

Childhood Memories

Enza Russo

When World War II ended, in 1945, it was followed by a period of Allied occupation. When the Anglo-American Allies arrived, there was still a considerable presence of German soldiers, in many parts of Italy, who were not happy with the latest turn of events. So, during this initial time of transition, it was not uncommon to see acts of violence and remonstrations by German soldiers against the local population.

I was five years old and my younger sister just a toddler. One night a neighbour came to fetch my father to go and rescue a local young man who had been seized upon by a German soldier and was being badly bashed in a lonely and dark lane. My father was not a demonstrative and openly affectionate person, but was always ready to defend the weak and promote social justice. So armed with a broom stick, went with his friend, hoping to create a distraction that would allow the young man to flee from his assailant.

It was evening; my mother was nursing my younger sister in her arms and was pacing up and down in our front room, waiting for my father's safe return. She was singing a soft lullaby, to put my baby sister to sleep. I was holding on to my mother's skirt and keeping up the pacing. No words were spoken and my mother appeared calm, yet she must have had some serious concern about the situation.

At once there was a huge blow on our front window, the glass shattered; the soldier's fist protruded and his face could be seen. He examined the family scene before him: a mother trying to put her baby to sleep and a scared little girl holding onto her mother's skirt. He was obviously searching for the two men who had interrupted the beating. My mother remained calm and unperturbed, continuing the soft lullaby. Fortunately, the soldier moved on continuing his search.

Later in life, I learned to read my mother's moods from her songs. They would reflect her inner pathos and her trust in a God whose supportive presence she relied on, throughout her life.

This was the milieu in which I grew up, where my faith blossomed and where I developed the spiritual values I cherish today.