

# Le Famiglie Brunacci

Pubblicazione: 19/11/2012

## Un recente viaggio ad Assisi

Non so chi abbia inserito su internet notizie riguardanti il proprio recente viaggio in Umbria, ma, essendo esse molto interessanti perché riguardano la Famiglia Brunacci di Assisi ed in particolare **Don Aldo Brunacci**, ho pensato di fare un copia/incolla e riportarle nel nostro sito delle Famiglie Brunacci.

Oggi, 28 gennaio 2021, grazie ad un fortunato contatto, siamo riusciti a conoscere il nome dell'autore del seguente articolo, scritto nel lontano 2012.

**Autore: ANDREA BRASS.**

**Aspettiamo altre notizie biografiche sull'autore.**

Per vedere anche le foto inserite nell'articolo, cliccare su:

[2012 - VIAGGIO AD ASSISI](#)

Dal link <http://onceuponatravelogue.blogspot.it/> leggiamo:

**Friday, October 26, 2012**

Il Cimitero

Il 25 ottobre 2012

Assisi

Outside the walls of Assisi is the cemetery; it's a very peaceful place to visit if one is not grieving for the loss of a loved one. There's something about going to an old cemetery that both saddens and fascinates me; the former because I think of lives lost and grief felt and the latter because I am surrounded by the history of times gone by and the lives that lived that history. Walking through a cemetery reminds me of how lucky I am to be alive and of all the blessings that I continue to feel each day and I am always "more centered" after such a visit.

When my dear friend, Mario Brunacci invited me to go to the cemetery with him to visit la tomba of Don Aldo Brunacci, along with the graves of other family members, it was with pleasure that I accepted the invitation. With roses in hand, I met him on the street between our two houses and we set out together; an Assisani who grew up on these very streets and "his student" who learns from him every time I have the pleasure of his company.

Il cimitero is located just after a short walk on a beautiful tree-lined road a few minutes beyond the old city . Outside its locked gate is a shop to buy flowers and plants and this is where Mario and I had our first stop. An interesting

custom in Italy is that a body can stay buried for only ten years. After that, whatever remains is dug up and put into a small container which can be reburied or put in a niche in the wall. This way, there will always be room for other family members in the same plot. There are all sorts of tombs nel cimitero...big ones with grand tombstones, smaller ones with tombstones that often have photos of the deceased, niches in the wall for bodies, and small niches for the ten year+ remains.

After leaving my flowers at the tomb of Don Aldo, we went to visit Signora Weiss and, as is the custom in the Jewish religion, I left a stone on her grave. We also passed the tombs of Luigi and Trento Brizi, the father and son who printed i documenti falsi for the refugees, and that of another "partisan" who also helped the underground movement.

The morning was one of closure for me; after these past few weeks of research, I was able to give thanks to those who saved the lives, not only of the Jewish refugees who were hidden here during the war, but of future generations who are alive today because of the faith and courage of a few brave souls.

**Wednesday, October 24, 2012**

### **My Visit with Graziella Viterbi**

il 23 ottobre 2012 Assisi

Just a couple of weeks ago, I found out that Graziella Viterbi comes to Assisi every year and that she had been here, but had already left, much to my disappointment. With the assistance of the owner of the hotel where Graziella stays, I called her at home and we arranged for "una intervista" a Roma. And so it happened that yesterday morning I took the train to Rome for an interview with this most interesting and gracious woman.

Although Graziella is also fluent in English and French, we both preferred to speak in Italian and, except for a few instances when I wanted to make sure that I had correctly understood, our interview was conducted "in italiano" which made the experience even more extraordinary for me. Much of what Graziella told me has already been recounted in a prior blog entry, but I would still like to tell it again as these are the words of a courageous woman who lived the experience.

With the passage of the Racial Laws of 1938, life for the Jews in Italy changed dramatically. In the beginning, Graziella, who was still a young girl, didn't mind the changes much as the laws only deepened her pride in being Jewish. As she told me, "if they didn't want us, it was okay with me." With the passage of time, the level of anxiety and danger increased and with the arrival of the German army in Italy, it was clearly a signal to leave Padua. The family was on holiday at the time and the owner of the inn (a Fascist who "walked both sides") where the family was staying suggested that they go to a place further up in the mountains. After a month there and with the weather turning much colder, it became an untenable situation. The German commander was told that Graziella's father was ill and permission was granted to the family to return home. They traveled south and, after stopping in Roma, continued on to Assisi where they spent one month in two rooms at a small albergo (Hotel Sole which is still operating) near the Piazza Santa Chiara. It was during this time that Graziella's father met a friend from Padua who told him of the clandestine operation to assist the Jews. Signore Viterbi went to the Vescovo (bishop) seeking help; thus began his (and his family's) relationship with **Monsignor Nicolini and Don Aldo Brunacci**.

When I asked Graziella if she was scared, she told me that she wasn't afraid, although she said that it was more difficult for her younger sister Mirjam who, at ten years old and too young to understand, knew that papa and mamma

were preoccupied, although outwardly remaining calm and not appearing to be nervous.

In the early spring of 1944, the family was advised to try and find another place to live as there were getting to be too many Jews in Assisi and there was concern for their safety. Graziella and her mother went to Perugia in search of a house and found a flat to move into. Shortly before the scheduled move (April/May), Signora Viterbi received news that family members had been deported. Distraught, she did not want to leave her home in Assisi. This turned out to save her family's life because, shortly after the scheduled move to Perugia, a bomb destroyed what would have been their new home.

With the arrival of the Allied forces in June, 1944 (English troops that included a Palestinian Brigade made up of Jewish soldiers), there was great rejoicing, although the family then had to decide what to do. As their palazzo in Padua had been partially destroyed by a fire (occurring during a Fascist party) and there were no funds to repair the damages, the Viterbi's decided to stay in Assisi for the meantime. Graziella's father secured a position teaching in Perugia, but after seven years, the family moved to Roma where Signore Viterbi taught at the university and Graziella and Mirjam continued their schooling. Graziella, who received a degree in criminology, went on to receive a diploma in Social Service, a career she was devoted to for many years.

When asked about Colonnello Muller, Graziella had nothing but words of praise for this German comandante who undoubtedly knew what was going on, but never said anything...un segreto nascosto (a hidden secret). Infatti (in fact), after the war, Graziella and her family developed a strong friendship with this courageous man and his family and they visited one another, both in Rome and Germany.

The 2.5 hours I spent with this lovely woman went by quickly, but there was still enough time to talk of other things personal about her life and mine and what we hold in common. We ended our visit with her sharing family photos and my taking pictures. I left Graziella's apartment with much gratitude and joy and a smile as I thought about one of her stories which I will share with all of you...

One day, while the family was in Assisi, **Don Aldo** gave Graziella false documents to bring to some other families. It was felt that if a young teenage girl was seen as simply taking a stroll that no one would be the wiser. Graziella, who was very proud to be carrying the documents, happened to pass by a German sentinel who, as she said, "looked at me like I was a normal person." She was so full of pride (molto fiere) after completing her mission, that, being a fearless ragazza of 17 years old, Graziella made it a point to walk in front of the German soldier yet again. In her words..."I had the pleasure to do something." ...And in mine, "Yes, you did, Graziella Viterbi...and I thank you."

**Saturday, October 13, 2012**

**La Famiglia Brunacci ad Assisi**

Il 13 ottobre 2012

Assisi

**The first Brunacci to come to Assisi was Chiara who arrived sometime in the 1400's.** According to **Maria (Brunacci)**, the family has been in Assisi per sempre (for always) and it certainly feels that way. Being in Assisi for so many hundreds of years, the **Brunacci family** is quite extended; it seems, now that I am aware of it, that the longer I am here, the more "parente della famiglia" (relatives of the family) I am meeting. And so it was yesterday when **Mario Brunacci** (my wonderful 90 year old friend who has fast become a "pal") took me to meet and visit with Maria and Liliana (nieces of **Don Aldo Brunacci**) so that I could learn more of what happened here during the war.

Mario picked me up a few minutes before 5:00 (He is absolutely punctual!) and escorted me for the very short walk. At the door I was warmly greeted by these two thoughtful and lovely ladies who quickly showed me to the chair they had prepared for me. After a few introductory words, our conversation began in earnest.

Liliana (the younger of the two) presented me with a couple of books. As they were the same ones that Mario had previously given me and Liliana's wanting me to keep at least one of her gifts, she asked me to return one of the books to Mario...I agreed and everybody was pleased.

Liliana was a young child during the war so, for her, life didn't seem too "out of the ordinary." She did mention that there wasn't any sugar and people were given food ration coupons. Actually, for the most part, daily life in Assisi was relatively undisturbed; the city was protected because of the medical services it was providing for the German soldiers (Assisi was officially declared a hospital city) and, by and large, the local "puppet" government under Fortini did what it was told.

Jewish refugees from other countries were already in Assisi in 1943; notably some from France who had entered the country via Genoa. For those who weren't Italian, one of the most difficult tasks was learning the language without a native accent. According to Maria, a good number/most of the refugees were in hiding, although the Viterbi's, among others, lived in private apartments with the "semblance" of a normal life. Maria, who was a friend of Graziella Viterbi, told me of the many times the two girls would get together; it wasn't until after the war that Maria learned of Graziella's real identity and that she was Jewish. The convent where the refugees were hidden was cloistered so, with the exception of Don Aldo who was allowed in to hear confession, no men were ever allowed to enter; a good way to keep the German soldiers out. As there were often German planes flying over the city taking pictures, when the men wanted to go out in the garden, they would wear the habits and veils of le sorelle, pretending to be sisters of the convent.

Monsignor Nicolini, besides hiding some documents in his office, hid a Jewish candelabra and other valuables brought by the refugees in the ground underneath il vescovado (home of the bishop.) Everything was scrupulously planned out and done to ensure the safety and comfort of those who came to Assisi in search of protection.

As to the imprisonment and release of **Don Aldo**...Someone either suspected or knew of Don Aldo's work and posted a very public sign that he had helped the Jews.

Il colonnello Muller (who was praised by both Maria and Liliana for his "ignorance" of the clandestine activity and for his support of the Assisani) had no choice but to have Don Aldo arrested. While he was in prison in Perugia, Don Aldo's sister went there and met with "higher ups" in the clergy, telling them all that had happened. Due to her efforts, a representative came from the Vatican telling the German authorities that **Don Aldo** was a citizen of il Vaticano (with its own government and laws) and, as such, was not a citizen of Italy and, therefore, not subject to the laws of Italy and needed to be released from prison.

This, undoubtedly, saved **Don Aldo's life** as he had already been scheduled for a transport to Auschwitz that was to leave shortly thereafter.

**Tuesday, October 9, 2012**

**Ebrei In Assisi Durante La Guerra - Due Storie**

Il 9 ottobre 2012 Assisi

The Stories – Part 2

There are some especially wonderful stories of generosity, courage, and inventiveness that are a testimony to the goodness of humanity; one such is the narrative about the Viterbi family. Emilio Viterbi was a professor at the University of Padua who, as a result of the Laws of 1938, was no longer allowed to teach. Daughters Grazia and Mirjam had to leave school and their friends came less and less to visit, fearful that they would get into trouble. Some time later, a red Star of David was painted over their front door and for the next 4.5 years, the family lived in uncertainty and fear...and, then, in May of 1943, the synagogue of Padua was set in flames. That summer, while the family was staying temporarily in a hotel away from Padua which then, ultimately, became too dangerous a place for them, Grazia and Mirjam's parents heard from other guests that, in Assisi, although the podesta was Fascist, he was “una bravissima persona.” The family left for Assisi shortly after.

Once there, Emilio, who was an admirer of San Francesco, found a friend from Padua who told him of two other Jewish families in the city. Emilio and his wife, Margherita, were introduced to **Don Aldo Brunacci, Arnoldo Fortini, and Monsignor Nicolini**. An apartment was quickly found for the family, their name was changed, and false documents were procured. Their “true” identity cards were hidden by Monsignor Nicolini behind a picture of the Madonna that hung on a wall in his study. With a new identity, the family was able to leave the house and visit with other families that were in hiding, some of whom were in the Monastery of San Quirico.

In the early months of 1944, the police went to the hotel where the family had first stayed in search of them. Although the police were told that the family had gone to Firenze, it was felt by all that their apartment would no longer be safe. There is a lovely story of how Monsignor Nicolini offered his own bedroom for the Viterbi's to stay in. Not wanting to accept this generous offer, Emilio decided to take the family to Perugia and go into hiding there. This plan was foiled with the arrest of some members of the underground movement in March of 1944 and the further bombing of the apartment the family was supposed to have lived in. The new identity cards which had already been printed changing the family's name, origin, and residency, would not be used.

On May 15<sup>th</sup> of that year, Emilio and Margherita were waiting in Don Aldo's office to discuss a new plan for the family when two policemen came to arrest him. Don Aldo quickly went upstairs, took his breviary, closed the door to his office, and walked calmly outside with the police who then had no reason to search for anything...or anyone. Once again, the Viterbi family had been saved.

Another story, which I love to share, is that of Signora Weiss. Originally from Vienna, she was staying in the Monastery of San Quirico, when she died from a cardiac crisis. The problem became how to bury her without revealing her true identity. As the sky grew dark, her coffin was carried to the Cimitero di Assisi, right outside the city walls. Don Aldo led the funeral procession and the casket was placed in a funeral niche that he had purchased under his own name. The next day, Signora Weiss became “Bianca Bianchi” where she still lies peacefully to this day. The only difference is that her tombstone has been changed to reveal her true identity; her son, coming after the war to visit her grave, acknowledged the loving hospitality of the people of Assisi on her stone.

As an added note...To all those who watched, this appeared to be a Catholic funeral and, being such, the German soldiers saluted the coffin of an elderly Jewish refugee as she was carried away.