

## Memoirs of a Child at Play:

PONTANA

20191010

My Nonno Giuseppe Attisani invested in the land following his return from Abyssinia (current day Ethiopia), working on the road construction gangs; his story to be narrated previously. The farm was at the end of a narrow track, the '*via Nova*' as the farmers called it (*Strada Provinciale*) and was accessible by donkey. The sealed road continued to intersect the highway leading to the 'Pizzo' township. The family did not routinely reside on the farm; however, there were times when it was necessary for the security of the crops that some, one or two men would remain overnight to guard their crops. For this, there was a straw hut (*poghiaro*) erected for the purpose. There were no other comprehensive structures built and the main feature of the farm was its crops.

The typical work day would begin early in the morning setting off from our homes in the locale of 'Pendina' at the lower end of Francavilla. The trek on foot was quite uneventful through the crisp morning air along the pathway that doubled up as one of the playgrounds where the town's children roamed. I have recollections of imaginative escapades with childhood groups to the lanes between farms to collect the colourful fruits of the '*strawberry tree*'<sup>1</sup> to play with in late autumn. Small talk between the family members announced their moving presence like bees buzzing from flower to flower. The donkey carrying whatever was needed for the day's labour and meals, would be tagging along with light hoof thuds giving rhythm to the conversations.

The dirt track would offer some challenges, especially after rain as the clay substrate would make it difficult and care was needed to avoid slipping near potholes filled with water. Farms along the way were outlined by dilapidated fences interspersed with unkempt hedge bushes which we knew as '*trema violi*' because of their fragrant jasmine-like fragrant white flowers produced in late spring. Francavilla rests on a hilly outcrop and the track from 'Pendina' eventually came to an end at an embankment that with use and weathered erosion the track became a sloping trench. At this point, the journey to the farm became a little more hazardous and care was needed to avoid tripping on the sandstones protruding from the surface. Having made it to the bottom there was a short walk from the slopes to the sealed road that followed the contour of the Francavilla hill and adjacent plateau to both the Pontana and A'Farco farms. I would make the same trek later in the morning with my Nanna Maria looking forward to collecting candle tripods from the Saint's dedication along the way. Nanna would cross herself and say a silent prayer.

At the entry to the farm, there was a rivulet which was managed by the various farmers that bordered it. In the Attisani management of the water resource; meant that provision could be made to divert some of the water flow to the farm from the upstream section of rivulet. This made for a wonderful playground for a child of my age (4 to 7 YO). The earthen open aqueducts/channels were constructed by oxen, shovels, and hoes (*zappi*)

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<sup>1</sup> Arbutus Unedo, 'Irish strawberry tree'

and most likely using day labourers in the later part of the summer-autumn over several years. The flatness of the land made it reasonably easy to have the water flow directed to areas under cultivation. The channel began in the uppermost corner of the land and cut across the farm dividing it into two. Thereafter the channel was split to tributaries to wind their way to the farm subsections allocated for a particular crop.

One of the channel spurs was directed towards the far side of the land on the left looking back from the inner part of the land towards the rivulet designated as the entry to the farm. This flowed past the pergola, which to this day retains a fervent spark of contentment on my childhood awareness. It was a shadowed oasis-like milieu where it offered respite from the day's toil for the family and contracted labourers. At the denoted time the women would leave the fields first to prepare the lunch. An open hearth fire would be lit and left to burn away the smoky components of the wood. The meal would include any produce that was in the productive stage of its growth such as string beans, peppers, and *malangani*. (need to write on this later) . The sharing of the meal with the group was enjoyable as it often meant that folk stories and gossip would be shared.

The flowing waters in the channels provided for adventure playground for a small boy who would conjure up adventures to be played out. My father Michele had taught me how to make a water wheel from the cilia stalks of corn (*gran turco*). This entailed selecting several of the uppermost of stalks and neatly cutting them into appropriate predetermined lengths for stays, crossbars, and spokes. By delicately cutting entry points in the stays and the spokes these could be assembled into a little contraption that looked like a flywheel on stilts. With a little hand excavation ingenuity, a small subchannel would be carved out from the main channel to split the flow and make two small bank foundations whereby the apparatus could be positioned on them. The result would provide satisfaction over hours as the kinetic flow of the water transferred its energy to the wheel; are real automaton and the only one on the farm.

The water was used to irrigate the summer crops that had been transplanted seedlings. The seeding beds had been prepared during early spring depending on the decisions made to the quantity and type of crops to be cultivated that summer. The range of vegetables included tomatoes, peppers and *malangani*. Other crops grown from seed included watermelons, rock melons, zucchini, chickpeas, lupines (*lupini*) broad beans, corn, string beans and peas. It was customary to guard over some crops especially water melons from potential poachers as these would have a ready black – market which would absorb such anonymous produce. (need to write on this later)

Preparation of the fields for the summer crops was an arduous undertaking to say the least. Before WWII and early post-war mechanization had not yet become routinely viable for smaller landowners; costs were in many cases outside the finances of these farmers. It was not common even in larger holdings in Calabria to own tractors as the infrastructure to provide services for tractors had not been put in place. There was a tractor service that was mentioned by my father, Michele, however, I was not privy to this enterprise. Arrangements would be made in advance with such business enterprises in

Vibo Valentia and Nicastro. The service included provision of the tractor and the driver to perform set jobs as agreed in advance. The services were contracted on a day-by-day basis. The driver would stay overnight in the straw huts (*poghiaro*). However, in most cases the labour was low-tech, human muscle power was provided by the land owners or by day labourers they could afford to pay the wages. As an alternative and more cost effective, some of the heavier tilling was done by oxen (*vua*). Of the farming tasks, preparation of the plots for the crops was the most physically demanding. The hoes (*zappi*) were quite large implements; the cutting head could measure 250x400mm, slightly curved to provide strength to the blade. These were hand-made by blacksmiths (*forgari*) in the environs of the farms. The wooden handles were made of hardwood and positioned onto the blade at an angle and held in place in the eye of the blade by a wedge slipped into the split in the bottom of the handle and hammered home. Moisture absorbed by the wooden handle would cause some swelling in the wood, giving the handle binding contact with the metal blade.

Working with *zappi* required strength and stamina to last a full day. The silhouettes of the men from a distance could be made out like roughly hewn puppets dancing with by the order of invisible strings attached to the heavens. From time to time one would straighten up, put the *zappa* to his side and spit into his hands to improve the grip on the implement. Then continue with turning over of the sods. The effect on the hands was to turn the skin into a type of wearable leather, these callouses were considered a badge of honour. It has been said that a man's character could be judged to the feel of his hands. Men looking for marriage were put through this test! The would-be-mother-in-law would openly or surreptitiously check the suitor's hands for callouses and would send him pacing if she deemed him not to be a hard worker. For the tiller there were not any complaints; it was just the way it was and survival meant that the crops had to be planted or sown and the soil had to be readied.

The tilling of the soil had a lighter aspect to it. Weed infestations is nothing new and have been a curse for farmers, for centuries before glyphosate weed killer. One of the prevalent weeds on the land then as it is now was '*Oxalis pes-caprae*' an indigenous plant to South Africa, is often called by the common name 'sourgrass' or soursop due to its pleasant sour flavour. This sourness is caused by the exceptionally high content of oxalic acid. The plant has a reputation for being very difficult to eliminate once it has spread over an area of land. The weed propagates largely through its underground bulbs and this is one reason why it is so difficult to eradicate, as pulling up the stems leaves the bulbs behind. The soil in which the plant has grown is generally contaminated with many small bulbs. Some attempt was made to separate the bulbs (*cicercoli*) from the sods to reduce the infestation. The larger of these would be gathered up and taken, at the end of a work session and roasted on the dying embers of the previously light fire. The roasted bulbs would be eaten by the family and considered a delicacy.

The flatness of the land made it suitable for wheat and a sizeable area was set aside for the sowing of the grain such as wheat and oats/barley. The size of the land applied was not on a commercial scale and the harvest was to be mainly for the use of the family for

making bread. Some quantity would be used to barter for produce that the family did not grow, such as chestnuts. In this case farmers from the mountain villages would bring the chestnuts down to lower lying villages and hamlets and trade their produce for oil, wheat and corn. The oats/barley was mainly used as feed for donkeys and/or mules.

The grain harvest would be undertaken in midsummer onwards. The wheat harvest was an especially picturesque and highly sociable undertaking. It was a time that has captured the imagination throughout the ages and was used in propaganda to push an agenda of prosperity and wealth and/or of lifestyle, by kings and despots alike. It does conjure up pleasant memories of my childhood. The manual harvest, reaping with scythes was just a wonderful time of the year. The reapers; the men associated with a family group would pool their resources together as the wheat crops came into maturity. Working as a team of reapers was the most practical way to accomplish the harvest. as the men rhythmically cut through the dry cellulose fibres of the stems and lay them on the windrow of cut stems behind them. Their level of skill determined how well they could keep the seed heads aligned. There is always a skill that can be compared among the reapers and valued and a source of pride. The women acting as sheavers would follow in their wake and gather the grain-laden stems and arrange and tie them, into sheafs which would in turn be stood up into 'stooks' to dry. There would be a sing a long of Calabrian folk songs, which gave the scene and grand operatic feel.

There was some mechanization in the thrashing of the wheat and at the time the manual laborious task was taken over by the '*Trebbiatrice*'. This mechanized workhorse was moved from place to place during the wheat harvest. To take advantage of the contract service the wheat harvest had to be centralized in an area close to a main road thoroughfare. By agreement, the landowner in proximity to the road would allocate spaces for landholders in his/her vicinity to erect haystacks for some form of compensation which may have included a portion of the grain in place of payment. Having made the arrangements in the course of the seasonal farm needs the family would have the wheat sheaves transported to the locality. The transporting was a combination of donkey loads and women balancing loads on a precarious rolled-up kerchief. On delivery to the allotted site, another man (usually a contract worker) with skill in constructing haystacks would instruct the deliverers where to position their loads. The lower levels of the stack would be managed by one person; as the stack got higher there was a need to, for a two-man operation: one on the ladder and another tossing up sheaves to be layered on the rising stack.

## FARCO

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The property A'Farco, was across the road from Pontana and access was possible from two approaches. The most common would be from the lower side of the plateau's sloped embankment. Pontana was situated in the alluvial flats of the valley surrounded by relatively low hills. A'Farco farm was on the northwest side of the *Strada Provinciale* and spread across several outcrops of hill bulges and gulleys. The uppermost section of the land was bordered by another road on the highest point of the property. At this point

the land retained a gentle slope overlooking the picturesque '*Pontana*' bordered by a treed rivulet. Depending on the work schedule and time of year the Attisani and Simonetti families would make their way to the farms via the *Strada Provinciale* which was the common road to both properties. The other route was longer but did not have the goat-like ravine track which marked the access to *Pontana*. The high road approach was from the uppermost tip of Francavilla past the cemetery and then winding through farmlands bordering the road through an area known as "*U Surdo*".

The land *Farco* of my childhood was by then already divided by my grandfather Giuseppe Simonetti amongst the three sons: Bruno the eldest, Pietro and my father Michele. Zio Chic'Antoini Grillo had negotiated his preference on behalf of his wife Teresa that they would forgo their need for a house because the Grillo family had its own for a share of the land, and so the four families inherited parcels of the *Farco* farm. There was some practicality to the lots and each had allocations of the relatively flatter areas of the property. The gulley areas were accessible but could not be used for crops that required continuing cultivation. In this case, these areas became common to all the siblings and were planted with walnut, hazelnut and cherry trees and shared by the Simonetti and the Grillo families. The scrub forest continued to produce firewood and was a valued resource for heating and bread making. The Grillo's also had another farm adjacent to A'Farco making theirs a sizeable making holding on the slopes of the low-lying hills bordering the *Strada Provinciale*. Concetta shared Pontana with her brother Zio Mico thus giving Michele's family a sizeable holding and a diversity of possible crops that they could grow.

The more memorable aspect of my going to A'Farco was walking via the low end of the hill, past Zio Pietro's farm to the left and making our way up the dirt track carved into the hillside *santieri*. The soil was fertile and the most was made for its use. The track was edged by grape vines of the '*zibibbo*' variety (white muscatel). Dotted amongst the vine would be pear and plum trees. The pears were a small variety known as '*pira di Sant'Antoini*'. These would now be looked at, as a variety that could be bottled in a spirit of choice. But that would be a travesty as the pears had a super sweet aroma that filled the air and could be picked up in the gentle summer breezes from miles away. The muscatel grape is also a natural aromatic fruit and its ripeness would also linger in the air and relished as one made their way up the track to the farms above.

The summer crops for the farms were a mixture of table grapes and varieties for making wine. The vineyards were laid out to make the most of the slope's sunlight. These needed to be cultivated and the work program included hoeing to allow water absorption and weeding. There was no flowing water on the farm and the plants relied on summer rains to ensure a bountiful crop. The vines by their nature grow in an unwieldy manner that would cross lanes to the other plants and cause gridlock if allowed to grow unchecked. This had to be controlled by pruning when necessary. The more common approach was a work routine to tidy the vines by tying them with raffia to anchor points on the wire stays. This would allow the leaves maximum sun exposure and give order to the mass of vines to facilitate the picking of the crop.

It was not possible to collect water in tanks as there were no suitable structures from which to collect the rain into. Culvert pits were dug in positions that allowed them to fill when it rained. The water was used to prepare spray solutions with *viridi-rame* (copper sulphate) to protect the vines from black-spot and other fungal diseases. The spraying of the vines was done by a knap-sack style apparatus which was a source of wonderment to a child. How cool was this machine that delivered a mist that appeared multi-coloured as sunlight played on the expelled fine mist droplets? The procedure left the leaves dripping and soon they took on a blue-green hue from the residual chemical compound. I have recollection of playing with the sprayer once it had been washed and dried; what imaginings I had, are now lost in time.

In the main, the cereal and legume crops were grown in *Pontana*, however, there were some plots of broad beans (*lupini*) grown for the fattening of pigs. The pig sties were in Pontana. The crops could withstand some dry periods and there was adequate rain in spring and early summer to mature the seeds to fruition. The broad beans were used in cooking as fresh vegetable minestrone. The harvest of the legume crops in mid-summer would allow for a drying out time before manually threshing harvesting the seeds.

The family work routine would mean that some planning needed to be made for meals. During the summer, Pontana would have the vegetable crops coming on stream for market and these would also be used to prepare lunchtime meals. Tomatoes and capsicums would be picked in Pontana in the morning before making way for A'Farco for the day's toil. These provisions would last several days, so these were topped up as necessary to avoid double trekking to either farm. As the orb ticked up to the high skies, Mother Concetta would go to prepare lunch. At the edge of the vineyard on the upper slope of the ravine, there was a small flat area with a straw hut (*poghiaro*) which was used to keep utensils and food items in the shade. The ground was dry and quite firm underfoot. A small fire was lit with *frasci* (large twigs/dried minor branches) from the wooded ravine and let to burn off the first smoke; the partly flamed embers would be used to roast the new green capsicums. A tomato salad would be carved up if these were in season; sliced onions would be added and garnished with olive oil. Chilli peppers would be used by the grownups when in season. In later years whenever I prepared a meal and was pleased with the result, I would tell all that would share in the meal; that it was "gourmet" to distinguish it from all other contenders. The meals prepared by my mother on the slopes of *Farco* and the pergola of Pontana surpassed any of the meals I have prepared. Dare I say, that these were better than meals I have had, on trips to France. That's for another day.

One indelible feature of the locale that has stayed with me most vividly was on the side of the hut was an unexploded ordnance missile. It was like a *huge bullet* of say 10 kg; I cannot recall any discussions with my father, about this potentially dangerous item. It was just there! Did it still have cordite in it? I just do not know. I have thought about it over the years and knowledge of the War and surmise that it was a remnant of the Allies making their way from North Africa via Sicily and that Pontana and A'Farco had been

indeed bombarded as discussed previously. Michele did recount how my mother Concetta and the Attisani family were impacted by the landing of the Americans on the beaches some 2 kms from Pontana.

My mother Concetta was a teen of 18 when Italy capitulated. The American landings on the Calabrian beaches were the same that my childhood were known as the '*spiagga*' where the Francavillese would spend their leisure beach time during the summer. Over the few years of my going to and from Pontana, I recall concrete huts dotted along the flat fields, some in reasonable proximity to the road. When I did enquire of these structures, the answer was '*quisti suno cosi da guerra*' (artefacts of the war). I had no grasp of the meaning of war and did not pursue the topic to determine whether these were built by the Germans, Italians or the British. The family narrative of the events was that the American soldiers were camped on the rivulets in the vicinity of Pontana. Research undertaken has defined that it was the British under General Montgomery who took a breather before heading for Monte Cassino to meet up with the Americans to break through to Rome after a long and costly campaign. The freshwater streams provided cooking and other needs to the advancing army. There was no detail of any interactions with the soldiers. At this time Michele was languishing in a German POW camp at Dessau-Rosslau in north east of Germany.

## SURDO

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Post WWII and Michele back from the German POW Camp there was universal hardship for those who had land for crops and those who did not. The simple equation was the absence of labourers meant that crops could not be planted. The women did the best they could and there was subsistence farming undertaken. My Nonno Giuseppe was 39 (born in Australia's year of Federation), Concetta was 17 YO and Zio Mico was 9 YO when Italy joined the Axis Forces and was not conscripted into the Italian Army. The capacity to have units of labour available meant that some cropping was possible and food was not a critical issue as it may have been. On the Simonetti side, the ages of the males were such that all were called up and joined Italian armies: Zio Bruno and Zio Pietro to Libya, Michele to Greece. Their family's ability to farm was devastated. Nonno Giuseppe Simonetti died in 1928 when Michele was only 6 YO. Nonna Caterina had very limited options to farms with her daughter Teresa.

My mother, Concetta had been betrothed to my father Michele, the catalyst of adjoining farms of Pontana and A'Farco attests to the love of the teenagers. It would be tempting to say this was an arranged marriage to be; that of convenience; however the teenagers did know each other, as they would often cross paths on the way to their respective farms along the same routes. The power of love may be well explained by the events later in the war years where Michele was called up and left Francavilla in 1941 to go to the Greek Theatre of War. He was later interned by the Germans following Mussolini's fall from grace and Italy signed an armistice with the Allies. Michele did not return to Francavilla until 1945. In the interim period of his absence, there was little news of Michele's whereabouts and there was pressure on Concetta, from other suitors to give

up on Michele's possible return from war. Concetta remained resolute that her Michele would return. Concetta waited and underpinned my assertion of true love and my existence.

Michele's return from war meant continuing hardship as Francavilla was in the grips of a severe depression. He was emancipated and had lost a lot of body mass, but overall, in reasonable health, meaning that, he did not have critical diseases such as TB, Typhoid or malaria; he was able to recover. Good fortune also played a part in keeping the other brothers safe and all returned in due course to Francavilla. In the aftermath of their return, there was an urgency to become productive. *Simonetti-Attisani Enterprise*, in a way kicked off by the pooling of resources and manpower, to undertake moderately ambitious farming practices to produce crops on a commercial scale. The Simonetti's had the sloping land of Farco and the Attisani's had the more practical land Pontana for perennial crops and fruits including oranges, apricots and peaches, The farming collective expanded their horizons and searched out another farmland to crop on a share/lease basis. Surrounding areas that were farmed were at '*Surdo*' and further afield as far as Pullia. It was common practice that big landowners would lease out parts of the holdings for such production.

The crops targeted for their enterprise were selected to make the most of the spring and summer. The key crops included peas, watermelons, capsicums, and eggplants. The cultivation of crops in the range of 5 '*tumanati*' (guestimate same as acres) was generally by manual labour. The preparation of the fields was done by *vua* (oxen). *Vua* and handlers could be hired on a day-by-day basis. Day labourers would be employed as needed to smooth finish the field so that it may be furrowed for seeding or planting. The furrowed embankments were suitably prepped for irrigation, weeding and tilling the soil to enhance the productivity of the crops.

Wholesalers would visit during the growing, and pre-maturation of the crops to inspect and negotiate prices for the produce. The produce would be destined for markets in capital cities such as Naples and regional cities Vibo Valentia, Nicastro and Cosenza. During harvest '*camios*' (small trucks) would make their way to the various localities where crops had been manually harvested and loaded as prearranged and paid for. If areas were not able to be serviced by '*camios*' then donkeys were used to bring the produce to a denoted area to facilitate the transportation to the eventual markets.

Tending to the crops to maximise their value was an ongoing need and at times having to safeguard the crops against would-be poachers. One of the crops that has passed into the *Simonetti Oral History* was that of a pea crop share farmed at *U Surdo*. The land leased in this case was on the other side of the access road to Farco and the farms were not far from each other. Michele and Concetta were part of the labour contingent that cultivated the crop with assistance from several others of the family and day labourers. I shall claim that that I have a recollection of one of these days' work events; therefore I would estimate that I was around 3 YO placing the spring of 1951. I would further surmise that my sister Caterina was born and in the spring of that year was 1YO.



In that case Caterina was left with our Nonna Maria Attisani in Francavilla. The day was typical in every way; monotonous hoeing, intermittent stops to drink water to replace the sweat expired from the energy expended from hoeing.

Stopping for lunch broke the monotony of the group's toil and preparations made by Mother in the only shade on site. The shade was provided by a series of hazelnut bushes that had not been pruned to make single, discernible trees. Lunchtime conversations were about the likely value of the crop and where else they would need to be over the coming days' tilling schedule. Back to work and their collective minds in autopilot; brains were not a necessary asset for the task at hand, so these were addled by the warm spring sun. As the shadows lengthened and bones grew weary and muscles stiffened, thought was given to homeward-bound preparations. The mule was packed and the group trudged off towards Francavilla. Some way off from the cropped paddocks, a niggling feeling crept in, that something was not quite right; the load seemed a bit light. In time Mum's brain did come back to life and the ghastly realisation that *Pino* (me) was not with the group. Panic set in and Dad began running back to the field from whence they left their precious cargo, me. By this time it was twilight and visibility limited. Panic levels increased as Dad ran and Mum followed in desperation. There were known dangers of wolves that would have played on their minds. But all was well; their toddler son was just where they had left him playing with pebbles in the grassy area under the hazelnut bushes.

#### FLAX-LINEN PRODUCTION THE ANGITOLA RIVER

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Francavilla Township, *Farco* and *Pontana* farms were the major three settings in the tapestry of my early life. The three sites have always remained in my mind's eye and to a degree have determined who I have been and maybe who I have become. The day-to-day needs were provided for by my parents and the Attisani grandparents Giuseppe and Maria. I can relate to the daily life from notes taken during conversations with my father, Michele. The descriptive content of their routine in the late 1940s and after my birth was of considerable value for me to relate my position in their lives. I represented their hopes for a future after the tragic war in their collective near memories. I was a 'baby boomer' in the Italian landscape.

The *Pontana* farm was the agricultural plot owned by my Attisani grandparents as discussed earlier, a bit of residual wealth from the Italian adventurism in Abyssinia. The land of around 10 acres was at the foot of a backdrop of low hills in the background approx. 4.5km<sup>2</sup> from Francavilla. The soil was of silty loam in nature and quite fertile in keeping with the abundance of water in the area. The farm had a rivulet on the entry fringe to the property. Access to the farm was via a small makeshift bridge for people needing to cross the water. The donkey would be led across the shallow waterway.

One of the crops grown was flax. At harvest time in late spring the crop would be taken downstream to an area where the water became a shallow flow through the lake. This

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<sup>2</sup> Estimate made using Google Maps and Google Earth

was ideal for processing the flax to extract the delicate cellulose fibres. The sheaf bundles would be laid in the sandy beds and weighted down with rocks. The routine was that these needed to be turned to ensure uniform soaking and the stems were gently pressed between two flat rocks. The process would be performed over several weeks eventually having the fibres separated from the outer husk and dried. The fibres would be bagged as a mass of undifferentiated balls which would be twisted into linen thread by the women in the winter months whilst the men would attend to the paddocks for the coming spring and summer. In Francavilla, there were some spinning Jennies that would be worked by families to thread the linen as piecework. The same family may also have a *talaro* (loom) to process the fibres into linen cloth for those who had spun the linen into thread themselves. My grandmother and mother used the services of such family across the road from our own home and I recall playing with the neighbour's children around the loom when it was not in use.

Work by the family at that stage of my life was just by the way, for there was fun to be had for little boys. I would have been around 4 YO (1952) and there were several other boys but time has blurred their identity. But the fun was real, and whilst work was underway on the slow flow stream, we made the most of the time. The Calabrian spring sun had not yet reached full power of its summer potential. It did not need to work that hard, as the wheat fields and summer crops still had some growing to do before they needed to be harvested. The sun beckoned us to run through the shards of light twinkling through the gentle swaying of the Italian poplars. These were a hybrid between the American species and 'Black Poplar' with origins in France in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Italian Poplar is a large, deciduous tree with erect branches up to 30m and a long trunk with no 'bosses' (rough swollen areas) and a coarsely, but regularly fissured grey-brown bark. Very commonly planted in river valleys, roadsides, and hedgerows. A valuable quick-growing timber tree for making boxes and crates.*<sup>3</sup>

The late spring breeze carried the aromas of the land; sweet smells of roses, wild poppy, olive peach, apricot blossoms and the young fruit that would be forming on the stems.

The area was wooded but not so dense that it may have been a source of danger. We climbed the trees and played out childhood adventures from a scant understanding of knives, swords and slingshots. The banks were strewn with well-weathered flat rocks. These were ideal for skimming across the tranquil water surface of the shallow expansive slow slow-flowing clear waters. We would scurry up and down the banks to select the most ideal and gather them in small piles on the water's edge. Then it was a competition to see who could skim them the furthest. And we practised to argue to advance our positions for our prowess in this competition of skill and strength. Time moved on and would drift back to the work area for lunch.

Winter was the period for making salami and was a staple for lunches for spring and summer. Mother Concetta and my Nanna Maria would prepare the spread some way off

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<sup>3</sup> Ref Science & Plants from School website

from the water's edge; on a little rise in the bank in the shade. This gave them some reprieve from the monotony of processing of the flax stalks. The conversations would be about what to do next on the farm; the channels would need to be cleared of weeds for the summer crops. Was there a need to extend their reach to another part of the farm? It all had to be done by hand and at times hired labour if the task was beyond the reasonable scope of the landowners. The day labourers were an identifiable group of men and women who had no family connection to their own land and relied on farmers for day work. As part of the practice of day labour, there were such enterprises that would hire hoes (Zappa, pl Zappi). If the person did not have his or her own.

The flax processing was in proximity of the farm and tasks would combine to make the most of the light hours. Towards the end of the day, preparations would be made to make the trek home located at via *Onofrio Simonetti*. We lived in 'Simonetti Street' however it was a Simonetti not from our lineage and a tale for another time. Here I shall concentrate on the details of daily family endeavours. The donkey owned by the Attisani side, was an integral part of the day's routine. It provided the carriage capacity to and from the farm. There was a need for firewood for the evening meal or stockpile for the next time bread would be baked in the *furno* at Nanna's house. The donkey would require feed and this needed to be cut from an area set aside for silage. It was spring and the grass was in abundance and scything was a task to be performed in the late afternoon.

As the sun starts to lose its brilliance and gives the clouds, that may be hovering in its setting path, their coat of many colours, as sunlight flickers through the variegated density of water molecules to give the explosion of prism effects. This was the setting of both the sun and the closure of a day's toil. The donkey packed and ready for the home journey would begin. But wait that little boy has expended all the energy and run out of 'puff' to make it on foot with the family. The donkey's baskets were already loaded with the provisions to be taken home; what to do? A little boy does not weigh that much; what if it were possible to make an opening in the fodder? OK, that works; quick rearrangement of the wicker baskets' load and hey presto, I am slipped into the soft leafy fodder. The alternative possibly would have been my crying all the way home and spoiling the sing-along that was the practice of the entourage of families making their way to the township.

So the family worked its way to the creek and took turns to cross the footbridge; my father Michele held the reins of the donkey to guide it across the creek; all good and as I peered over the basket I relished this as another adventure for the day. Thereafter we made our way via the '*via nova*' a road which had been upgraded around 1952. It was a nice conveyance but unfortunately, it did little to make the task of getting to the township easier; it seemed that it started from nowhere and ended up nowhere and it was necessary to leave its path to make our way up a rocky raven, goat of a track to get up the cliff. The path was made of rock and pulverized dirt from the travellers making the daily journey to and from the outlying farms. Up and up until we reached the relative ease of the flats from 2 Km from the lower end of Francavilla known as 'Pendina'.