had confirmation how much I liked him. He was very fashionable, wearing a long camel-wool coat perfectly fitting with his fair carnation and his brown hair. His gait and his being fashionable were in harmony, putting in evidence his genuine elegance. His liveliness and his way of speaking completed the picture and to my eyes he was irresistible, the perfect reproduction of Prince Charming, of my Prince Charming!!

Oh yes, he is the first man to attract me and I'm so glad he has also shown some interest asking to see me again. I thank Gigliola who gave him the permission to attend her home.

15th December 1955

This morning opening the window I remained astonished: the town was completely covered under a lot of snow. What a marvellous sight!!

Every thing looked different, as if it had leavened. Each small detail seemed magnified and puffed up because of the snow lying on it. The whirling of the flakes had created some incredible laces in the roof corners and on the projection of the chimneys. An unusual silence reigned over the town, the very few noises arrived from far away and softened.

We couldn't go out, so I remained at home all day embroidering; we also made a nice Ciambellone to offer to Sergio who, in spite of the tall snow, came to visit us, as usual. He arrived wrapped up with a scarf, a pair of gloves, a hat and a pair of big rubber boots, feeling chilly but not embarrassed for being at someone else's home, he, a man, with two women. He told us many funny tales and anecdotes about the life in his town.

He brought a fine bottle of Vinsanto and in the wine we soaked our slices of Ciambellone, which really tasted good. I couldn't say if it was because of the cake, or of the wine that warmed the atmosphere, but our evening was really

pleasant, full of high spirits and gaiety.

I like Sergio more and more! The more I stay with him,
the more I want to stay with him!

18th December 1955

Christmas is coming and I miss my family a bit, but I have fitted in here.

I wrote my family a letter to inform them about my health and my life in Montepulciano. I told them about Gigliola, and her kindness towards me, about our tablecloth that is filling more and more with coloured bunches of roses. I didn't say anything about Sergio, because they might get worried. I'll tell them when the time will be, hoping that it will arrive. At the moment nothing is between us...but, the proof of the pudding is in the eating!!

With regard to Sergio, I feel excited because Gigliola has invited him for dinner for tomorrow evening and... I could see him again, at last!!

17th January 1956

How fast the time goes through! Christmas feasts have gone and we almost didn't become aware about, so busy in our work: it absorbs us completely and our eyes are seriously put under strain.

Sergio is a daily presence by now, and I more and more appreciate such a gay and talkative young man who succeeded in filling the void I felt during Christmas-time for I missed my family.

Today, in the afternoon, he came and said it was his birthday. As it also was St Anthony Abbot feast, we went to the Mass to celebrate the Saint in the small church of Tombesi Family, by Porta delle Farine. There were a lot of people and most of them had carried their pets: cats, dogs, some rabbits and a pair of pigeons. Yes, because St Anthony is the animals' protector, so at the end of the Mass all of them were blessed. Sergio took me back as far as home, but he didn't enter, and I wondered why for!

Oh blast! I'm so sorry! I'm very keen on him and I don't want to miss him.

24th February 1956

Carnival is over and it was magic! I had never enjoyed so much in all my life! Gigliola taught me how to make Crogetti: we kneaded, rolled, and fried these typical Carnival sweets in the afternoon of the Thursday before Lent. When in the evening Sergio came, we proudly showed the trays full of golden pastry sheets, covered with honey or icing sugar. It was a success and Sergio liked them a lot. On the last Tuesday of Carnival, we went to the Carnival ball at the Politian Theatre, where an orchestra played. The fine theatre had an ancient atmosphere with its stuccos and gildings, the curtains, the red velvet padded chairs and four rows of boxes overlooking onto the round stalls. A rich chandelier hanged in the centre of the fine frescoes of the ceiling. In the middle between the boxes there were some curious lamps in the shape of a candle which reminded me to a huge birthday cake.

The theatre was crowded with people carrying trumpets and paper hats: they leant over the box railings, even thronged as far as the top, the last row called pigeon-house.

It was the first time I've entered a theatre and I was a bit frightened. I wore the only one graceful dress I own: it's

turquoise that is my favourite colour because they say it fits with my blue eyes. Sergio himself said so.

The orchestra played properly, but dancing was quite difficult because of the thick layer of confetti on the floor; my high heeled new shoes sank into it and streamers coiled around my ankles. Thank goodness, at a certain point somebody swept the floor and piles of that were jumbled against the circular walls.

Sergio was not a good dancer, but he brilliantly coped and I was happy to dance with him. When it was time to go home, while I was putting my coat on in a corner of the box, Sergio approached, held me tight and for the first time we kissed one another. . .

It was exciting! Getting down the stairs to leave the theatre, my legs were trembling, I felt like if I was going to fall down and in my stomach I had crowds of fluttering butterflies.



Carnival ball at the Politian Theatre

9th March 1956

Today it was a fantastic day. I wore my new overcoat and a pair of new black leather ankle boots to go out with Sergio. He collected me after his work and held me by the hand, while walking along the town streets. I felt I was in the seventh heaven! In Piazza Grande, in the alley along the Diocesan Curia we stopped to admire the breathtaking view of Val di Chiana and the three lakes: Trasimeno, Chiusi and Montepulciano. It was such an enchanting view, with a lot of different shades of green, like only spring, or Pinturicchio's paintings can give. We sat on a low wall, warm for the sun and there, as nobody was passing by, Sergio kissed me for the second time and asked me to get engaged to him. I said "yes" !!! He promised me he would go to Radda to meet my parents at the beginning of the next summer.

I'm bursting with joy!!!

Easter Monday 1956

It is spring today and Easter Monday, too. Easter Monday is the day when traditionally people eat in the open air to celebrate the beginning of warm season. Today Sergio and I took the coach together and went to Pienza: it was the first time. Sergio, acting as a guide led me to visit that wonderful town, and so doing he uncovered all his culture and artistic sensibility. He told me about Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini who became Pope Pius II and wanted to change the medieval village into a papal seat in the Renaissance style. He rearranged Pienza like the ideal town, working at the topographical project together with the Florentine architect Rossellino. The main square of the town is surrounded by all the buildings that in ancient times shared the power: the magnificent Cathedral, opposite it the Town Hall and, at its sides Borgia Palace and Piccolomini Palace.

Continuing the high way, Sergio led me inside three romantic lanes, all next to one another according a logical order: Balzello (ambush) Street, Kiss Street, and Love Street. There, to honour the place, Sergio wanted to kiss me, thank goodness nobody was passing by! All those small lanes ended

in a lookout with a terrific view of Mount Amiata, and Val d'Orcia in full bloom.

At lunchtime, we walked down a path that, passing through the arch under the cathedral, shortly led us out of the town.

It was a sunny day so we lay down on a meadow in front of the Pieve of Corsignano, and there we ate flat bread with Capocollo and some Easter doughnuts I had put in the hamper.



Easter Monday with Sergio

St Agnes Feast

23rd April 1956

I have found out that Sergio is a very devout person, mostly towards this Saint who is the Patron of Montepulciano. Today he took me in procession; it started from the church of St Agnes and went all round the town: A lot of people was there, the whole community took part to the liturgy, proving to be well devoted to this Saint who lived in Montepulciano. It was exciting passing along the streets of the town aware that all around people were full of curiosity about me, but they kindly smiled because all of them knew Sergio, who was next to me. From all the windows coloured flags and standards hanged down, they were red, white and yellow. In front of each church, a carpet of pink petals lay on the floor. After the procession Sergio took me in a place called "Apostoli", nearby the town, and we had dinner at a country house. It belongs to some farmers who are Sergio's friends. To go there we went downhill across some fields full of small lovely daisies and after a short time we got the threshing yard in Emilio's farm. Emilio was just there, cutting hay for his cows from the hayrick, but he immediately came down the

ladder and said hallo in a very cordial way.

After the introductions and the greetings, he led us up the stairs of his home. Up there, at the top of the stairs some old bowls were in a line along the wall of the house: they were used as vase and were full of pansies. These flowers, simply variegated in yellow and brown gave to the place a welcoming atmosphere.

When I entered the huge kitchen, I was impressed by the fire, most of all: it burnt in a wide fireplace and a lot of terracotta pans were there, on the coals, all around the fire.

A wonderful smell spread in the room stimulating appetite.

When the housewife saw us, she cleaned her hands on an apron before coming and shaking ours. She was really kind because she had prepared for us a lot of delicious things: polenta with sausages, ciaccia with friccioli, tomato bread soup, and some pig's liver.

Emilio, the foreman, called out to Sergio and together they went down to the cellar. When they appeared again they were carrying two big flasks of wine, just drawn off. I must confess that Montepulciano wine is as good as Chianti one!

I like the atmosphere we can breath inside country houses,

among those plain people who always warmly welcome you, and who are so friendly and genuine just like their food.

It was dark and late after dinner. Emilio accompanied us on foot, guiding us till the asphalt road, said goodbye and went back. Sergio and I, hand by hand, went uphill towards the town. We could see Montepulciano high on the hill, all the lights shone far away while a crescent of moon overlooked just above the Dome campanile.

“Look” I said to Sergio, “ isn’t it a wonderful view? It’s like a crib!”

He gazed at me, and gave me a kiss.

20th June 1956

The moment we have so long been waiting for has arrived: the tablecloth is ready!

We have finished our work at last, and we are really proud of it.

Conveying on the material all the hues of a bunch of red roses, working so many close stitches in line was a long and difficult work. We have embroidered something like twelve bunches of roses, spread in the corners and all over the tablecloth, as well as a rose in each of the twelve napkins. Yes, Gigliola and I have made a really good work, and we are very proud about it.

I can come back home, now!

Next Saturday Sergio, who doesn't have to work, is accompanying me to Radda to meet my parents, as he has promised. I'm a little nervous to the idea to see my family again and, most of all to introduce them my fiancée, but I feel he will be able to cope very well, as he usually does, and I'm sure everybody will like him, so much he is jaunty.

Radda in Chianti, Feast of All Sins Forgiveness

2nd August 1956

Today Sergio arrived from Montepulciano by coach; it was such a long time we hadn't seen each other. He is staying until Monday, since coaches never travel on Sundays.

The bus stop was in a place called Villa, close to my home. All my family was there waiting for him: my mum Beppina, my dad Ottavio, and my brothers and sisters, the oldest ones Alma and Carlo, and the youngest Gastone, Agostino, Mauro, and Carla.

To welcome her next son-in-law, mum had prepared a wonderful lunch and aunt Bruna and grandma Isola had helped her.

Mum made Tagliatelle in rabbit sauce which is her special. Grandma fried some rabbit meat and cooked artichokes. My aunt, very skilled in cake-making, prepared a cake with sponge biscuits, whipped butter, and chocolate.

Being Sergio an important guest, my dad put on the table a bottle of Chianti, the excellent Gallo Nero quality, that had been kept for special occasions and that Sergio really liked.

I had the confirmation that Sergio is a true gourmet: he heartily ate everything and congratulated the cooks on the excellent lunch.

In the afternoon, after that we had cleared and tidied up the kitchen and the men had chatted around the table, we dressed up and all together went to Mass.

The church was extremely crowded for all the people of the village were there. It happens that in such small villages like mine is, where we all know to one another, going to church is also a chance to meet each other again, so more than one head turned round towards us, curious about the young stranger sitting next to me.

After the service, instead of going home with the others, Sergio and I went to the Fair running along the streets of the village. I enjoyed walking arm in arm through all the stalls showing so different coloured goods and, while going, crunching the almond toffee Sergio had bought for me. Every now and then, I bumped into some friends of mine to whom I introduced my fiancé.



Feast day in Radda in Chianti

12th August 1956

Here I am in Montepulciano again to give the tablecloth the last touches before showing it at the Handicraft Exhibition.

Gigliola and I spent the whole afternoon in carefully starching and ironing it and now it is absolutely beautiful! The green leaved blossoms, the half opened roses and the fully opened ones look like a palette where different nuances of yellow, orange, red, and green enchant your sight in an alluring harmony. We also ironed and folded the napkins, putting them and the tablecloth in tissue-paper in order to protect them from dust while waiting for the delivery.

The days spent in Radda were really joyful, and as I had thought, my family showed a special fondness for Sergio. Anyway, I feel I already have a bond with Montepulciano because it's there that I will spend all my life: Sergio has asked my parents the permission to marry me.



Touring with Sergio

30th August 1956

It was a great success!

Our linen table-cloth with its coloured bunches of roses won the first prize, with many congratulations from the judges.

It was a great happiness that repaid all our sacrifices.

Gigliola embraced me: we were deeply moved.

But it's time to return to Radda. I'm sad about leaving Montepulciano, also because I will not be able to see Sergio so often, but I have to prepare my trousseau for we are getting married by the end of the next year.

30th November 1957

I have been married for a week.

Last 24th November I became Sergio's wife and now I am Mrs Ercolani.

The ceremony was an easy one. It took place in Siena, at Madonna di Camollia Church.

After the Mass we had an aperitif and some sweets at Mannini's cafe, in Banchi di Sopra, later, at one o'clock sharp, we said goodbye to friends and relatives and caught the bus to Perugia.

Our honeymoon was quite short, just two days because we couldn't afford to stay longer for the little money we had. We only owned 25 thousand liras and we wanted to save part of the sum for the first days of marriage.

My life has completely changed, here in Montepulciano. I spend my day here, in this small Antique Shop that Sergio ran before starting to work as a cashier at the Popular Bank. He had closed the shop at that time, but he has reopened it just for me.

In here I pass my time embroidering, and waiting for customers but also reading art books Sergio gave me to learn how to distinguish the different styles in art.

But today I'm shutting earlier because I fancy cooking, so Sergio will be able to eat a tasty dinner.

I'll make some Tagliolini meat soup and a potato pie, which he really likes.

Our life is simple, but peaceful. We're happy in such an endless honeymoon!



On honeymoon

20th June 1958

Dear diary, I've neglected you. It 's almost a year I haven't found any time to tell you about my life.

During the last months I have always worked in this small Antique Shop, my second home, so far.

But I have a novelty that I want to confess to you: I'm pregnant and in three months my first child will be born.

My stomach is growing and clothes are getting shorter and shorter.

Pregnancy is going on in the right way, but I sit too long and my ankles get bigger in the evening.

To make me walking, in the afternoon Sergio took me in the country by our farmer friends' home.

They were thrashing and the thrashing yard was full of people and machinery.

All the share-croppers of the nearby farms were there to help and be helped in their turn. The thrashing machine made a terribly loud noise while it ground the wheat sheaves. They were inserted from above and disappeared inside its open mouth. The wheat grains, after they had passed through the whole machine, came out from behind the thrasher to be immediately collected in large hempen cloth sacks that, little

by little were filled up, loaded onto the men's shoulders and taken away indoors.

A thick dusty cloud surrounded the thrasher; from its front-side the straw fell on a conveyor belt to be then carried up to the hayrick, near the cowshed.

From a side of the machine, at last, the corn skin came out. It is called the "lolla" and it's the part of the corn collected and used as fodder for the farm animals.

After the farmers had finished their work, they first washed themselves at the well basin, then, ready for lunch, they sat on banks settled down around a long plank covered with a chequered table-cloth, working as a table outside in the yard. The place where we ate was once occupied by an old hayrick made of thrashed wheat sheaves.

Also Gina, the housewife, had hard worked for the Threshing Feast.

To feed all those people she had had to butcher four geese and used them to make Cannoncini with goose sauce, filled goose's neck, and roasted goose with potatoes.

For dessert she had made dry biscuits to soak in Vinsanto. The whole company was cheerful and thoughtless, although

well exhausted after a day's dusty and sweaty work.

So, while Franchino was playing the accordion and Emilio singing refrains, poor Gina never stopped passing the wine and water flasks.

At the fall of the evening the group broke up and all of us took the way home.

Sergio and I said thanks for hospitality and started walking, hand in hand just like two years before, when, still unmarried, paid a visit to the farmers. It was almost the same: the sweet flower smelling, the countryside, the same touching down view of Montepulciano but what's different now is that we'll be three people very soon.

It only needs a few months to our child's birth and I can guess he will be a male child because of the big kicks he is continuously giving me!



Threshing in Montepulciano

16th October 1958

I'm by the window in my bedroom; I'm embracing my female child Elisabetta, born on the last 29th September.

I've just suckled her and, waiting for her burp, I'm trying to write a few lines with my free hand.

It's a very beautiful moment in my life, a moment I want to keep for ever, for this I'm writing on your pages.

Elisabetta was an absolute surprise for us. We were sure that our first baby would be a male, but we are not disappointed, of course!

My husband and I are completely happy. In the evening, Sergio is eager to come back home to cuddle.

The baby was born just in this room, on the big wrought iron bed where I clung to when I was in labour.

It was a regular birth, all was at its best; Elisabetta came out pretty quickly, and she is very beautiful and in good health. She is green eyed, like Sergio and has got a pink plump mouth; she looks so lively to make me think she will be a strong active woman.

I deeply thank God for the wonderful gift He has given us.



Elisabetta's birth



*One year old Elisabetta sitting
on Granny Carolina*

8 years later

2nd November 1966

Dear diary, I had been thinking to have lost you while these years, so rich in change, were going by. I found you again in the bottom of the children chest of drawers: Yeah, I'm using plural, these ten years a lot of children came along! To Elisabetta, Cecilia added, and Carlo who just today celebrates his sixth birthday, then Angela and Marco and, almost three months ago, Stella arrived, the last one, I hope!

Our family is so big now, so lively and joyful, but a lot of work has to be done. Six children are such a large number but we consider them as a God blessing, so all of them have been welcomed.

I confess that it's a hard work to raise them all, but, on the other hand, it's a full joy to look at them as good-looking healthy children.

Apart from the first-born, all the girls are dark eyed and haired, the boys instead have green eyes and dark hair.

They are our fortune and our future investment. Sergio and I live for them, for their health and happiness, and this is the reasons for which two months ago we took a turning-

point decision.

Perhaps the brave choice we made might be a little risky, but I trust my husband and I strongly believe in our will to transform our dream in reality.

It happened that, at the end of August, Sergio left his job in the bank, where he had been working for eleven years. Thanks to his gratuity, and with the help of the bank itself we bought a room placed inside the main gate of Montepulciano, Porta al Prato.

This room, which is rather typical, has been settled down in a tavern by us and here we serve the typical products from the surrounding farms, and the very famous *Vino Nobile* of Montepulciano.

Obviously, we have called the tavern "La Porta di Bacco".

Now our business is divided between the tavern and the Antique Shop, and we take it in turns according to necessity.

Sergio is mainly dealing with the selling of antique furniture and he's having a good deal of customers. Daily, after he has closed the shop, he comes at the tavern to care for wine and giving advice about purchasing.

We have luckily succeeded in finding a fitting house for our

big family; it's just above the shop, so we can properly look after the children. Thanks to God, we are helped by grandma Carolina, Sergio's mother and the nanny, Marina.

Ours is rather a large house, so we can lodge Carla, my youngest sister, who since tomorrow is living by us. I'm happy because she could study at the Caselli Institute, here in Montepulciano and also help me to bring up my children.



Sergio in his Antique shop



Porta di Bacco inside

19th December 1966

Christmas is coming: it's the most important feast in the year, but with so many children all around, I feel it will be absolutely special for us; all of them look so excited thinking about the gifts they hope to find under their Christmas tree.

In the hall we have planted a charming juniper in a vase and the children had a great fun with the decorations, even if the lively collaboration of the youngest of them caused a lot of broken balls!

Less adventurous was the arrangement of the crib, put on the floor, in a corner of the dining-room.

The small crib statues, though delicate and continuously moved and shifted by the children, in the creation of well unusual array of sheep inside the cave, in turn of the cow and the donkey, are still in their whole, also thanks to the thick moss layer which made the fallings soft.

We are spending the Christmas Day together with our families, Sergio's and mine.

Further, my brother Agostino has got engaged to Graziella, Sergio's youngest sister, so all of us have an additional reason to celebrate.

I'm going to make a good meal for Christmas Day: Marina, our nanny and Arduina, our cook that in that day won't be working at "La Porta di Bacco", will help me.

The day before Christmas, we'll make the pastry for Tortellini in meat soup, Ravioli, filled with ricotta and spinach, cooked with sage and butter, and for Lasagna.

For second course, I'm thinking about braised veal cooked in Noble Wine, and for dessert, apart from the traditional Panettone, the Pine-kernel cake my children like so much.

Sergio is not only a hard-working man, but also a self-taught artist.

In his little free time, he started to carve a Madonna con Bambino into a river stone that he's going to give me as a Christmas present.

Next spring, in Pienza he is showing his first collection of sculptures.

I'm sure it will be a success!

He has already prepared many works that the clients have really liked and wish to buy, but he is determined to sell them only after the exhibition.



*Christmas dinner
Cecilia with her paternal
grandparents Gino and Carolina*

2nd February 1967

Today was a special day: three of our six children performed at the Politian Theatre, exactly where 10 years ago my love story started.

The Bologna Antoniano Chorus, was looking for new voices to insert in the Zecchino d' Oro Festival, so they announced a contest in Montepulciano. They arrived up to here with their Rai-tv machinery, here in the southern area of the Siena province. The town authority gave an enthusiastic welcome to the initiative and a widespread publicity to it through the town schools. As my older children are pretty good at singing and also for the encouragement of their teachers, Elisabetta, Cecilia and Carlo were signed to the competition, and their domestic training started under aunt Graziella guide. The family, after a referendum, agreed that the most fitting song for the children's performance was "The Three Little Pigs".

For a fortnight after school all around the house the tune of this song was the only one possible sound to hear from the children, and aunt Graziella made them repeat again and again the tune daily, with patient promptness.

And today the great moment arrived.

Early in the afternoon, all of us dressed up, we went to the theatre hoping to get enough seats for our large tribe. Our arrangement needed several rows in the central stalls.

We patiently listened and clapped to the other contestants, waiting for the children's performance.

Their turn arrived at last! Introduced by the popular "Wizard Zurlì", and accompanied by the orchestra, they entered in an excited mood, while we were clapping to encourage them. On the stage Elisabetta, Cecilia and Carlo sang the tune that by now they had learnt at best. The two girls wore the same black and white checked dress and a nice white collar which conveys a sort of professional air, suitable for the Antoniano Chorus. Between his sisters, hand in hand with them, Carlo in perfect English style wore a pair of under knee-length trousers and a sweater.

Distracted either by the audience or the joyful continuous waving of his little sisters and brother, sitting on our knees, Carlo looked a bit embarrassed, red with the emotion.

He was the youngest of the three, and we were worried that

he might have forgotten everything; he also looked as if he was about to cry but, surprisingly, he took out a wonderful voice, which appealed the audience. Perfect was the children's performance, and very warm the applause.

The jury, which was composed of local music teachers and schoolmasters, gave the first prize to our three children, filling with proud all the Ercolani family present in the theatre.

Unlucky, the competition regulations didn't expect but one winner, so, in order neither to disappoint the girls, nor to send Carlo all alone to Bologna, we had to renounce to the prize, that was given to the second best song.

Even so, Sergio and I enjoyed the result, perhaps also more because we don't want our children to be deceived by life perspective so far away from our expectations.

We organized a nice family dinner and the children were given fine presents: a guitar for Carlo and two boxes full of watercolours and coloured pencils for the girls.

This way their artistic talent was awarded all the same!



Cecilia, Carlo and Elisabetta with Wizard Jurli



Elisabetta, Cecilia, Marco and Carlo

29th August 1967

Today, in the afternoon, I was feeding the children at "la Porta di Bacco", when I was sent for by Sergio.

I rush to the Antique Shop where I found Signora Egle and her husband, some of our oldest clients.

They first paid many congratulations for our big, lovely family and business, then they made us a proposal: they offer us to buy their small Frateria, 2 kms out Montepulciano, along the road to Chianciano, at the moment occupied by some farmers.

Economically, the purchase sounded quite advantageous, moreover both the idea of bringing up our children in the country, in the open air, and the idea of an our own production of wine, oil and cheese, immediately made us enthusiastic. After a quick, spontaneous, mutual agreement gaze, Sergio and I said "yes."

I feel astonished and excited at a time; I feel this is the beginning of the realization of our huge dream.

Next to Sergio, nothing can frighten me, we will be able to face all difficulties and to own our farm, at last!



Celebrations of the Farm purchase

10th September 1967

Both of us enthusiastic to the idea of the farm purchase, we managed to quick all the necessary documents, so that only three days later the proposition, we signed the agreement to buy.

At that point, the contract gave us enough certainty to reveal the business to the family and to jump for happiness.

It was a fine weather Sunday today, so we invited all our relatives for a picnic by our estate Fonte al Castagno in order to show the farm to them; in fact inside the estate there is a small wood lying just above the Frateria, opposite the road.

Around 10 o'clock, my relatives from Radda started to arrive :my mum Beppina, my granddad Ottavio, all my brothers with their wives and children, all my cousins, aunts and uncles. The house was like an ant-nest, so crowded of toing and froing people. The children were clamouring and running from one room to the other, pursued by all-age cousins.

Trying to organize the food quietly, I asked my sisters to lead the children in advance to the car park just outside

Porta al Prato.

In the meantime also Sergio's relatives arrived: they were given the first cases with salami, pecorino cheese, roll-bread, fruit and sweets which they carried to the car park and put into their car boots.

Sergio and I were the last to leave home after we had wrapped up the steaks, put the sausages inside a large covered container, prepared the flasks with the wine. Eventually, we locked the door and joined the others into the car park.

Everybody had already settled in the cars, waiting for us guiding them to the estate. The car parade was so long to be like a wedding procession!

Once at the farm, we left the cars and, walking in an Indian queue up a narrow path, we arrived at the small wood, not far from Mount Tona.

The previous day, in the same area, Sergio had arranged some stones in a circle to prevent the fire be dangerous for children or the bush all around.

We put the boxes on the grass, then, while the children were playing roundabout and happily running, and the men were looking for dry wood for the fire, I and the other women

opened the tablecloths and laid for the picnic.

We were about thirty people moving around that place, but I couldn't see the youngest of the children, Stella. I asked my sister, who had been given the charge of the baby, but she answered Stella had neither been with her nor with the other children, so she had thought the little girl was with me. On the contrary, I was completely convinced Stella was in one of her uncles' car.

Suddenly panic took all of us, seriously worried that something bad was happened to the child-girl. So everybody gave up doing what he or she was doing and started looking for Stella. Our tempts were useless. We were getting anxious, the girl was still not found, so Sergio and I decided to walk back till to the car, but Stella was not there. Immediately we drove back towards home, once arrived we stopped the car, unlocked the door, breathless rushed upstairs... We flung open all the room doors, useless! We were losing the hope that the child might have been forgotten in the house, among the confusion; legs were trembling, despair rising. We were still calling "Stella!", again and again with a more and more trembling voice, when we heard a noise, such

a creaking from our double room. The wide-opened door was slowly closing, pushed from behind. We first saw the little fingers of a little hand, black, then, whole shape Stella. She was absolutely calm, unaware of the condition of anxiety she had caused to us, completely black for the chocolate she had been eating until then, indifferent to what was happening all around her. Behind the door, where she had been hidden, a huge quantity of pieces of paper from all the chocolates she had been eating and spread on the wall and on herself.

We gave a long, deep sigh of relief and took her in our arms, though she was untouchable.

After a nice bath, out of any plan, completely cleaned and dressed again, Stella was put in the car and taken in the wood where the group was anxiously waiting for.

When they saw all three of us, Stella smiling in Sergio's arms, they gave a welcome back warm clapping.



A country trip



Stella sitting on Elisabetta

22nd June 1970

Today, the second from the last of my children, Marco celebrated his sixth birthday.

School closed a few days ago, so all the children are at home at the moment.

We have been living in the country for almost three years; here the children have been in true contact with nature, freely running across the fields and learning how to name flowers, trees and mushrooms and, above all have been growing up plenty of health.

In the farm, the children can also ride 8 horses, 6 of which are saddle horses, and 2 are gig ponies. We have built a large circular fence in order to make the customers have fun.

The oldest son, Carlo could be addressed as a jockey in the Palio of Siena, so much good he is at bareback riding our best studhorse.

I'm afraid when he zippy gallops amidst the fields, he, so tiny on such a tall animal.

The other children, not so brave as him, limit themselves to wandering around by the gig, and are always going down the dirty road that, sharing into two parts the vineyard from the

forest, joins the farm to the valley,.

At lunch and dinner time, looking at them, pretty sweaty and hungry, while all are sitting at the table, I proudly smile for their lively eyes, their pink complexions and happiness they exhale, since in them I see the evidence of the rightness of our life choice.

Apart the family that Sergio and I always take in the first consideration, there is the business which is thriving.

Our farm is always full of people: they are customers in treatment at Chianciano Spa; they, after their treatment, wander around and stop here in a great number.

Some of them are for us as close as relatives, such as Mr and Mrs Corsini, textile industrialists from Milan. They have their treatment at Acqua Santa waters, regularly in August, and take us to the Antique Exhibition at Strozzi Palace, in Florence where Sergio yearly keeps a reserved place for our antiquities.

Mr Perfetti is another affectionate client, also from Milan. He is the owner of the homonymous confectionery company. Every year, at Christmas he sends to each of our six children a huge carton box full of mixed chewing-gums.

Or Signora Mery and her husband Antonio, from San

Donà di Piave who put their caravan behind our farm to be as near as possible to us, and whose children play outside with mine, while in the kitchen we share recipes and tiny secrets.

I have realized that I work much more here in the farm than I did at Porta di Bacco; yes, I have to take care both of the menu for our customers, and of the production of our products. Anyway, Sergio's formula has been successful: it was the union of the very rare pleasure of scented tasty quality food to the simplicity of a genuine surrounding that has given us the success we have always been hoping and dreaming for.

Today, for Marco's birthday, we made working again the ancient Frateria oven and, helped by Antonio, a faithful collaborator of ours, we homemade some bread and some Focacce.

What a nice perfume and what a flavour!



Carlo, Marco, and their friends



*My family in full:
Cecilia, Carlo, Marco, Angelo, Elisabetta, and Stella*

29th September 1970

Today Elisabetta, the eldest has just turned 12: she's quickly growing.

As a birthday present, Sergio drove us shopping to Siena by our Mercedes car, the only one able to contain us all, though a little squeezed.

We bought winter clothes for all our six children at Signora Giovanna's boutique, in Banchi di Sopra, near Piazza del Campo; Sergio didn't want to be unfair to the other children, and didn't care about money.

So, with a very full boot came back home in the afternoon, just in time to prepare the birthday dinner with the friends invited for the occasion. They were two couples from the north of Italy, clients for a long time: Katia and Enrico from Sanremo who yearly, at Christmas, send us a huge 15 kilos Panettone, and Adolfo and his wife Buby from Milan who always give cashmere pullovers to all our children.

Before leaving to Siena, I had put pastry to rise to make some Panello with grapes and walnuts; it's an old recipe from the monks, which I discovered in an ancient cookery book, and that I want to experience.

Antonio had already turned the oven on, so beside Panello,

I put into some lamb meat with potatoes and onions.
Everyone enjoyed the dinner and the Panello tasted really
delicious, so I have decided to make and insert it regularly
in the list of the farm produce.



Ready for dinner: Carlo, Marco, Angela, Elisabetta, Cecilia and Stella.

5th October 1970

Our enterprise is popular and attended more and more.

The increasing amount of clients deeply appreciate our genuine food, for its being simply cooked, and the ancient atmosphere and flavour it conveys. Also because the monastery style tables, dressed with brownish paper, keep in the trace of the monastic life style used at the time of the Frateria.

Lately, the film director Federico Fellini and his wife Giulietta Masina have been our guests; they have given us their congratulations for our cookery and our big family. Mr Fellini looked very interested in our daughter Angela, who is very beautiful. He suggested to take her to Cinecittà for an audition, but Sergio, who is absolutely jealous, refused kindly, but firmly.

I have turned 35 today: I feel so strange realizing that I have been married for 13 years and I have given birth to six children.

A big family has always been our dream and now that the dream has achieved, Sergio and I are thinking about our children's future. We wish they remained here, all close together, working in collaborative harmony to the enterprise

we are running for them.

That would be the best gift for my next birthdays; they are still too young, so I'm satisfied to celebrate it in our farm, surrounded by my nearest and dearest .

Sergio prepared a surprise for me: a wonderful dinner. He roasted the pork in the wood-burning oven and grilled some juicy Florentine steaks. Agostino, my brother, helped him with the meat, while Carla and Graziella made Potato Gnocchi with meat juice, and a nice tart with plum jam. But I was absolutely unconscious about all this, and wanted to celebrate myself, I made some Cantucci according to one of my mother's recipe. They are typical of Florence area, but I have introduced a personal touch to the original recipe: I've substituted sugar with an identical amount of our production wonderfully sweet honey. The result was excellent, they really taste much better than my mother's ones, more crunchy and tasty. I will make them like that from now on, and after they are out of the oven, I will put them in a card package for my clients.



3 years old Angela, on the Porta di Bacco doorstep



"Pulcino" Farm in 1970

8th October 1971

The grape harvest

It's vintage time: the time to pick grapes from our vineyard.

The nice September sun made the grapes mature to the right point, so that they hang down black and bright among the reddish vine leaves waiting for being cut off. The grapes are sound and sugary, we will surely have some good wine!

Each time grape harvest is a feast for all of us, both the adults and the children are always very active. It's a chance to be in the open air, cheery chatting and telling funny anecdotes, while a lot of hands rummage amidst the vine-shoots, looking for grapes to pick up.

Early in the morning Sergio detached the baskets that had been hanging from the cellar ceiling after last year grape harvest, and made them ready with a pair of scissors inside each of them.

I myself instead, helped by Elisabetta and Cecilia, arranged all was needed for having lunch in the fields in the food hamper.

Wrapped up in a large checked tablecloth, I put a whole sheep cheese, a salami, a whole ham to cut at the moment, raw sausages to eat uncooked with bread, and some rolled bread filled with omelette.

Before going to the vineyard, Sergio also drew out of the cellar some flasks of wine and jugs of fresh water, so that, as soon as the group of the harvesters gathered, each of them took one of the previously prepared basket with the scissors inside, and helped to carry the drinks.

The quite numerous group was formed by relatives, friends and children, and all together we went down to the vineyard, placing ourselves in the many rows.

It was sweaty hot, the children had taken off their t-shirt, being in their vest. They were red cheeked and tacky because they tasted grapes biting it off from the bunch before putting it in the basket. But they hard worked, mostly Carlo, who, not yet 11 years old, stood out like a young farmer for his energy and commitment.

Around one o'clock we rested for a while and had lunch in a shadowy wood, bordering with the vineyard. There, where the food had been left before starting the harvest, we all settle around the table-cloth, sitting on the soft grass, or

on the stones, heartily eating, and drinking a lot for the heat. After lunch, we rested for another while first, then we started to work again, more energetic. From a row to the other, crossing voices and a rhythmic pit a pot can be heard, and a continuous joking and laughter came immediately after.

In the first hours of the afternoon, the heat was even higher (amplified by the deafening song of the buzzes). The jugs of fresh water were not enough, so we had to fill them more than once; the same was for the flasks of wine, and more and more Sergio had to substitute the empty ones with others full of wine.

The children sweated, Stella fell asleep on the table-cloth, in the shadow, the others were given hats that I made from vine leaves joined together by small pieces of wood, to protect them by sunstrokes. I sometimes managed to see them, so thirsty, leaving the vineyard and going in the shadowy wood where food and drinks had been left. They stopped there for a while before coming back to the vineyard. In the meantime, I kept apart some grapes of mammola variety, that I will use tomorrow for some Pannello to offer to our customers.

Once over, I went to the wood to drink myself and there I saw Carlo and Marco who, lying legs in the air, were singing and talking in a puzzled, incomprehensible way. They also had silly laughs and their faces in a colour nearer to purple than red. Between them a half empty flask. Their breath wine smelling, I realized that they had drunk wine instead of water. I tried to make them standing up to took them home to wash and freshen them: it was useless, they couldn't stand up and moved their body swinging continuously.

So I left them under the trees to sober up.

After we had finished the grape harvest, the two boys still singing and completely unaware, were taken home by Sergio and uncle Agostino who carried them on their shoulders, like two chickpeas sacks.



The grapes harvest

28th August 1972

Since the end of July my mother and aunt Bruna have been living at the farm. Both of them are suffering from asthma, so they decided to take their thermal treatment in Saint Albino Spa, not far from here. Aunt Bruna lives in Panzano, a really small village near Radda in Chianti, where my mother lives.

As both of them are very good in embroidering, to take advantage from their presence here, and to make my daughters busy during summer holidays, they were asked to teach my girls to embroider, hoping that they can appreciate this nice tradition of my family.

All my daughters are quite artistic and creative, so in order to stimulate their inventiveness, I have organized a small handicraft market here at the farm: the different items would be sold to our customers, and the money earned given for charity.

All of them happily liked the idea, and hard worked for long afternoons, under the guide of their aunt and their grandmother, so a lot of small works of art were made.

Elisabetta, who is pretty good at drawing, drew nice motifs on some fabric using a tailor's chalk. The fabric had been

previously cut by granny Beppina from a paper model, and was later embroidered by Elisabetta and her sisters. The embroidered fabric was later transformed into quite original bags, sewed around circular bamboo handles. Finally, as a last trimming, aunt Bruna wanted to add some ribbons and buttons.

Cecilia personally took care about children bed sheet, specializing herself in embroidering it, while I sewed it adding some Sangallo lace flounce.

Angela and Stella, who are younger, embroidered some bibs for babies and jeans purses which aunt Beppina provided with hand sewed zip.

I myself, in the rare odd moments, also took part to the activity and sometimes took a rest for my legs sitting in the rocking chair in the shadowy garden behind the restaurant where some tables had been fully equipped.

The work was so active and fructuous than by the half of August we had already made a good amount of pieces, all shown in big windows next to the restaurant lounge.

All those little objects, carefully made by children wishing to help other less lucky children, were deeply appreciated by our customers, and they were snapped up in a short time, so

that they needed to be substituted day by day.

Among all the objects that the girls made, I have managed to keep a little sheet embroidered with some flying bees, that I'm going to give to my first grandchild, when he, or she will be born.

Yesterday mum and aunt Bruna finished their treatment: before to go, they accompanied the girls to the orphanage in Montepulciano and, with proudly satisfaction gave nun Rosilla what their month's hard working had produced: 180 thousand Liras.

15th September 1972

Today Fernando and Pinuccia arrived. I saw them entering the farm while as usual I was busy in wrapping up the Cantucci that I had just cut.

I was thinking about them right now. They have been coming for many years, exactly mid-September for they treatment in Chianciano. It was a great joy to see them again, almost if they were relatives and even more. They have been our customers since when we worked at Porta di Bacco, at the beginning of our business.

They come from the area of Milan and run an enterprise of hydraulic pumps; yearly they buy olive oil, ham, and cheese not only for themselves, but also as Christmas presents to give their factory workers.

They always take with them two grandchildren, who happily play together with our children, having a great time.

Year after year, our friendship has strengthened so much that when they are here, at the farm we share our table with them, as if they were in the family. They enjoy our Florentine steaks, most of all!

They always arrived full of gifts; this time they brought

Sergio the latest model of a torch to keep in the car, sweets and typical biscuits for the whole family and two bright red bicycles for the children.

Also Sergio was happy to see them again, and during the lunch he informed them about how the business was running and explained them his future plans. Mando (so we called Fernando) is very friendly and practical in his advices, both because he is very careful to the market movements, and because of his personal business experience.

Our children looked rather anxious during the lunch, eager to be allowed to leave their seats, and go playing with the new bikes; so, after lunch they immediately went out in the yard to ride them. We were still sitting and talking, when from outside we heard such a disturbing noise, that all of us stood up, and went to the door to see what was happening.

Carlo the oldest of the boys had taken a bike and had no intention to give it to anybody else, so all the others were quarrelling about who should have ridden the left one. Moreover, Carlo, pursued by the whole claiming tribe, while trying to elude them, fell down, and his knees were now bleeding, full of little stones. He, both for the blood, and the tedious possibility to have the bike taken away, was

shouting at the top of his voice.

At that point, we had to intervene to calm all of them down and dress Carlo's wound. Later, to pacify, we removed the bikes and locked them inside the storehouse, waiting for the children agree themselves about taking turns in the use of the bikes for the following days.

22nd November 1972

Sergio is always the first to get up. This morning he woke me up saying he had a surprise.

I got up rushing and I opened the shutters: an unusual whiteness invaded the room. Outside a thick layer of snow had cover everything. Since we have lived in the country, we had never seen so much snow.

Suddenly our farm looked like a mountain hut; the forest opposite the road looked very different, deeply transformed by the white snow on the branches.

No cars were passing through, and all around the biggest silence was reigning.

Sergio started to organize the day: he firstly asked me not to wake up the children because they couldn't go to school in such weather conditions. Moreover, the snow would have been a nice surprise to them, too. His second thought ran to the animals: our small flock of sheep, our three cows, our pigs, poultry, and pigeons.

Well clothed, he went down to feed them all. When he came back, to warm him up, I gave him some hot coffee

and the biscuits I had made the day before. After the refreshment, he went down again to mount the snow chains on our car tyres. Then he got the town to buy snow boots for the whole family. He emptied the shoe-shop!

When the children woke up, try to imagine their happiness! They spent the whole day playing out in the snow.

In the afternoon, I made them go back home, and after a nice hot shower I gathered them all around the kitchen table to celebrate the snowfall with salted doughnut and Sergio's fresh Pienza sheep cheese.

The band had a lot of fun in kneading and modelling the doughnuts, they gave very creative form to the pastry, enjoying looking it rising in the saucepan.

My husband wanted to join us in that unusual collective snack, but can you imagine how long did it take to me making my kitchen clean again?

Anyway, it was worth it, I like having all of them all around me. I wish this moment would never end.



Snowfall at the Farm

23rd November 2008

Dear Diary,

how much time has passed since I last opened you!

It was 36 years ago: It sounds impossible but it's the true!

I can realize it turning over your yellowish pages and also reading what I confessed to you, words that put my past feelings and emotions so lively, so sharp and close.

Time is a hard master who fast runs without giving us the chance to be aware of. We are always so busy in our daily work, that we lose the awareness of being in the middle of our best time until, suddenly, here we are, to close the balance of a whole life.

I left you in 1972, as a young busy mother with 6 children to bring up, and I meet you again as an old granny surrounded by 18 grandchildren.

My life has not be always plain, nor easy, for the money obligations, troubles, and a lot of labour, but in the idea of family Sergio and I have always found our energetic reserve to go ahead and face difficulties.

In the meantime, all our children got married and had babies.

We are a much bigger family now.

My first grandson, who I had kept the sheet with the bees

for, is Luca who is 27 just today. It was his mother Cecilia to embroider the bees on the sheet; she has two other sons: Stefano, 20 years old, and Damiano, 12.

Elisabetta, the first born of my children, was the most prolific: Serena 22, Carolina 20, Andrea 18, Irene 12, Elena 9. If she had had another son, she would have followed our family model with four daughters and two sons.

My daughter Angela has two girls: Alessandra 24, and Francesca 19. Carlo, like his sister Cecilia, has only boys, but one more than her: Simone 20, Niccolò 18, Saverio 13, and Francesco 11.

My other son Marco has: Benedetta 16, Chiara 15, and Alessandra 14.

My youngest daughter Stella has a 12 years old girl called Sara.

I consider myself a sort of super granny, because of all my wonderful grandchildren who make me feel so proud and happy. It's due to them if the whole Ercolani family is projected into the future: they will develop the fruit of our sacrifices which will not be lost.

All of them are so good and responsible, both in their studies, and in the business, specially the older ones.

Today I had the pleasure to see all of them all around me: it was Luca's birthday. All of them appear good-looking and strong.

That was one of the best moments I could spend in my whole life: I feel deeply happy having them all around, their cheerful spirits, their only presence makes me proud of myself, of what we have done.

I'm so happy to be with them that I want them on holiday with me as much as possible, when I'm free from work.

Today, at the birthday gathering, I observed them one by one, to feel, once more, the emotion to find out in their features something mine or Sergio's. Yes, I'm pleased with myself so far, all I have done comes back to me through the affections I'm surrounded with.

What I wish the most, at this time in my life, is that they could find enough energy and perseverance to fulfil their dreams.

They look quite enthusiastic and eager, so, Sergio and I are planning new arrangements for the future of our business.

What is important is they keep themselves working united and collaborative even when we won't be on this world anymore.

We hope they never will be competitive among them, nor

diverted by self-interest making them forgetful of how in life the union of the family, not money, is the most important value.

Thanks to family we could set up such a little empire; like a tribe of other times, we shielded ourselves, joined our efforts, we stood up to external attacks, and never a breach endangered our rock-like solidity. The only one possible danger, able to destruct all has been created, may only come from inside the family, but it will be really the end of everything.

That's the only danger we are afraid of; we hope it never happens.

We deeply wish our nice familiar affection to keep up developing in honesty and agreement, in order to carry on the dream that Sergio and I begun 50 years ago.



I myself sitting on my granny Isola

Gabriella's ancient recipes

Bread and Focaccia

Serves 10:

1 kg flour

2 glasses tepid water

40 g baking powder

6 tablespoons oil

1 tablespoon salt

In a large bowl pour the 2 glasses of tepid water and the baking powder. Use a spoon to dissolve the baking powder, add some salt and the oil, then add the flour and knead carefully. From the bowl put the pastry on a floured board and knead again.

Make little ball with the pastry, 3 to use for the bread and 1 for the focaccia, transfer the balls in a saucepan, cover with some cling film and set apart for 2 hours.

After the leavening, bake in the oven at 220°C for 35 minutes, turn off the oven leaving it in there for farther 15 minutes.

Prepare the focaccia rolling out the pastry and greasing with salt and oil.

Use the same oven temperature for the bread, but less time for baking.

Salted Doughnuts

Prepare it like bread pastry, rolling the pastry with a rolling pin, and form circles. Heat oil in a frying pan and fry the circles.

Excellent as aperitif.

Focaccia and Capocollo

Serves 6:

500 g flour

2 glasses tepid water

6 tablespoons oil

1 tablespoon salt

20 g brewer yeast

200g sliced capocollo

some rosemary

In a bowl, dissolve the brewer yeast in the tepid water, add salt and oil.

Add the flour gradually, and knead the mixture forming a ball.

Allow the ball to rest for 20 minutes, then roll it on the pastry board with the rolling pin. Put the pastry in a ovenproof baking dish lined with baking sheet.

Season the pastry with oil, salt and rosemary.

After 30 minutes of leavening, bake in the oven at 250°C until golden.

Leave to cool completely, cut the focaccia in the middle and put inside the sliced capocollo.

Ciaccia with friccioli

Serves 6:

600g flour

2 glasses tepid water

6 tablespoons for the pastry

6 tablespoons for season

1 tablespoon salt

30 g brewer yeast

200 g “friccioli”

In a bowl, dissolve the brewer yeast in the tepid water. Add the salt, oil and half of the flour. Mix carefully, then add the “friccioli”. Combine the flour left and form a ball. Let it leaven for about 30 minutes. Roll the pastry with the rolling pin and put it in a ovenproof baking dish lined with baking sheet. Season with oil and salt left. Bake at 220°C until golden.

Crostini with goose's liver

Serves 6:

Goose liver and gizzard

half a onion

5 tablespoons oil

fresh parsley

half a clove of garlic

half a celery stick

2 apples

half a glass white wine

1 glass meat stock

3 tablespoons capers

strips of anchovy

salt and pepper

Finely chop onion, garlic, parsley and celery, and lightly brown in oil.

When the onion is soft add the goose liver and gizzard, previously rinsed in water and vinegar. Let it brown, pouring gradually first the wine, then the stock.

When the liver and the gizzard are almost done, add the chopped apples, salt and pepper. cover with a lid waiting for the apples are done too.

Cook for 20 minutes then remove from the heat, add the strips of anchovy and capers. Pass all in the masher, add some oil and cook over a very low heat for another 30 minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon.

Handmade Montepulciano Pici

Serves 6:

500 g flour

2 tablespoons oil

1 glass tepid water

salt

Open a well in the flour and pour the tepid water, salt and oil.

Knead carefully to get a ball.

Leave the batter to stand under a cloth for an hour.

With the rolling pin, roll out the dough to a thickness of about 1 cm and cut it into strips 1 cm wide.

Handle one strip at a time, let it pass under your open hands to form long pasta wires, like spaghetti.

Cook it in plenty of boiling salted water for 7 minutes, drain, and season with meat, or tomato or "aglione" sauce.

Meat sauce or Ragu

Serves 6:

300 g beef mince

400g peeled tomatoes

1 onion

1 carrot

1 celery stick

half a glass red wine

8 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

salt and pepper

Finely chop all the herbs and pit it in a saucepan to brown with oil, salt and pepper.

Cook for about 20 minutes, then add the beef mincemeat to brown.

When it is well browned, add the wine and let it evaporate. Join the tomatoes and bring to the boil over a very low heat for 2 hours.

Tomato and basil souce

Serves 6:

600 g fresh ripe or peeled tomatoes

1 onion

1 celery stick

extra-virgin olive oil

salt pepper and basil

Finely chop the herbs and put it in a saucepan with oil to brown.

When the onion is soft, add tomatoes.

Reduce the heat and continue to cook for 30 minutes, in the end add fresh chopped basil.

“Aglione” sauce

Serves 6:

600 g fresh or peeled tomatoes

3 garlic cloves

8 tablespoons oil

salt and pepper

1 pinch of Cayenne pepper

Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the garlic until soft: add tomatoes and Cayenne pepper. Cook for 1 hour over a low heat until garlic has melted in the tomato and the sauce is well-blended.

Ribollita or Bread soup

Serves 6:

200 g stale bread

300 g dried haricot beans

3 bundles of chard

4 potatoes

4 carrots

3 celery sticks

2 onions

3 courgettes

6 tablespoons tomato purée

10 tablespoons olive oil

salt and pepper

Boil the beans in 2 litres of water for 3 hours.

Heat the oil in a pan and brown the onion until soft. Add the tomato, 1 litre of tepid water, then the carrots, the celery, and the finely chopped courgettes. Salt and cook for half an hour. Add chopped potatoes and finely cut chard. Let it cook for about 2 hours.

Toast the stale bread and rub it with garlic. In a saucepan form alternate layers with bread, beans and vegetable soup and boil again for another 2 hours.

Serve in terracotta pots adding in the end some extra-virgin olive oil.

Polenta with sausages

Serves 6:

350 g maize flour

6 sausages

1 small onion

100 g pork cracklings

6 tablespoons oil

some half-ripe sheep cheese

salt

Bring to boil 1 litre of salted water. Slowly pour the maize flour continuously stirring.

In the meantime, brown the finely chopped onion in the oil until soft, then add the cracklings and the peeled sausages.

When polenta is done, about after 30 minutes boiling, pour it in the saucepan with the sausages, stir carefully, and add the chopped sheep cheese.

Pour the polenta onto a large woody board to cool. Cut it into slices and serve.

Pappa al pomodoro or Tomato bread soup

Serves 4:

300 g stale bread

400 g fresh or peeled tomatoes

2 garlic cloves

1 celery stick

6 basil leaves

½ litre water

6 tablespoons oil

salt and pepper

Put in a saucepan the oil, the garlic cloves divided into halves, and the chopped celery stick. When garlic is soft, add the chopped tomatoes, the basil leaves, salt and pepper. Cook over a low heat for 15 minutes. Pour the boiling water and the stale bread cut into pieces. Boil for about 40 minutes over a very low heat. Turn off the heat and without removing cover with a lid. To serve hot.

Tagliatelle with rabbit sauce

Serves 6:

500 g flour

6 eggs

2 tablespoons oil

½ a tablespoon of salt

On the pastry board, put the flour like a fountain. Pour the eggs, the oil, and the salt in the middle. Slowly stir using a fork and combine until all the flour is absorbed, then form a ball and let it rest under a cloth for 30 minutes. With the rolling pin roll the dough very thin and cut it into narrow strips (tagliatelle).

Before cooking, sprinkle some flour on tagliatelle to avoid it to stick, and let it rest on a cloth for a while.

Cook in plenty of boiling salted water and drain when it rises to surface.

Rabbit sauce

200 g mince

½ rabbit with head and liver

400 g fresh or peeled tomatoes

1 onion

1 carrot

1 celery stick

1 garlic clove

some rosemary

white wine

8 tablespoons oil

salt and pepper

In a saucepan or, even better, in a large earthenware crock, put the oil and the finely chopped herbs to brown. When soft add the minced meat, the rabbit (previously washed and cut to pieces), included head and liver. Cook uncovered for about 30 minutes, add ½ a glass of wine, salt and pepper. While cooking, pour some warm water with the rosemary. Cook for about 2 hours and when it's almost done, add the chopped tomatoes. Cook for another 30 minutes over a low heat. Now the ragu is ready for tagliatelle.

Tagliolini soup

Serves 6:

300 g flour

2 eggs

2 tablespoons oil

400 g beef shin

3 litres water

1 carrot

1 onion

1 celery stick

1 garlic clove

3 basil leaves

2 ripe tomatoes

salt

In a large saucepan put the water, the salt, the herbs and the meat.

Cook over a low heat for 4 hours, preparing tagliolini in the meanwhile.

On a pastry board put the flour like a fountain, put eggs, oil and salt in the middle and combine, until the flour is absorbed, then form a ball and let the dough to rest under a cloth for 30 minutes. With the rolling pin roll the dough very thin, bend to form a roll and cut it into very narrow strips (tagliolini).

When broth is done, strain and let tagliolini cook in it for no more than 5 minutes.

The meat used for the broth can be served as second course with pickles.

Cannoncino pasta with goose sauce

Serves 6:

800 g cannoncino pasta

300 g mince

goose liver, goose gizzard and goose legs

1 celery stick

1 onion

1 carrot

1 garlic clove

some parsley

500g ripe or peeled tomatoes

1 glass wine

½ a glass of oil

salt and pepper

Finely chop the herbs and put in a saucepan to brown. When softened add the mince, the liver, the gizzard, the legs, and salt. When it's well brown and starts sticking to the pan, pour the wine and cover with a lid. Cook over a low heat until the liquid has evaporated and it starts sticking again. Carefully break the goose liver and the gizzard into pieces, then add tomatoes. Cook over a very, very low heat for about 3 hours.

Tortellini soup

Serves 6:

stock:

500 g beef shin

1 onion

2 carrots

2 celery sticks

2 ripe tomatoes

some basil

salt and pepper

Put all the ingredients in a large pan and pour 4 litres of cold water.

For a tasty broth, let it boil for at least 4 hours. If the liquid subsides, add boiling water.

tortellini filling:

150 g mince

80 g ham

80 g mortadella

1 egg

100 g parmesan cheese

50g butter

some nutmeg

salt and pepper

Heat the butter with the mince, salt and pepper. Brown for a while,

then remove from the heat. When the meat is cool, combine with chopped ham and mortadella. Finely mix and combine in a bowl with a pinch of nutmeg, the egg and parmesan cheese.

pastry:

6 eggs

3 tablespoons oil

700 g flour

salt

On a pastry board put the flour like a fountain, put eggs, oil and salt in the middle and combine with a fork, until the flour is completely absorbed. Keep kneading using your hands. Form a ball and let the dough to rest under a cloth for 1 hour. With the rolling pin roll out the pastry very thin. Cut to obtain little squares.

Put some filling in the middle of each pastry square, bend to form a triangular, and make a ring turning around your finger.

Cook in the boiling strained broth for about 5 minutes. Serve with a sprinkle of grated parmesan cheese.

Ravioli with ricotta and spinach filling

Serves 6:

500 g flour

7 eggs

1 kg spinach

350 g ricotta

100 g parmesan cheese

2 tablespoons oil

some leaves of sage

salt pepper and some nutmeg

Prepare the ravioli pastry setting the flour like a fountain and slowly pouring in the middle the eggs, the oil and the salt. Let it rest under a cloth for 1 hour, then with the rolling pin, roll out to obtain a thin pastry.

Prepare the filling boiling the spinach in salted water and drain carefully. Combine the chopped spinach with ricotta, eggs, parmesan cheese, a pinch of nutmeg, salt, and pepper.

On the pastry (lying on the pastry board), arrange many small amounts of the filling mixture, like a chessboard. Using a glass, cut to form regular disks.

Bend each disks to obtain a half-moon and, with a toothpick make a hole in each of them.

Cook ravioli in a plenty of boiling salted water for 10 minutes.

Put in a saucepan the leaves of sage and heath to melt the butter.
Carefully drain the ravioli, pour it in the saucepan with butter and sage,
sauté and serve with a sprinkle of grated parmesan cheese.

Pasta al forno or Lasagna

Serves 6:

500 g meat sauce

300 g parmesan cheese

1 litre béchamel (1 l milk, 60 g flour, 80 g butter)

500 g puff pastry

Make the same pastry quantity as for tagliatelle. Once rolled with the rolling pin, cut it to obtain large squares and let it rest for 2 hours.

Pour the pastry squares into boiling water for 6 minutes, then add cold water to stop the cooking point.

Arrange béchamel melting the butter with the flour continuously stirring, and gradually adding milk and salt. Heat the mixture to boil, then turn it off and let rest.

Butter a baking dish, put some béchamel on the bottom and cover with some pastry squares, season with sauce, béchamel and parmesan cheese.

Repeat, to obtain other similar layers, one on the other to the edge of the baking dish. Follow this order: pastry squares, sauce, béchamel and parmesan cheese.

Bake at 220°C for 35 minutes, and serve.

Potato gnocchi in sauce

Serves 6:

500 g potatoes

180 g flour

1 egg

30 g butter

salt

Wash the potatoes without peeling, put them in cold water and boil them.

When done, peel and mash.

Add the egg, the flour, the butter, and the salt.

Combine on a pastry board until well-blended.

Take some pastry at a time and using your floured hands roll it on the board to form a long rope, as big as you wish. Cut the pastry rope into many same size pieces (gnocchi).

Boil the gnocchi in a plenty of salted water and drain, as soon as they rise.

Season with meat sauce and parmesan cheese.

Chicken galantine

Serves 10:

1 boned chicken
100 g mortadella
100 g ham
2 sausages
200 g veal mince
6 eggs
200 g grated parmesan cheese
some soft part of bread soaked in milk
100 g pistachios
salt, pepper, and nutmeg

for the soup:

2 onions
2 celery sticks
2 carrots
10 fresh small tomatoes

Bone the chicken, paying attention not to break its skin. Boil 4 eggs and the pistachios, then peel them.

Prepare the filling for the chicken, carefully mixing the mince with the 2 sausages, the soaked bread, the chopped mortadella and ham, the cheese, salt, pepper and a pinch of nutmeg.

Add to the mixture the boiled eggs, the 2 fresh egg left and the pistachios.

Put the mixture inside the chicken and close it using needle and thread.

Wrap the chicken in a cotton cloth, fixing it with a string.

In a large saucepan put cold water, the chicken, the herbs and some salt.

Let it boil for 4 hours.

Allow to cool before slicing up.

Pig's liver in crock

Serves 4:

500 g pig's liver

300 g pig's omentum (net)

3 tablespoons fennel seeds

10 leaves of laurel

2 garlic cloves

½ a glass of red wine

10 tablespoons of oil or lard

salt and pepper

Cut the liver into pieces, and roll it in a mixture of fennel seeds, salt and pepper. Wrap the pieces in the omentum, properly cut according to their size, fix them with a skewer, or a long toothpick, or better, with a fennel or laurel stick.

Between a piece and the other, put 1 laurel leaf.

Cook the meat in a crock with the garlic and the lard, or if you wish, olive oil.

Keep to brown for 10 minutes, add the wine and let it slowly evaporate.

Cook for another 20 minutes. Let them in the crock, and heat over low heat whenever necessary.

Fried rabbit with artichokes

Serves 6:

½ a rabbit

8 eggs

300 g flour

6 artichokes

½ a glass of vinegar

1 lemon

1 litre of oil

salt

Cut the rabbit into pieces, wash them carefully in water and vinegar, and let it drain in a colander.

In a bowl, beat 6 eggs with 150g of flour and a pinch of salt; add the pieces of rabbit, and let it rest in the fridge for 12 hours.

Clean and wash the artichokes, then cut them into quarters, let them to soak in water and lemon juice for 2 hours.

In a bowl, beat 150 g of flour and 2 eggs, then pour artichokes well drained and dried.

Using a wooden spoon, carefully blend and put in the fridge for 2 hours.

Fry in boiling oil first the artichokes, then the rabbit.

To serve hot.

Filled goose's neck

Serves 6:

2 geese's necks

180 g veal mince

100 g pork mince

60 g grated parmesan cheese

8 eggs

100 g grated bread

50 g butter

salt, pepper, nutmeg, and thyme leaves

Remove the internal bone from the necks.

Heath a saucepan with the mince, the butter and the thyme until brown.

Remove from heath, and grind again to obtain a very fine mixture.

Add the eggs, the cheese, the grated bread, the nutmeg powder, salt and pepper.

Bend, and fill the necks with the mixture, paying attention not to break their skins.

Tie the two necks extremities, and bring to boil in a warm broth for 30 minutes.

Turn the heath off, allow to cool, slice, and serve with pickles.

Roast goose with potatoes

Serves 8:

1 goose without legs, neck and entrails

2 oranges

½ a glass of wine

½ a glass of broth

½ a glass of oil

600 g potatoes

sage

garlic salt and pepper

The day before cooking, finely chop the sage and the garlic, add salt and pepper, and insert it inside the goose's breast, legs and body, through small cuts. Put the goose in an edged ovenproof baking dish, pour some oil, and keep in the fridge until the following day.

Bake at 220°C. When it starts browning, pour the orange juice, the wine and the broth. Cover with silver paper and let it cook for 2 hours, then add the potatoes, peeled and cut into segments. Cook for another 30 minutes.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool. Cut the goose into pieces, set the meat in the middle of a tray and the potatoes all around; pour the orange juice left and serve.

Baked lamb with potatoes

Serves 6:

1,5 kg of lamb

500 g potatoes

2 garlic cloves

1 glass of red wine

some extra-virgin olive oil

rosemary

salt and pepper

The day before cooking, finely chop the garlic, the rosemary, the salt and the pepper.

Wash the lamb with water and vinegar, drain and dry; rub the chopped herbs on the lamb's body, put it in an ovenproof baking dish, and keep in the fridge until the following day.

Pour some oil on the lamb, and bake at 260°C. When it starts browning, add the potatoes, peeled and cut into segments.

Let it cook for a while more, then pour the wine and cover the baking dish with some silver paper. Let it cook for about 2 hours.

Stewed potatoes

Serves 6:

500 g potatoes

150 g chopped tomatoes

2 garlic cloves

8 sage leaves

6 tablespoons of oil

salt and pepper

Heat some oil in a saucepan with the garlic and the sage leaves.

When the garlic is golden, add the tomatoes, salt and pepper. As soon as tomatoes boil, add potatoes, peeled and roughly cut.

Stir using a wooden spoon, then add $\frac{1}{2}$ a litre of warm water.

Put a lid on the saucepan and cook over a low heat for about 40 minutes, or until potatoes have absorbed all the liquid.

Potato pie

Serves 6:

6 potatoes

50 g butter

2 eggs

100 g parmesan cheese

some parsley

salt and pepper

Wash the potatoes and boil unpeeled for 35 minutes. When done, peel and mash.

Pour the mashed potatoes in a bowl, adding the eggs, the melted butter, the cheese and a pinch of salt.

Blend and pour the mixture in an ovenproof baking dish, previously butter greased and floured.

Bake at 200°C, and cook for 30 minutes.

Ciambellone

Serves 6:

250 g flour

300 g sugar

4 eggs

100 g butter

1 glass of milk

2 tablespoons of *Vinsanto*

1 bag of baking powder

1 grated lemon rind

a pinch of salt

Beat the eggs with sugar, butter, milk, *Vinsanto* and flour in a bowl.

Add the baking powder in the end.

Knead all the ingredients carefully. Pour the pastry in a buttered and floured shape, bake at 190°C for 40 minutes.

Crogetti

Serves 6:

400 g flour

100 g sugar

3 eggs

40 g butter

3 tablespoons of *Vinsanto*

1 grated orange and lemon rind

1 bag of vanilla sugar, or some honey

¼ a bag of baking powder

1 pinch of salt

1 litre of vegetable oil

Beat the eggs with butter, salt, *Vinsanto*, the grated lemon and orange rind, the flour and the baking powder.

carefully knead, then form a pastry ball.

Roll out the pastry with a rolling pin until thin, cut it into short and large strips (*crogetti*).

Heat the vegetable oil in a large frying pan, then fry the strips, some at a time, not all together.

Drain and pour some melted honey, or vanilla sugar.

Easter doughnuts

Serves 4:

600 g flour

200 g sugar

6 eggs

150 g butter

½ a glass of extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon of aniseed

½ a glass of tepid milk

1 bag of baking powder

Combine the eggs with the sugar, then add the butter, the oil, and the aniseed softened in the milk. Add the flour and, in the last the baking powder.

Using your hands, kindly knead to obtain a well-blended mixture.

Shape the dough into rings, and set the rings on a lined ovenproof baking dish.

Bake at 190°C for 40 minutes.

Granny's biscuits

Serves 6:

400 g flour

2 eggs

2 yolks

200 g sugar

100 g butter

1 bag baking powder

1 grated lemon rind

1 pinch of salt

Beat the eggs with the sugar, the butter, the grated lemon rind and a pinch of salt. Add the flour and the baking powder in the end.

Shape the pastry into rounded strips, set them in a linen ovenproof dish, and bake at 180°C.

When well golden, take out from the oven, on a pastry board cut as long as you wish to obtain the biscuits, put in the oven again for another 10 minutes to make the biscuits crunchy.

Pine-kernel cake

Serves 10:

250 g flour

100 g pine-kernels

12 tablespoons sugar

6 eggs

250 g butter

1 grated lemon rind

1 bag baking powder

Beat the eggs with the sugar in a bowl.

Add the tepid melted butter and the grated lemon rind.

Slowly pour the flour and the baking powder in the end.

Carefully combine all the ingredients, then pour the mixture in a linen ovenproof baking dish. Sprinkle the pine-kernels.

Bake at 190°C for 35 minutes.

Gabriella's Panello

Serves 10:

6 eggs

12 tablespoons of sugar, or 8 tablespoons of honey

1 kg flour

1 risen bread pastry ball

1 glass of extra-virgin olive oil

200 g walnuts

4 tablespoons milk

4 tablespoons *Vinsanto*

300 g fresh grapes, or 150 g raisins

rosemary

Make 200 g bread pastry ball with flour, water and baking powder.

Heat the oil in a saucepan, put in the walnuts and the rosemary to brown, then let it cool.

Combine the eggs with the sugar or the honey, add the pastry ball, and carefully knead. Add *Vinsanto* and tepid milk, keep kneading to a well-melted dough.

Knead again adding the grapes or raisins, the oil with rosemary and walnuts, and in the end the baking powder.

Pour the dough in a linen ovenproof baking dish, sprinkle oil and sugar, and let aside to rest for 2 hours.

Bake at 200°C for 30 minutes.

Sponge biscuits, custard and chocolate cake

Serves 6:

1 packet of sponge biscuits

2 glasses of coffee

½ a litre of chocolate

½ a litre of custard

some flour

lemon rind

For the custard:

Beat 2 eggs with 150 g of sugar and 1 tablespoon of flour in a bowl. Pour ½ a litre of boiling milk and some lemon rind in the bowl.

Carefully stir and cook over a low heat for 10 minutes. Stir while the custard cools.

For the chocolate:

Beat 2 eggs with 150 g of sugar and 2 tablespoons of bitter chocolate powder in a bowl.

Pour in ½ a litre of boiling milk. Carefully stir and cook over a low heat for 10 minutes.

Set the sponge biscuits in a bowl, let them soak in the coffee for a while, then pour custard and chocolate alternately, to form layers.

Cantucci with almonds

Serves 6:

450 g flour

280 g sugar or honey

200 g almonds

3 eggs

3 yolks

1 tablespoon of aniseeds

6 tablespoons of oil

1 bag of baking powder

1 pinch of salt

Carefully beat the eggs, the yolks, the sugar or the honey.

Add the oil, the aniseeds softened in the milk, the flour and a pinch of salt.

In the end, add the almonds and the baking powder.

Shape the mixture into small loaves 5 cm large (cantucci).

Line an ovenproof baking dish, and set cantucci inside. Bake at 190°C for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven, cut across to obtain small slice, and bake again for 8 minutes to make them crunchy.

Plum jam tart

Serves 8:

4 eggs

8 tablespoons sugar

180 g butter

1 lemon rind

220 g flour

10 tablespoons of plum jam

1 bag of baking powder

Beat the eggs with the sugar and the butter. Add the lemon rind, the flour and, in the end the baking powder.

Carefully knead, and with the rolling pin roll out the pastry (it should be not too soft).

Set aside some pastry to decorate; linen an ovenproof baking dish, and pour the pastry, spread the jam and decorate the top with the pastry set aside.

Bake at 190°C for 35 minutes.

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From *Dai Verdi prati della Valdichiana alle nevi dello Jutland*,
by Remigio Presenti

... What were the most typical figures in that little world that the Tuscan, or Umbrian farm was?

The *capoccia*, the *massaia*, the *bifolco*, of course; such words, figures and characters have almost no meaning anymore...

-The *capoccia* was the overseer, the authority over the estate activity, he fit in with the *bifolco* about sowing, reaping, and harvest; mostly he was the figure who transacted with the landlord, or the land agent. Due to the wideness of the estates, country families were considerably large in the Chiana area, so a lot of people lived in the same house, grandparents and brothers, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins...

The *massaia* had an undisputed primary role inside the patriarchal family, at the beginning of the XX century. She had credit and consideration like a prima donna, (she was the most important person after the *capoccia*); she devoted herself to prepare the three main meals of the day, to tidy up, and look after the poultry; moreover (nobody had still told the word "stress" at that time), if some free time was left, she went and helped the rest of the family in the fields... The liturgical year was side by side with nature time, consequently tied to the climax events of reap and grapes harvest, when, again, the *massaia* had a role of primary importance. She went out from the close of her kitchen to join the others in the fields, carrying trays plenty of food, such as *pici* with ragu, or the entrails of a goose or a rabbit. Yes, indeed, during the reap, the threshing, and the grapes harvest, meat appeared on the farmers' table; wouldn't have they made a poor impression, otherwise, with the neighbour farmers, who had arrived to help, or with the land agent or with the landlord, come to survey?...

-Very early in the morning the *bifolco* started his working day, about at two o'clock, or half past two, following a monotonous scheme, day after day. Firstly he wore his home woven strong apron; he slipped his neck into and fixed its strings round his hips. Afterwards, he went down into the cowshed, took the pitchfork and the shovel to remove animals' dung. In the meantime, somebody of the family arranged food for the cattle, using a sort of stool with a big sickle, through which he cut hay or, if possible, green grass.

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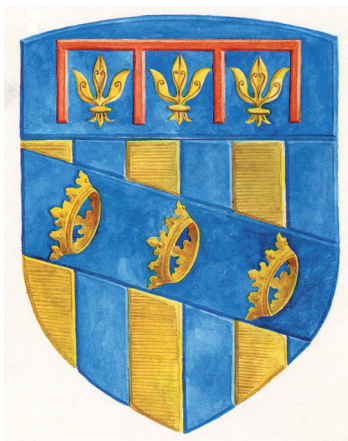
Sileno

II century b.C. river stone sculpted mask. It has ever been Pulcino Farm and its produce logo.

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