

Massimo Melli

The refugee

"And you will go wandering from sea to sea." Amos: 8, 12

This story is dedicated to all those
who emigrated because of the war



Prologue

This is not an autobiography (I don't think I am a person important enough to merit one), but a memorial written in self-defense to be presented to those who will ask me on the Day of Judgment.

This memorial explains how I became a Kabbalist.

Everything I've written is the truth: the names of the people are their real names, place names are their real geographical names, historical events are those documented by distinguished researchers and historians, and my thoughts are my original thoughts, although often clouded by ignorance, also a gift from God.

The name of my cat is his real name.

Sometimes I may have invented something to make the story more interesting, but rarely have I misrepresented the facts. My inventions were only for the sake of literary style and to avoid to bore the reader. No one forces me to write these pages, except my sense of justice.

The story is divided into three chapters, each of which is one and three at the same time (they are entangled, if you know what I mean).

Each chapter has a quote from the Bible or a philosophical one written in self-defense so that it is clear my question that I will present to the Judge: the written word remains "*et verba volant*".

My witnesses are all dead, then the judge or will have to trust me or ask them, in the hereafter, to confirm what I write.

If I omitted something it's because of my ignorance or because of my poor memory. No one is guilty of what he does not know or does not remember, although the Italian justice thinks that the ignorance of the law is not an excuse. Fortunately, here only the Divine Justice prevails, which I trust.

That's enough. See you soon wherever the Judge decides to send me and you!

Massimo Melli

Chapter 1

"The Lord gives, the Lord takes, blessed be His Holy Name" Job

Birth

I was born in Rimini on the night of November 9, 1939, a year after the famous Night of the Broken Glass (Kristallnacht), when the pogroms of the Nazis against the Jews began.

As far as I know I never asked to be born and I did not choose the city in which to be born. I do not remember anything that happened before I was born.

Of the first four years of my life I do not remember anything: total darkness, before the day of the explosion. Actually I do not remember anything except that I was afraid of the dark and in my wooden bed with high sides like a cage I was crying for my mother to come to console me. I wanted to sleep with my parents, but my Dad did not want me in his bed, and he used to bring me back to my bed if I jumped the bedpost to go by my mother in the big bed. I have a big photo album put together lovingly by my mother, with all the dates written below the pictures, so it's like if I had memories of my happy childhood, before the war. But I have no real memories, my real memories. Except the dark, that I did not like at all.

Then I have a vivid memory of the explosion: the first grenade fired from the sea that had hit our house of Viale Cormons, the Pensione Primavera, by the seafront of Rimini. Perhaps because the explosion was accompanied by a flash of light as bright as a flash of lightning. My mother was in the next room, the kitchen, intent to cook a chicken, therefore it had to be noon. I remember that I ended up under the table of the dining room next to the kitchen, which we used as our private dining room. The large room was at the front of the Pensione, and it was a large hall used only as a dining room for the guests. That day there were no guests because my mother and I were alone at home, so I assume it must have been low season. From my position under the table, I could see the debris that fell from the ceiling and saw my mother in the kitchen. That table, which I inherited from my father, is the same that now was renovated and is located in my private quarters in the farm of Scicli. Together with the two cupboards of the living room of the beach house in Santa

Maria del Focallo, the table is part of the furniture miraculously saved from the collapse of the Pensione Primavera. This is a very robust furniture built in Forlì.

Then I remember that my mother picked me up and put me into the small seat attached to the handlebars of her bicycle and began to ride along Viale Cormons, in the opposite direction of the sea. My father was not there, maybe we went to look for him.

In the street there was dust of debris and smoke of fires. We could hear the sirens that warned us of the attack from the sea. I remember very well the image of an old woman screaming, in front of the gate of her destroyed house, waving the bloody stump of an arm that was missing a hand. It was nevertheless a beautiful sunny day and the light in Viale Cormons was dazzling as we headed fast toward the railroad. Maybe we were trying to go to the office of my Dad.

Arrived at the railway gates of the train crossing, we met Uncle Guido, who had come to Rimini from Bologna, and who was coming to look for us on foot. After that I do not remember anything until the period spent under the train tunnel of San Marino, where we survived for about five months until the liberation of Rimini.

So I think that our escape by bicycle must have started in late April or early May 1944, after the bulk of the bombing that destroyed our Pensione Primavera.

Why didn't we run away before, since there had been several bombing episodes before May? I haven't got the faintest idea, and now those who could answer are all dead.

Apart from the little I remember, which is not much, there are a few stories of my Dad that often ended with his tears, followed by mine. You can not tell the story of Rimini with humor and joke about it, unfortunately.

Then there's the Story, written with scrupulous amount of information, often lengthy and unnecessary, for all I care. I will therefore examine the facts in a simple and straightforward manner relying mainly on my few memories.

War

In Italy almost all the bombings were caused by the Allies (British and US), while a small portion (definitely a minority) were done by the Germans in the second phase of the war. The Germans were guilty of many crimes and made many massacres of

unarmed civilians, but among the population they caused relatively few deaths, in percentage terms, compared to the dead caused by the bombing.

The whole country has suffered from north to south, and of course throughout the center and we all had our dead.

In relative terms and percentages, between the cities that suffered the worst destruction (say those with more than 30,000 inhabitants) Rimini with 80% of the town destroyed is at the top of the list. The two martyrs cities are Foggia, Apulia, and Rimini in Romagna. The two bloodiest battles are Monte Cassino and Rimini on the Gothic Line.

Particularly affected by the bombings was the center of Italy, who found itself between the Gustav Line (passing through Cassino) and the Gothic Line (passing through Rimini) between autumn 1943 and summer of 1944. In the same month the bombing continued even in the north, to destroy especially railway junctions, railways and bridges so as to prevent supplies for the Germans. This situation continued even after the breaking of the Gothic Line, when the battle moved to the Pò Valley until the liberation of the north. Rimini who was on the Gothic Line suffered repeated attacks for a long time because it was for months on the front line. According to historian Amedeo Montemaggi the bloody British battlefield of Rimini is one of the most crucial and ignored of the second world war. About 1,200,000 men took part in it of which 1,000,000 were allied soldiers (80% English) and thousands of planes, cannons and tanks. The Germans were about 200,000 but resisted fiercely, true to their Teutonic willpower and courage. The offensive was for the capture of Rimini, strategically important city to allow the allies to enter the Pò Valley through the narrow passage that existed between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea. From November 1, 1943 to 28 August 1944 Rimini had 92 days of Allied air raids with 372 waves of bombers of all kinds. The bombing of 1st November 1943 made 68 victims and in the following months, while the bombings followed one another without respite, the 40,000 inhabitants of Rimini began to seek refuge in the surrounding countryside to escape the massacre. Many Riminesi crowded in the Republic of San Marino to seek refuge in its territory that had remained neutral and safe enough, despite the threats of the Germans who accused San Marino to give refuge to Jews, deserters, draft dodgers and to the partisans. Many sought refuge from the bombing in the many tunnels of the railway Rimini-San Marino. In addition to the inhabitants of Rimini there were also those who sought refuge in the Rimini

district in addition to the displaced persons from central and southern Italy, who had fled north to seek refuge from the ravages of war. So up to 100,000 people took refuge to San Marino. Despite its neutrality also San Marino was bombed on June 26, 1944 with 54 confirmed victims among the population, of which forty were of San Marino.

There was no safe place in the entire area for the terrorized population.

The worst month for the bombing was the month of September 1944 all the way to the end of September 21, when Rimini was finally liberated. Greeks and New Zealander liberators found a ghost town, unrecognizable and cluttered with rubble. The destruction was total with 82% of homes that had been destroyed completely. In the square, the liberators found the forks of three partisans hanged by the Nazis before retiring. That square is now called Three Martyrs Square, in the center of Rimini rebuilt.

Of the nearly 100,000 civilian deaths in the bombing, registered in Italy, Foggia had 2,000 dead and Rimini about 607 in addition to which, about 1,000 people died from the epidemic of typhus. Very few in comparison to the devastation suffered. The survival of almost all the inhabitants is to be explained by the fact that everyone had fled the city. The losses for the battle of Rimini between soldiers of both sides and civilians were 80,000 men.

My memories begin again from the train tunnel under the hill of San Marino, where we took refuge along with thousands of Riminesi. My Dad had built a kind of large double bed, with timber of luck. The bed was elevated from the ground of at least half a meter and was surrounded by four wooden pillars on the four sides to which my Dad had hanged bed sheets that surrounded it from all sides. He had built almost a four-poster bed to ensure the privacy of his little family to make sure that we had a dry bed. The four poster bed was my new home, fortunately the train did not go through there, because the stations were all destroyed, along with almost all the bridges, and the train had long since ceased to be passing through the tunnel.

I also remember a few pots and pans near the bed, to allow my Mom to cook. Other families were in contact with us, with similar canopies or tents put together as best as they could. I remember sleeping between my parents I had no more fear of the dark. I remember my Dad challenged the bombings to fetch water from a fountain in

the surrounding area. I have no memories of the health conditions, which must have been catastrophic, because many of those poor people who lived in the tunnels became ill with typhoid fever. I think that to make their toilet needs they had to come at night out in the country and they emptied their buckets in the countryside around the tunnel, but I'm not sure.

Men adapt quickly to the disasters and will definitely find a remedy to all evil.

I remember though that often I accompanied my Dad to the fountain to drink, and that he quickly filled the bucket of water.

The photo below, published in the Internet by Amedeo Montemaggi, was taken by someone at the mouth of one of the galleries of San Marino, maybe mine. The image is blurred but you may notice a multitude of people and many children who come out of the tunnel. Until today, at age 76, I have a great fear of entering a dark tunnel.



Country Life

It was probably at the end of September that my father decided to move to a farm, near Verucchio, while the front had passed over the Gothic Line, but the fighting continued just north towards Cesena, Forlì and Cervia. A month after Rimini, on October 20, was freed Cesena, then it was the turn of Forli, Faenza, and Bologna. Ravenna was liberated on December 4, 1944.

Those are the best memories. I remember the fields illuminated by the sun and the beautiful green hills of Romagna. I remember the beautiful farm and the fire of the fireplace in the evening to warm up, because in October started to be a little cold in the evening. After the horror of the tunnel, that country house was a haven for all of us. Sometimes there was Pippo, the reconnaissance plane of the allies that machine-gunned the country side looking for hidden Germans.

There were chickens, but few sheep and cows, because the Germans had stolen them. But there were free birds in the trees and numerous insects, grasshoppers, ants and snails. I had become a quiet child who liked to observe the ants and their incessant comings and goings. The holiday did not last long, because suddenly we were hit by the tragedy. My Mom that had survived all that, fell ill with typhus, from the bite of a louse taken under the tunnel. The disease had grown in her robust body until it had won. I remember that a white ambulance with a red cross painted on both sides, took away my Mom who was dressed in a beige dressing gown, and wept. The last image I have of her is as she waved goodbye before the nurses, along with my father, took her away in a stretcher. For a long time I stood there watching as the ambulance pulled away in the dusty country road and I had a lump in my throat, fearing that I would not see her again. In fact it was so.

I was left with the peasants of the farm. After about a week she was dead in the hospital of Riccione, aged 33, on November 9, the date of my birthday. I was 5 years old when she died, another fatality worthy of being taken into account in the game of dice that is life.

Cervia

From that moment my memories become clearer, perhaps because a five year old is starting to become a bit big. I remember traveling on the cart pulled by an old tractor that took us to Cervia, home of aunt Giovanna. Me and my Dad were hidden under the straw, but could breathe very well anyway because we had dug for us a kind of den. The trip of about 30 km took place at night without lights and we reached Cervia around midnight, in the street behind the Hotel Allegri, which had been owned by my great-grandfather, then by the older brother of my grandmother, Carlino, and now was run by his two sons Dino and Armando because he was dead.

I have often wondered why my father was hiding. As a precaution, to avoid the checkpoints of the allies, or for fear of the Germans, or because he was wanted as an army deserter. Before the war he had been lieutenant of the "Bersaglieri" riflemen, stationed in Cesena. Then after the armistice, he had abandoned his uniform. Was he hiding? I never had the courage to ask him, and he never said anything.

Once on the alley behind the Hotel Allegri my Dad got out first and went to call the relatives and the women, Dirce and Cina, respectively wives of Dino and Armando, and came out even Venusta, the grandmother, that was the mother of Dino and Armando. Then came also aunt Giovanna, awakened by the women.

When asked: "And where is Rina? " My father replied laconically: " Rina is dead!" There were screaming and crying of women, who shouted: " Holy Lord God! ". And Aunt Giovanna shouting: "My God, My God, my Rina ... why?" Then Aunt Giovanna said: "And where's Massimo ?"

I pulled my head out from under the straw from the top of the tractor and said, "I'm here ..."

The zì Zvana

Aunt Giovanna, who took us over, was an Allegri too and my grandmother's sister and was a thoroughbred Romagnola, called by the grandchildren Allegri in the local Romagnolo dialect "zì Zvana". Giovanna Allegri widow of the quartermaster Baracchini. She signed her name : Giovanna Allegri widow Baracchini, though she was saying, "Nicodemo Baracchini, let him feel comfortable in his grave and I would certainly not be the one to get him out of there. "

I just called her aunt, but she was my great-aunt. My grandmother, Carlotta Allegri widow Ancarani, had been evacuated in the neighborhood of Lugo, where the battle still raged and therefore weeks passed before she could reach Cervia. My grandmother used to say like her sister: "My Ricciotti Ancarani, I let him stay in his grave. I would certainly not get him out of there. "I thought that both had had enough of their husbands.

Aunt Giovanna lived beside the Hotel, in what she called: the house of my father. The grandchildren Allegri said instead that the house belonged to them, being part of the Hotel that they had inherited, but aunt Giovanna said: "I am staying in the home of my father and I do not move from here." So she could live in that house until her death, despite the complaints of the Allegri. The house was on the mainstreet of Cervia, in Via Mazzini 22 and actually bordered on the Hotel. Downstairs there was a long corridor leading to the living room illuminated by a large glass door that looked at the back into a narrow courtyard, separated from the courtyard of the Hotel by a high wall. On the wall there was a wooden door that led from the courtyard of aunt Giovanna to that of the Hotel and that we used to go

back and forth to the Hotel. Next to the living room there was a long, narrow kitchen with three doors, one that opened on the living room, one which opened on the huge dark cellar accessed by a long and steep stairway, which to me looked like the entrance of Hell in the bottom of which was the Devil. The third door opened to a landing where there was a small toilet and the door to enter the courtyard. Deep in our backyard was the laundry of the hotel, with the washerwomen always busy washing clothes and bed sheets. Above the laundry was the home of the poor plumber, called Stagno, which he shared with his wife and a son affected by autism and therefore rather stupid.

Upstairs of our house, accessed by a large staircase, were two large bedrooms, one facing the Via Mazzini and one overlooking the courtyard. Aunt Giovanna had said that this was her home, assigned to her by her father and that she would not move from there until her death. In fact, at the age of 77, in 1957 my aunt died in her own bedroom. The Allegri had commandeered the upper floor of the house, under the roof, where the chef of the Hotel Ottavio lived with his family. A few years before she died, the Allegri, taking advantage of her old age, had opened a door in the wall of the back room that the aunt called the guest room, and had annexed it to the Hotel. Next to the main entrance, bordering the corridor, there was the shop of Tonino, the barber, looking out on Via Mazzini, near the entrance of the Aunt. The house next door, which is accessed by another door from Via Mazzini and at the back had a courtyard divided by a high wall from ours, was the house of tailor Matteini, where lived my friend Sergio, who years later became my best friend, at the time of our youth, even if we knew each other by sight all along.

This place for three long years was my world and so I apologize for the long and tedious description. Besides the house in the historic village of Cervia, which was not her, but her father's, aunt Giovanna in Viale Pola had a small plot of land of 620 square meters, which she called: my garden of Eden. That was just her property and the aunt had decided to give it as a legacy to me, because I was an orphan. In Eden there were no buildings except for an old wooden hut that served as a storeroom and a toilet. At the bottom of Eden, that for me was the image of Paradise, there was a pergola with a wooden table and benches, which served for the lunches that Aunt prepared on an outdoor brazier. Opposite Eden was a large empty round plot, where grass was growing and where we used to play football. The round plot no longer exists since it was filled with large houses, but in the days of my childhood it

was our playing field and our tribal territory of the Redskin Indians of the roundabout of viale Pola.

Aunt Giovanna was, according to my calculations, only 64 years old in 1944 when we came to Cervia; my grandmother was 2 years younger than her and when she arrived at Cervia she was 62. To me both of them looked very old.

My father for a few days occupied the guest room before he got lost, sneaking away somewhere and I and the aunt slept in the room that looked out onto via Mazzini. The aunt had her beautiful bedroom made of solid wood furniture built by excellent carpenters from Forli that is now in the bedroom of my beach house in Santa Maria del Focallo. Next to her huge bed, she placed a cot for me and for one year I was sleeping there.

The cousins of my mother, the Allegri, had all their children of about my age. Dino had three children: Giancarlo, Edda and Piero (called in dialect "*e Gadj*" because he had red hair, but sometimes was also called the "*Fired up*" because he was always looking for trouble and was always running into some kind of difficulty) . Piero was a year younger than me. His sister Edda was a redhaired with white complexion and she was a few months older than me. I was of dark complexion and in the sun I became dark-green like a wild male-lizard. Aunt Giovanna called me "*e Regan*" which in dialect means precisely the male-lizard. Giancarlo was blond, at least three years older than us and was always playing tricks to us. The children of Armando were three, one grown up, son of his first wife who had died of consumption, Federico, who never mingled with us because he had his grown up friends. Then there was Lina, who was a year older than me and Gino who was exactly my age. Gino and Lina had brown hair and were of normal complexion. All together we were a bunch of wild children, difficult to manage.

For the first time together with the cousins, I ate well, after so many privations. In the Hotel there was the headquarters of the American troops, and therefore there was plenty of food. I remember that for the first time in my life I had eaten a big square of chocolate. The food that I liked most were the grits, prepared as porridge, with sugar on top. Gino, for fear that we should eat his oatmeal while he was away to go to the toilet, he used to say: "Look, I spit on my plate! "And actually he was really spitting, so we sucked and did not eat them.

Sometimes I was eating with aunt Giovanna who had a huge pile of pumpkins in the yard and had managed to find a lot of rice. Therefore she was preparing always the same soup: rice with pumpkin. After months of that stuff, to this day I still have some hatred for the pumpkins: apart from using them for Halloween, I do not know what to do with them. Once aunt Giovanna invited Piero to lunch and served its famous rice with pumpkin. "Tell me the truth Piero, do you eat best with the Aunt or in your house?" Piero was the mouth of the truth and said, "In my house." While I was laughing heartily.

Piero followed me like a faithful squire, and was always ready to follow my example and my counsel. Once he came to me with a handwarmer of brass, with screw cap and I suggested to fill it with carbide and put water in it to see what would happen. I've always been one who experimented with explosives.

The handwarmer began to lose from the cap a spray of acetylene gas with a loud hiss. I suggested to Piero to light the jet with a match and he went into the kitchen to fetch the matches. Once he lit the jet, it turned into a blaze and luckily Piero threw the hand-warmer on the roof of the Hotel kitchen where it exploded with a big bang. Dino tried to catch us, but we were running faster than him and went to hide in the dark cellar of the Aunt, the Hell in the bottom of which was the Devil, and thanks to the Devil, we were saved.

Survivors of the war as we were, our favorite games were war games. In the narrow street behind the hotel we found the covers of some big iron barrels, those used by the americans to carry gasoline. Probably Stagno, the plumber, used them to make pots. We were all intent on throwing them in the air like if they were flying saucers. Lina threw high in the air one of them that ended up on my foot, cutting the shoe and cutting completely the tendon of the big toe of my right foot.

At first it did not hurt me, but out of the cut came a lot of blood. They took me in their arms to aunt Giovanna, who ascertained the damage and tried to stop the blood screaming: "Help, Lord God, what have I done? " The wound took a long time to heal because nobody thought to close it with stitches and for a couple of weeks I was not able to walk. The Aunt took me riding on her back, wherever she went, with my foot bandaged, and sometimes she took me up to her Eden, where I sat down to play with the snails. The people we met asked: "Signora Giovanna, what happened? "And she answered:" It probably will be the divine punishment for having killed my father .. " I never knew if it was she who had killed her father, but around Cervia

circulated the legend that Mingon of Allegri had been poisoned by his wife, Mariuccia Pasini, widow Allegri. But the question remained: had the aunt helped her or not? The fact is that until now I walk with a sprained foot, as the right foot goes about his business. And Lina, when she sees me, continues to apologize: "I did not do it on purpose."

Grandmother Carlotta

When my grandmother finally arrived from Lugo, who being in the province of Ravenna was liberated after 4 December, there were more screams and other loud wailing. My grandmother was screaming: "God, tremendous and pious, why you did it? Why my Rina? I have a gap in the heart, I have a gap in the heart!" And she cried desperately. After a little things calmed down, but my grandmother continued to have a gap in the heart. The two sisters shared the large double bed and I slept in the bunk next to them, so I heard what they were saying. "Sister, did you remember to turn off the light in the living room? "

"Yes sister" really they spoke to each other in the local dialect, but I understood everything.

"Sure *surèla*. Tomorrow we try to find the potatoes, to change our menu, we can make fried potatoes in the pan. "" Yes, sister. Sure *surèla* ! "

"Now it's the hour of the rosary: Hail Mary, gratia plenaPater noster qui es in coelis ... fiat voluntas tua" And for a good half an hour they were praying. My grandmother prayed but had a special relationship with the priests, being republican and anti-clerical. She confessed only to scold the priest.

She said: "Massimo. Believe in God, tremendous and pious, but watch out for the priests, that they are all false and liars! " She never forgave God, tremendous and pious, for what He had done and went to church to tell the priest and scold him too. Before falling asleep they made me recite the prayer of the *guardian angel*.

In Cervia they called her "*la volpa*" (the female fox) because she was smart as a fox. She was lame in one leg because she broke her hip falling on the ice the year of the great snowfall in Romagna, in the winter of 1942. Her husband Ricciotti, my grandfather, taking advantage of her stay in hospital, had eaten a plate of half kilo of spaghetti with meat sauce that had caused the diabetic coma that took him to the grave. I have some pictures of my grandfather Ricciotti, who was tall and

handsomely fat, with a beautiful belly and always smiling. My grandmother had driven him from home many years before, when she discovered him in bed with a woman, that he called *his distant relative*, a woman that had been given accommodation in their house. For that reason my grandmother did not want to go to recover my grandfather from his grave. "Let him be there!" She said.

People looked at me and said: "Massimo is the whole face of his grandmother. While others said that I was different and I looked like no one of my race. My grandmother was dark skinned and had two almond eyes, black and very smart. When she was angry with me my grandmother caught me with her crooked walking stick and called me: "Dust of the Earth stand still." But I would sneak away and she, who was lame, could never catch me.

Cervia has an old village built with highly geometric criteria that surprise the many tourists and vacationers who come in the summer to crowd its beautiful beaches. The village consists of two concentric square rings. The outer ring is called the village of the saltworkers and its houses are inhabited mainly by families of the saltworkers. The salt pans of Cervia are famous since ancient times and the salt of Cervia was transported through ancient roads to the Marche, where the Via Salaria, which ended up in Rome, began. The outside ring is separated from the central village by an internal road that runs around the village of the saltworkers from the inside. The interior ring contains the village church, the big square and the Town Hall of excellent architectural value.

Below is the beautiful building of the Municipality of Cervia.

Two rows of houses of the same size flank the sides right and left of the main road, the Via Mazzini, which cuts the town in two, from north to south. The road is also called the Strada Statale Adriatica 16, which starts from Padua and goes all the way to Puglia along the Adriatic coast. Our house was right on the SS 16, a short walk from the square.



Winter

My job was to fetch drinking water from the fountain in the square of the market, behind the City Hall with the "*bucaletta*" a white enamel mug that was used by all the households of Cervia for that purpose.

From the stall of Zelide, that was selling sweets and sundries for Carnival in the square of the market, one day I stole a cardboard mask with elastic, while Zelide looked away. When I showed the mask to the old women, all hell broke loose: "Who gave you the money?" "I did not answer. "Thief, you stole it! "And they spanked me and scolded me. Taking me by my ear, aunt Giovanna forced me to bring it back to Zelide and apologize.

In the evening then she told me the story of *Chilàz*, the Romagnolo thief who was crucified for stealing. He was dying on the cross, and when his mother came to give him a last kiss, with a bite he broke off her nose. "This is because if I am on the cross it's your fault. You had to scold me as a child, so I would not have become a thief! "

We had one stove in the kitchen, a so-called wood cooker which served to Aunt Giovanna as a furnace, a stove to cook her soup and a hot water tank. My grandmother was a great cook, because she had learned from her mother and had

worked as a young girl in the Hotel of her father Mingon of Allegri, whose restaurant was famous throughout Romagna. The problem was that there was not much to be cooked. Food was scarce for all, and the firewood was hard to find. We had to make an expedition in the woods, to collect occasionally some sticks. So at three o'clock in the afternoon we went to bed, after heating our beds with the *priest* (a type of sledge with copper bottom that was needed to keep the bed covers raised) and in which, we introduced the *nun*, a small copper brazier with wooden handle where we put the remains of the embers of the stove fire to warm the beds. The feeling of well-being, entering into those sheets, warm and dry, was indescribable. While the old ones chatted of this and that, I read the comics of Mickey Mouse that they bought every week for me to make me feel good. I read for hours, until after reciting the *Rosary*, and after making me recite the *guardian angel*, the old women turned off the light.

By the end of November aunt Giovanna, when I started walking and the foot injury had almost healed, sent me to learn how to write and to learn the alphabet from a private teacher who lived on the same street, just after the Hotel and was willing to give me lessons. I remember little of that lady who according to other children was very severe. With me she was always nice and in a short time I learned to read. In October of the following year they enrolled me in the first grade in a public school located at the beginning of the great avenue Viale Roma, just outside the old town of Cervia, but already during the first winter I could read the comics of Mickey Mouse. The adventures of Mickey Mouse, Goofy and the evil Wooden Leg were so fascinating for me that they made me forget the boredom of the long hours spent in bed.

Dangerous games

Spring came and we children started going out around the village, sometimes pushing ourselves as far as the canal of the salt marshes. The life around the canal, with the fishing boats of the fishermen and the salt-carrying boats full of salt to be delivered to the warehouses, was full of surprises. My grandmother, however, was scared that I should drown.

The old women called me *biribisso*, nickname that maybe means something more than just mischievous, and used to say, "He has the *biribissisia* in his body!" Shaking their head. My father was never there except when sometimes he brought in his room a woman named Lola, all painted up with make-up and who stayed always

locked in the room. The old women said she was a whore, while they had tried hard to let him be engaged with a good girl from Cervia, whose name was Linda, and that on top of all was a Republican. But my father often disappeared and after a few months he stopped altogether to return to Cervia. The old women were saying, "Poor fool, he is a smuggler!" I thought that my Dad was a hero and that he had to do great things across the boundaries of Italy and when they asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I answered without hesitation: "A smuggler like my father."

The old women worried that something bad should happen to me. There were still many unexploded shells around and many military weapons, with which it was easy to get very badly injured. The son Tonino the barber, had lost both hands when together with other children he tried to open a grenade that exploded in his hands.

On the beach of Milano Marittima and in the pine forest there were mountains of unexploded munitions, that the boys of Cervia gathered, to use the balistite and the black gunpowder to blow up tin cans as a fun game. I was fascinated by explosives as indeed was Piero, who was always following me like a faithful squire.

Often I attended the workshop of the plumber Stagno, that was down at the end of our yard, in addition to the department of the washerwomen. With one excuse or another almost every day I was there, watching him as he worked. His son was already grown up and he sat next to his father on a stuffed chair watching his father smiling with his mouth open and drool coming out of his mouth. He said: "Baahahaha!" And waving his hands like a squawking chicken. There was so much misery around even before the war, but the war had given the final *coup de grace* to the poor who had fallen very low. The laboratory was cluttered with pots, pans, funnels of galvanized iron, large copper cauldrons. Sometimes Stagno helped me build my contraptions, like the time I went to him to help me build the rifle.

I actually had built, with the help of Stagno, a small gun with elastic rubber bands firing sharp knitting needles. To prove that it worked I shot from a distance the heel of a laundress, who had started screaming and jumping around like a chicken. Piero had built, always with the help of Stagno, a bow that shot arrows of bamboo with sharp nails attached to their tips. Gino had moved that summer to Milano Marittima, to the Pensione Flora, that his father had bought when he separated himself from his brother Dino, who was left in charge of the Hotel Allegri and

therefore we saw him rarely. Only a few years later, together with Sergio, the neighbor, we began to visit Gino and to go fishing in the river Savio with him.

Summer came and we pushed ourselves further and further away from the village, up to the pine forest of Milano Marittima. We went there to hunt snakes, so we needed weapons to kill them. Some snakes were poisonous vipers and we knew that they were dangerous. That first summer we were just me and Piero and armed to the teeth, had decided to go to chase snakes in the woods. We found no snakes and no vipers to shoot, so we decided to shoot the mullets that were jumping in the canal. Not with knitting needles that would have disappeared under the water, but with the wooden arrows of Piero, but using my rifle. After firing all the arrows, without catching any mullet, I gave orders to my squire to go into the channel, down from the ladder, to retrieve them. Seafarers and pirates as we were we knew already how to swim by instinct, like dogs, at a very young age, because the first thing that our parents had done was to teach us to swim, so there was no danger of drowning in the canal. Piero obeyed, and went for a swim, but he was unable to recover even one single arrow and he got all wet, so when we got home we risked being lynched by Dino.

Aunt Maria

The exact date of the arrival of aunt Maria to Cervia from Sicily is not sure because my memories are confused. Based on a single photo made with the *chef* cook of the Polish battalion in the summer at Villa Angelina and some vague memories I would say that aunt Maria had arrived in Cervia towards the winter of 1945. I remember having slept in the big bed of the guest room together aunt Maria almost the entire second winter, then I remember that I attended first grade in the public school of Via Roma in Cervia. The Poles continued to occupy Romagna (let's not forget that we were the old enemies) to maintain order, until the late autumn of 1946. So I'm pretty sure that the photo with the Polish cook at Villa Angelina was taken in the summer of 1946. I was already a little older and had two long, thin legs. I held with my hand the hand of my *chef* friend and smiled. Instinctively all my life I have always kept myself close to the sources of food, which during the war was very scarce. We probably moved with my aunt to Villa Angelina of Milano Marittima in the early summer of 1946 and until the summer of 1947 we stayed there. I have no idea of the reasons of that transfer. The old women instead remained in Cervia. Most likely

I made the second grade in Milano Marittima, because I remember going to school with other children right there.

The Aunt, my mother's sister, was the person who had been my godmother and was very fond of her sister that she called Riri. She lived in Sicily because she had married a Sicilian, uncle Carmelo. My grandmother, always a bit extremist in all of her expressions, said that she had married a Saracen. Uncle Carmelo was captured by Allied troops in the Sicilian countryside, while still wearing the uniform of lieutenant of the Italian army and was sent to a concentration camp in Alexandria in Egypt where he was serving his sentence of four years for being a fascist.

The Aunt had waited for the hostilities to finish as a guest of friends in Lentini and probably around November of 1945 had arrived in Cervia by train from Sicily. Being 35 years older than me she was still a young woman of 41 year. When she arrived in Cervia there were other cries and desperate sobs because aunt Maria was inconsolable over the death of her Riri, who was her younger sister. I remember only small episodes of her presence the first winter and the fact that I moved into the guest room with her, with whom I shared the big bed. It was nice to sleep next to her and I felt happy. It was she who replaced my mother, taking care of me, and when Carmelo returned from captivity, she took me with them to Ferrara, because Carmelo had been transferred to the Land Registry Office of that city. Carmelo was a land surveyor.

Of Milano Marittima I have a few memories and a few pictures in my album, taken by my Aunt. There is a photo at the beach where I was still very thin. I remember that with some friends we had found a large loader of machine-gun ammunitions and had spent a day hammering the shells to recover balistite and then we blew up some bins in the pine forest in front of Villa Angelina. I remember that in the end we put in a bin the bullets that remained, along with balistite, and we did blow them up against a pine. Stuff like that could have killed us! Then I remember a fight with a child who claimed to be a communist and who had snatched from my apron the Republican badge, the ivy that my grandmother had given me. When I came home my Aunt scolded me and said: "Do not bring more beatings at home, because you have to learn how to solve your problems alone!"

A few years ago I passed by Villa Angelina and noticed that it has remained the same, a pale greenish color a bit faded. It is the only villa of all Milano Marittima

which has not been renovated or transformed into a guest house or hotel. I felt sorry for it.

Chapter 2

"We are above all what people think we are." Aharon Nathan

Ferrara

Blessed is the tourist who happens to visit Ferrara for the first time, because he will be struck by its beauty. This medieval city, surrounded by an intact circle of walls, with wide boulevards, with palaces steeped in history, with the castle of the Estensi family of excellent architecture and unique in the world, with several parks with old trees, became for seven and a half years my city. The city had in it an old Jewish ghetto as famous as that of Venice and its main street, Via Giovecca, owed its name to the Jewish community, called the Giudecca.

We moved to Ferrara in the summer of 1947. Refugee from Rimini, after three years in Cervia, then finally I found my ideal city. But of course I was too young to know it.

In a few years I became Ferrarese. The distance of Ferrara from Cervia is only ninety kilometers following the road, but by train is perhaps less. I didn't miss Cervia because each year, once finished school, I left by train with my Aunt or with some family friend, to go and spend the whole summer on the beach in Cervia, home of aunt Giovanna. With the money disbursed reluctantly by uncle Carmelo, aunt Giovanna had built in her Eden a large garage in which there were many folding camp beds of canvas for all of us, and sometimes even for a few guests. Uncle Carmelo always refused to build the house, because Cervia was not his territory and he had other plans for the future.

To begin with, aunt Maria had rented an apartment on the ground floor of a house in the countryside outside the city walls of Ferrara. There were fruit trees and vineyards and we had a large backyard. There were many chickens that were funny to me. Hens could get into the house whenever they wanted. Having no friends with whom to play I had built, with the pitch that I had found in a bin, some men of pitch and I had dressed them with paper dresses. The paper stuck to the pitch very well, so I could touch them without getting stuck on the pitch. One of my men, I can't remember his name, was my favorite hero and he always won. I had built a small

sword with which he destroyed his enemies. Then I had the aunt's bicycle, that being a woman bicycle, I could pedal it without sitting on the saddle that was too high for me. It was the bike that caused the unexplained accident that hurt my knee of the right leg, causing a deep wound and synovitis. Even today I can not reconstruct the events that caused the disaster. We ran with a little girl in the neighborhood, each with our own bike when I noticed that I was struck by the pedal in the right knee. At first it did not hurt me, but big trouble came after. I had a really high fever and the knee swelled up like a balloon. The uncles brought me to St. Anna hospital, at the end of Via Giovecca in Ferrara, where I was admitted and where I spent several days between life and death, because it had developed an infection. When the infection was quelled, they had to plaster my leg and I went around with a plaster, which had left open a window in order to treat the wound. I later learned that my uncle Carmelo wanted to take me back to aunt Giovanna and my grandmother, because to raise a child like me was too much responsibility for him, who in all his life had only raised cats. When I started school I was already healed, but my right leg remained weaker than the left and I walked like a duck, with the right foot even more twisted.

They enrolled me in the third class of an elementary school on the outskirts of Ferrara West, near where we lived. I remember little of that time, except I became integrated immediately and made friends with many children. I was so popular that, with the approval of the teacher, I was immediately appointed head of the class.

My task was to write on the blackboard the good and bad guys, when the teacher was missing for a few minutes. I had to draw a straight line dividing the board into two. Good to the right and bad to the left. I watched the children's behavior and wrote the names. Before the arrival of the teacher I cancelled quickly the bad guys, so when she entered the classroom, all were good. The difference between the local dialect of Cervia and that of Ferrara is not much, and especially the accent and the cadence of the way of speaking are very similar. The speech of Ferrara is typically Emiliano, with strong influences from Veneto and Mantua, while the Romagnolo dialect is special, with strange nasal sounds that resemble the French. Perhaps because I spoke almost like them or maybe because I was a bit exotic, the kids in my class seemed to be fascinated by me and by my personality. One of them gave me a nice revolver that fired cartridges of paper in exchange for an old ball almost deflated. A deal that made no sense to me that I have always been fascinated by weapons and I evaluated the revolver hundred times more of the ball. Even the

teacher treated me in a special way. Why? Because I was a stranger? I could guess the truth only much later.

Via Gian Battista Aleotti

After a few months uncle Carmelo, as veteran and civil servant, got an accommodation in a new village of council houses just built near Porta Mare. The village was located in a large plot of land between the old medieval walls and via Mortara. The new road that ran through the village was given the name Via Gian Battista Aleotti in honor of the great architect of Ferrara who lived between 1500 and 1600. The village consisted of five buildings of 4 floors each, each containing 20 small apartments. Over the years there were built two other buildings, more or less the same size, but of slightly different model. In the period of about a few years were placed about 140 families in as many apartments with reduced rent. We were one of those families. Our apartment was one of the smallest. It consisted of a bedroom, a bathroom, a large kitchen and a dining room. The aunt arranged for me in the dining room a bed that doubled as a sofa. Among those who had got homes there, were few Ferraresi and most of them were made up of immigrants from the South, Naples, Sicily, Puglia etc .. People displaced by the war who sought new opportunities and a better life in the North.

There were also many refugees from Dalmatia, fleeing the persecution of the Croats and Slovenes, which after the war were persecuting the population of Italian origin. The ethnic cleansing of the Slavs against the Italians had caused, as it was known later, 20,000 dead, whose bodies were later found in the famous *sinkholes* and *foibe* of the Karst.

Our building was at No. 2, the first on the right coming from via Mortara. The building like all others was divided into two parts of 10 apartments each, each with its staircase, which was accessed by two separate doors. Below the ground floor there were 20 cellars, one for each apartment. On the top floor there were two large terraces, one indoor and one outdoor that were used for drying the laundry. The buildings were the gems of post-war architecture, but from the first moment I did not like living there. I used to live in a big house on the seafront of Rimini, Pensione Primavera, or in the countryside of Verucchio and in the countryside of Ferrara West or in an old individual home in the historical center of Cervia, with the chance to go and play in Eden when it seemed fit to do so. That promiscuity, that uniformity, that horrible lack of individuality, the lack of privacy that life in public

housing meant was contrary to the lifestyle that I was used to. Everyone knew everything about everyone, everyone knew how were made of all the houses, all the cellars were equal and all the stairs and the apartments were symmetrical. From an early age I was perhaps a snob, but I loved my individuality and my independence.

All the families had children, which soon became integrated into the local substrate and became Ferraresi acquiring the local accent and acquiring the local way of speaking, while retaining small residues of the accents of their parents. For seven and a half years I grew up with those kids, I played with them and I remember them all very well, because I knew everything about everyone. There were no secrets between us.

My aunt had enrolled me in the third grade of the elementary school G.B. Guarini, of Via Bellaria, a transverse of Via Mortara, so I changed school in the middle of the school year. G.B. Guarini was a poet and writer who in 1567 entered the service of Alfonso II d'Este, in which he was court poet - along with Torquato Tasso of Ferrara, his contemporary poet and author of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*. In Ferrara, which has remained almost intact since the Middle Ages, one breathed medieval history everywhere and especially in public schools. The first few days my Aunt accompanied me to school and picked me up, but then, along with other children, I used to go walking alone, because the road was straight and not very dangerous. There was the sidewalk on both sides and in those days there was very little traffic on the streets of Ferrara. The trolley bus, coming from the city center, crossed in both directions via Mortara and in Porta Mare it turned around and came back.

To go to school I could take the trolley bus, but it wasn't worth it because the walk was maybe only about 600 meters. I immediately integrated well in the new school. The first year in third class we had a female teacher, but a year later, in the fourth class we passed with the teacher Pedrocchi for two years. Unfortunately I remember very few of the events of those days, but one event a bit sad happened when I was in fourth grade.

A visit to the Ghetto

I needed new shoes for the winter, so with aunt Maria we took the trolley bus into town, to go and buy them in a shop of the old Ghetto, which the Aunt thought made good prices. Ferrara has preserved a great medieval Ghetto, which occupies most of

the old city, because the Jews expelled from Spain were received with open arms by the Este family, lords of Ferrara.

The Jews, with their business acumen and their financial ability, had contributed greatly to create good trade relations with the Middle East and the Venetian Republic, greatly enriching the Estes. It could be said that Ferrara in the Middle Ages had become a city where the Jewish and the Christian culture lived together in harmony and were they integrated with each other. At the time of my arrival, despite the persecutions of the fascists and Nazis, there were still many shops run by Jews.

We entered a long, narrow alley flanked by an ancient arcade and found the shop that my aunt wanted. My aunt bought me a beautiful pair of brown shoes, with crepe soles, two numbers larger than needed for growth. Throughout childhood I have always worn shoes two sizes too big for what I needed, with the excuse of the future growth. In addition to the injuries to the foot and right knee, this has helped me to always walk like a duck and make my feet grow today to number 47.

Once made the deal, with the new shoes to walk on, we went to the square to visit the beautiful Gothic Cathedral of Ferrara, St George, one of the most beautiful monuments still intact of the Italian architecture. The floor of the church, that over time has sunk below the level of the square, is several meters below the level of the river Pò, which runs a few kilometers north of Ferrara. Miraculously the Pò never broke the river banks flooding Ferrara, which seems to have been protected by her patron saint St George (*San Zorz* in dialect) to the present day.

Inside the cathedral we read the inscription of Italian architect Nicolao written in vulgar Italian, first record of vulgar Italian in history:

“ Lo millecentotrentacenque nato,
fò questo templo a San Gorgio dicato,
da Glelmo ciptadin per lo so amore,
e mea fu l’opra, Nicolao scoltore. “

Leaving the cathedral my Aunt took me to visit, a few hundred meters away, the synagogue of Via Mazzini that since 1485 the rich Roman banker Ser Samuel Melli had purchased and donated to the Jewish community of Ferrara. On the wall outside the synagogue the aunt showed me a marble plaque with the names of the Jews killed by the Nazis.

" Massimo. You can see that there are three Melli's among the names of those killed in concentration camps. "She said, pointing her finger.

" Why ? "I asked.

"Because they were Jews. Luckily you are a Christian ... "concluded my aunt.

Seeing my name written on that plaque, along with Ferrara's victims of the Nazis, I was very impressed and that caused my curiosity and my great interest for the Jewish world that continues to this very day.



The synagogue of Via Mazzini with headstones of the fallen Jews

The Montagnone

Ferrara is built on a flat alluvial plain, about 50 km from the Po delta and the Adriatic sea. For this reason, an imposing building as its medieval walls, high up to six to ten meters, appeared to us as a great mountain, in fact we called the walls:

Montagnone. When it was snowing we were ready to go with the sledges to slide to the Montagnone, which was only a few meters from our homes. In the summer, we could slide on the grass of its slopes, or play football on its esplanade. Beyond our houses, across the via Porta Mare, the walls continued with the walls of the Angels and their bastion, perhaps more than 10 meters high. Sometimes we ventured in that direction to go to steal the jujubes in the garden near the Jewish cemetery, which was located on the city side within the city walls or to steal the green plums in the garden at the foot of the walls, on the other side, outside the city. A test of courage consisted in entering the dark tunnel that was under the bastion, but few could exceed ten meters into the tunnel and then they ran away screaming. The

walls of Ferrara were our hunting grounds for lizards and the site of many of our adventures.

All our toys were manufactured by ourselves with wood and nails, including sledges. I had an elastic sling, made by myself with the fork of a tree, which I always carried in my pocket, just in case. My best friends were Paolo Sisini who lived in my own front door and in my own building and Donato, whose family name I don't remember because for some reason I called him *Dunada*, who lived in the next building. With Paolo and Dunada, we used to race on foot with the other children of via Aleotti, around the four corners of via Mortara, via Porta Mare, then into the road that ran along the walls and the finish line was in via Gian Battista Aleotti. We called the race the Tour of Italy. Paul was tall and blond, with blue eyes, a real example of the Celtic race who had lived on the Po plain before the Romans arrived. He was a year older than us and very athletic and he always won. And I and Dunada, we already gave up on the corner of via Porta Mare and we had to stop to drink to recover our strength. In turn I or Dunada we came last. We had invented the solution to bring bottles of what we called "*rigurgita*", that is, fresh water to drink, so we could keep running while drinking. But we were all the same useless.

Me and Dunada however we were strong with racing cars, in the race that we were running on the sidewalks around the buildings. The race was called the *Mille Miglia*. Who drove out of the road, that is, out of the sidewalk, had to go back to the starting point. My red racing car, that I had baptized *Nuvolari*, was running straight and I almost always won. Dunada had a green sedan, which sped very straight too, so sometimes he won. There was a child whose name was Dando, who owned a large collection of racing cars. One day he said: "Massimo, come with me to via Giovecca, let's go to Mr. Pesaro, because I want to buy some other cars."

I said, "Fine!" And I followed him to Pesaro, a Jew who was selling toys of all kinds. His shop smelled of rubber because of all the rubber balls that he used to sell.

Dando asked to see the cars and Pesaro took out of the display window some of them, which Dando began to study in detail. When Mr. Pesaro was distracted, Dando tucked one in his pocket and then returned the others to Pesaro, which put them back in their place without realizing that one was missing. Dando said: "There is none that I like!" And left the store with me that I wanted to sink underground with shame. I was appalled and asked: "All your cars have been stolen? "

"Well, sometimes I will buy one. Pesaro is full of so much money! "Dando despite having many cars, never won. I wondered: "Who knows what will happen to him when he will grow up? Maybe he will end up on the cross like the thief Chilàz.. "

The spiders and lizards

In the Garden of Eden I had become specialized in races with snails. I collected snails around the garden after the rain and put them on a line at the beginning of the large wooden table that was fixed under the pergola. The snail that reached first the end of the table, won. I was directing the race with a long pine needle, pricking the flanks of the snails to make them go to the finish line without deviation. Their tendency was to be disobedient and wanted to go about their business. My favorite was a snail with a house darker than the others and that ran fast, but had a tendency to want to go where she wanted to go, and often wanted to go back, so I was pricking and encouraged her in every way to make her win. I was not a racing judge famous for my impartiality. Within a few months I learned almost everything that there was to learn about the snails and their reproductive system, how their eggs were produced and how functioned the long horns on top of which were their eyes.

In Ferrara instead I specialized in spiders and lizards. I liked to put on a straw hat like the one used by colonial explorers and go around exploring armed with a stick.

Around the buildings of Via Aleotti there were vacant lots full of hairy spiders, big and black. I put them in cages that I had built with clay found in the river sand that was used by the masons to mix cement. There was glass everywhere, even pieces of glass well-squared, left over from when the carpenters had put the glass in the windows of the houses. There was also a lot of wood around with which I could build all the cages I wanted. Those with glass allowed me to observe the behavior of spiders. The building material was not lacking, because the last two blocks of flats of the via G.B. Aleotti were still under construction and it took them a couple of years to be completed. On the medieval walls I went along with Dunada to catch lizards. That was not an easy task, but sometimes we could catch them. I put them also in a cage, sometimes together with spiders. I had observed that spiders attacked the lizards, if they were small, biting them in the neck and killing them with their poison. If the lizards were big, like male-lizards that we call *ramarri*, it was they who attacked the spiders and ate them with one single bite.

Both myself and Dunada we kept away from the many females, who were nasty and bitchy and always threatened us to go and tell what we were doing to our parents. They were also always ready to criticize. They gathered in groups of four or five and were giggling among themselves and pointing the finger at us. Beside my apartment on the ground floor lived the two sisters Valenziano, Anna and Lucia, from Puglia. Anna was a year older than me but Lucia had a couple of years younger than me. Those bitches of the neighborhood girls had spread the lie that I was engaged to Lucia, and teased me with their chants, and for me Lucia was only a nuisance. Instead, my favorite was Pina, a pretty brunette of my same age who lived in the same block as Dunada. I loved watching her from a distance and when she approached me, I ran away. One day Pina came up to me and told me: "You know Massimo, when I grow up I want to become Mrs. Melli." I got all red and ran away without saying a word, but since then I knew that Pina had a soft spot for me. When we ran the Tour of Italy around the square of Porta Mare, it was she who applauded me most of all, although I came last to the finish line.

Mickey and the Commendator Faggioli

The first summer after we moved to Ferrara, I returned to Cervia with aunt Maria for the summer holidays that lasted three months. My Aunt after taking me to Cervia, a few days later returned to Ferrara. At the Eden there was intense preparations and work on the construction of the garage, so we went with aunt Giovanna everyday to Viale Pola and spent the day there. My grandmother stayed home in via Mazzini, however at midday she joined us at the Eden slowly, with her walking stick, bringing lunch from home, that we ate together in the garden. After lunch, the old women lay in the shade to take a nap on the folding camp beds that my aunt kept in the shed. Then in the evening we came back together to via Mazzini for dinner. In the Eden I was never bored because I had many snails and insects to study. One day I found a kitten under the shed, young but not a small baby. He could probably be a couple of months old because he was already able to move around by himself and if one tried to catch him, he ran and hid under the shed. I managed to catch him and started to stroke him. He was a gray kitten with white paws and a white spot on his chest. I asked aunt **Giovanna**: "Can I keep him? " " Sure, but you will see that his mom will come back to get him. "

I continued to stroke the kitten and he began to purr. The aunt said: "Tomorrow we bring milk, so if he's still here, we will give him something to eat."

After a while, I let him go and the kitten ran to hide under the shed, but without haste. The next day the kitten was still there, so we filled a saucer of milk with a little bread crumbs soaked in milk. The kitten ate everything and eventually licked his whiskers satisfied. His mother was never to be seen. "Obviously she is dead ... and he is an orphan." Commented my grandmother, and I thought: "Like me!"

All summer I continued to feed the kitten and he kept growing and became my cat. I gave him the name Mickey, from Mickey Mouse, and when I returned back to Ferrara in late summer aunt Maria, who liked cats, agreed to take him with us. So even Mickey became a Ferrarese. At the Eden then I had a little friend, that when I arrived came running toward me to the gate. Even in Ferrara Mickey was coming towards me meowing of joy with his big tail raised like a flag, up to the beginning of Via Gian Battista Aleotti, when I came home from school.

That summer there was also a welcome visit the Commendator Faggioli, CEO of SITA, the buses that were carrying passengers between Florence and the beaches of Romagna, through the Futa Pass of the the Tuscan-Romagnolo Appennine. Aunt Giovanna hosted him for two nights in the guest room, but during the day we always went to the Eden to eat under the pergola. It was evident that the Aunt was in love with him, of course a platonic love, because the Commendator Faggioli was a bit younger than her and had never been married and probably was not interested in women. He had a nice belly, testifying that he was a good eater and he liked the Sangiovese wine. We made some great lunches and Mickey was very happy because in addition to milk, he even got spaghetti with meat sauce. The Commendatore wore axillary pants, all the way to his chest, with suspenders. With the Aunt there were some colossal laughters. After a few glasses, the Aunt began to recite her famous poems, and the Commendatore applauded. My grandmother joined the party, also slightly intoxicated, and she applauded, even though she was not a poet. The only poem she had written was her spiritual testament, which I had learned by heart and that she never failed to pull out at every opportunity:

From my mother the peasant zest,

From my father the heart.

I collected a grain of grapes,

I was giving away a basket.

Sometimes all, taken from the euphoria, sang a piece of Italian Opera and the Commendatore sang very well with a soprano voice, although apparently he was a man.

Although my grandmother and aunt Giovanna got along very well, they had two different personalities. Aunt Giovanna when she was young, was maid of honor of Donna Albina, the aunt of Mussolini, and often spent the winter in Rome to keep her company because Donna Albina was an old peasant woman from Romagna and in Rome she felt alone and disoriented. The Aunt had also written her famous poem to the Duce:

Hail newborn Caesar,

Poet elect,

You sang to the Motherland

The love perfect!

My grandmother was instead a Republican, as her father Mingon of Allegri, and Mazziniana to the core, so she was also anti-fascist. When Mussolini came to Cervia to inaugurate the port-channel, she came up to his car and shook his arm tightly and said: "Mussolini, mercy for our poor Italia!" And the Duce who had become pale replied: "Don't be afraid, woman ! "

Every time she had drunk, my grandmother told us the same story.

The school teacher Pedrocchi

In the class of the teacher Pedrocchi we were 30 students, 3 of whom were Jewish, at least so said the adults. When speaking of the Jews, our parents lowered their voice, put a hand over their mouth and seemed that they were telling stories of secrets. I still remember their names: Finzi, Minerbi and Vissoli. After visiting the Ghetto the aunt had told me that the Jews were different from us and that was the reason that they were killed by the Germans in concentration camps, but to be honest from the outside I did not see anything that distinguished Jewish children from other children and also their names and surnames seemed absolutely normal for Italians. It took years before I began to ask myself sensible questions about the Jews and at that time, in fourth grade, I had no questions to ask, even though a thought process had started that led me at a young age to my first heresy.

One day the teacher Pedrocchi read the famous poem by Carducci: *the tree to which you stretched your little girl's hand ...* and the teacher started to cry because his little daughter had died of typhus, precisely because of the war. Crying, the teacher explained to us what had happened, and said that because of the war we had all our dead. He spoke briefly also of those that had died in Nazi concentration camps. In sympathy with the teacher, also I and Finzi, who had lost one of his parents in Auschwitz, burst into tears along with the teacher. The teacher wiped his tears and said: "How ugly is the war!" The other Jewish children had tears in their eyes and that day I felt spiritually close to them.

In fifth grade, my aunt Mary, fearing that I was behind with the lessons, sent me to private school to the teacher Pedrocchi, who lived with his wife and a child of my age on the top floor of an old eighteenth-century house in via Montebello, near the school. The teacher was a distinct person, a handsome, tall and noble-looking man, of an excellent Torinese family. Teachers like him do not exist anymore. Thus I had a chance to know him intimately and I think he had great respect for me. In fifth grade he had given me a 9 for the essay that I wrote after visiting the reptile exhibition with the class. I've always been fascinated by snakes and therefore I wrote a great essay to describe the exhibition of the reptiles. For me it was easy to write about reptiles and from that day the teacher was convinced that I was writing well. I realized that time that sometimes it's only an event of chance that causes a person to be judged by others better or worse. If the others think you are good, then you're good.



The elementary school G.B. Guarini

The School of via Borgoleoni

In Ferrara there were two famous schools: mine was in via Borgoleoni, a street that started from the Este Castle and continued in a northerly direction to Via Porta Mare. The second school was in via Bersaglieri del Pò, which started in the middle of via Giovecca and from there continued southwards. Finzi and Mirerbi came with me to via Borgoleoni while Vissoli went to via Bersaglieri del Pò, as it was right near his home and the kosher butcher shop of his father who was supplying meat to the Jews. Even in middle school our class consisted of about 30 students, of whom three were Jews: Finzi, Minerbi and Ottolenghi, this last was a boy who lived a stone's throw away from our school in via Borgoleoni, in an old house with courtyard.

The first days of school, the headmaster Adolfina Melloni, called the four of us : Finzi, Minerbi, Ottolenghi and I, to come to the Presidency to hand over to us some orange envelopes that we took home to our parents, to confirm whether they wanted that we should be exonerated from the hour of religion. My Aunt read the letter and said: "Maybe the headmaster, because of your last name, thought that you were a Jew. But you are a Christian and a bit of religion is good for you." So the answer was yes, that I wanted to stay for the hour of religion. I threw the letter away with the answer and the headmaster forgot to ask for it.

Finzi, Minerbi and Ottolenghi left the class during religion hour and went to the home of Ottolenghi to play football in his large backyard. I remained in class, but I found that the priest, Don Maddalena, was not upset if I went out with the others and did not ask any questions. So sometimes, when the weather was nice, I went out with the others and I joined them to go to play football. It was then that Ottolenghi taught me all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which I then used to write secret messages.

At school I was good at drawing and in Italian, but I was a disaster in gymnastics because of my twisted foot and the bad knee. I was not even good at arithmetic, probably because no one had explained to me well the logic of numbers and especially the logic of *zero*. Only now as an old man, I finally understand *zero*. During the hour of religion I was the terror of the priest, to whom I was always asking weird questions that he hesitated to answer. "If God is Pure Spirit, it means that his body is zero? "" Yes, of course, God has no body. "Answered Don Maddalena. "Then it is as He didn't exist." I pressed him. I once asked him: "God is a Christian or a Jew?" And

Don Maddalena patiently replied that God was not religious, the religious ones were we, who tried to reach him with our prayers.

The Melli were all Jews in Ferrara. My doctor, Dr. Melli, who came to visit me all the way to my home by bicycle when I was sick, was a Jew. The famous painter Roberto Melli was a Jew. The synagogue of Ferrara had been given to the Jews by Samuel Melli, a Jewish banker. Everyone knew that the Melli were Jews and when they pronounced my last name, the people of Ferrara lowered their voice, put their hand over their mouth and secretly looking at me thought: "He's definitely a Jew!" As if to be a Jew were a deadly disease or a fault.

And thus I was convinced that if the others think that you are Jew, then you are Jew. Everyone is what he shows to be.

It was around that time that I started to ask the first questions about the Jews, because somehow I felt part of the group that came out of the class during the hour of religion and secretly I felt I belonged to them, by right of birth as Melli.

Chapter 3

"God can be Pure Spirit only if His body is made of infinite zeros joined together to create His unity." The Kabbalist Melli, that's me.

Ragusa and Sicily

The fate that had caused me to be born in Rimini wanted that when I was 15 1/2 year old Uncle Carmelo, that I too began to call "the Saracen", asked a transfer to Sicily. So from Ferrara, my hometown, I had to move to Ragusa, Sicily. (Remember what the Prophet Amos had said: *"And you will go wandering from sea to sea."*)

Jump the period of my youth, because they are the usual useless crap, typical of adolescents, such as the discovery of sex and rebellion against the school and the parents, which in my case were not even my parents. The stories of that period don't serve the purpose of this memorial, to be delivered to the Judge.

I had seen my father for the last time when he came in a hurry to greet me in Ferrara before leaving for Morocco. The next time I saw him again when I went to visit him in Morocco ten years later, when I was already eighteen. My father,

however, wrote long letters full of difficult words, urging me to sacrifice with constant study, because only through study one reaches the noblest objectives.

The Saracen read the letters and shook his head, saying: "All that is bullshit that your father is telling you! Only those who are smart win in life." And he looked at me with pity, thinking that I was not smart enough.

After 7 and a half years of my life in the city of Ferrara, the Saracen decided he had had enough of living in the Pò Valley, with its fog and its autumn rain, with its cold and rainy winters, so he asked a transfer to Ragusa, and being the only one in Italy that wanted to be transferred to that distant land lost in the Iblei Mountains, he managed to be transferred. I had repeated the first year of high school in Ferrara, because along with 20 other classmates, all in adolescent crisis, I had flunked the examination.

That year of the flunking I had discovered another trick: not only I avoided the boring lessons of religion joining my Jewish friends, but I avoided also all the other lessons and instead of going to school, I used to play football. Mickey had died young about two years earlier and I had buried him, with a moving funeral ceremony along with Dunada and Paolo Sisini, in the garden of our building. He had been a victim of his thirst for adventures, and had died from injuries sustained in a battle with a bull dog. He had returned home battered and after two days of agony was dead. According to the *priests*, he would not go to heaven, because he was a cat and had no soul, in addition to not being baptized. But I thought: shit, a just God will open the doors of heaven for him. It will be you *priests*, black crows of ill omen, that God will leave out!

That was another of my many heresies.

The second year, by repeating the class, I passed with flying colors, but now I had grown up even in the brain, as well as in other parts of the body, having grown 20 centimeters in one year, of course in height and not in other parts that grew a little less.

Pina had found a boy friend that was hanging around with her, the son of the butcher of Via Mortara whose name I erased from my memory, who was making a racket riding his shiny new Rumi motorcycle. They stood for hours to talk like two birds sitting on the wall under my windows and me, more than anger, I felt sorry. After two years I learned from Paolo Sisini, when I returned from Sicily to Ferrara for

the holidays, that he, poor boy, had died crashing into a tree with his Rumi on the road of Copparo, a few kilometers from Ferrara. Poor Pina, I thought, another possible husband faded in a short time, before age 17.

Arriving in Ragusa, for one long year I sent murderous glances in the direction of the Saracen until, after discovering the beauties of the Sicilian sea, I got used to it and began to settle down in Sicily. I soon created an environment there, although it was *home of the Devil*, as my grandmother used to say. Indeed the *home of the Devil* had some merit, if only the countryside and the sea were considered, and no small account, the climate. For all the 3 years that I lived in Ragusa, I've never owned a coat and I've never felt the need for one. If it was raining I had a light waterproof coat of some kind of plastic, that sheltered me from the rain.

In Ragusa, in my class there were no Jews. Our grammar school was located at the bottom of the district of Carmine which overlooked the valley that divided Ragusa from Ragusa Ibla.

In Ragusa I attended the second year of high school and was promoted with flying colors, but the following year, the situation with the Saracen had become so unbearable that I wrote to my father to let me come to Morocco or to send me to a college somewhere.

After lengthy discussions and negotiations, my aunt enrolled me at Bishop's College Atestino, Este, a boarding school run by the Jesuits. It was at this college that after months of religious brainwashing, I created the foundations for all my most important heresies.

In Ragusa I had good friends, including Frank Pezzino, Frank Sgarioto and Globo, all three of them my classmates. Sgarioto was also my benchmate. All three were instrumental in the process of gestation and development of many of my heresies. They too agreed with me on almost everything.

The Bishop's College Atestino

When I arrived in Este, in the Veneto region of Northern Italy, to begin third grade of high school there, the grim gesuit Rector, a true descendant of the Inquisitors of Sant 'Ignazio of Loyola, sent for me and gave me a lecture. He was an Emilano and

evidently had knowledge of the Melli, who had been Rabbis of Parma and Mantua and Venice and Trieste:

"... Melli. Hem! I see that your origins and your roots from Romagna, which has always been the most anticlerical region of Italy, does not promise anything good. Here you have to study and to be good and every morning there is the Holy Mass and the Rosary every night. Try not to overdo it, otherwise you're out We understand each other? "I did not answer and did not say yes or no and I was standing straight by him and I held my tongue. "I fell from the frying pan to the fire of Hell..." I thought.

In college I became immediately friend with those who thought like me: Pradella the skinny boy of Mantua, my faithful squire with whom we stole a cake, Rebecchi, called Rebe from Padua and Camuffo, called Cam, like the son of Noah, from Chioggia. Because of his genetic program, Camuffo was already an alcoholic at the age of 16 years. When the fence of the college collapsed, at night the three of us (without Pradella that was too young) we sneaked out through the fence and went out to drink a quiet *grappa* in an inn of Este, who turned a blind eye on our young age. And we were never discovered. We were not the only ones to break the strict rules of the college.

Older kids at night were fucking (according to them) the young waitresses of the college, who worked in the laundry or in the cafeteria, and boasted their exploits during the hour of evening recreation. Who knows if it was true or if only it was an erotic dream of their sinful life. Even they, as long as I know, were never caught in the act while I was in the college. Human nature evidently did not lend itself to being indoctrinated by the Jesuits.

Our favorite was the priest Don Guerrino, a true saint, who always joked with us and laughed even when we said humming, to warn of the arrival of a fellow priest: "Watch out for the black cop ..." Or if we were saying: do not make *priestly* tricks! Don Guerrino was laughing with us.

My first heresy that had a flawless foundation was that I did not believe in the dogma of the Virgin. The prayer said: "I believe in God Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son, born of the Virgin Mary" This was where the first problem was. Now, being a big boy, I knew how the children are born, and I was wondering how was that possible? I could accept a divine miracle

that could cause a virgin to be the mother of the son of God, but I could not believe the dogma that a Pope had recently decreed that she had remained inviolate, even after having several children.

In the Gospel I found evidence that Jesus had brothers and sisters. I discovered that everything was evident in Matthew 12: 46-47 where it was written: *while He was still speaking to the crowd, His mother and His brothers were outside trying to talk to Him. Someone said: " Behold, thy mother and thy brethren, are seeking to speak."*

So I, when I recited the *creed* had stopped to say *virgin*, after Mary.

Then after the spring retreat on the Euganean Hills, the Dominican friar who was preaching to us managed to convince me of the existence of God, because he made the analogy to a spider, who was using his web to come down from heaven, then, once he reached the Earth he cut the web and forgot that he came down from heaven. So like that spider, said the friar, we have forgotten that generation after generation we came from God. If we go back to the beginning of the Universe, we find God alone. Well then, I guess, I had maintained my belief in God and in the Holy Spirit, but I was not sure about Jesus. In other words I had strong doubts about the Trinity. I adhered to the heresy of Ario, who said that the Trinity had existed only from the year zero of the Christian era, when Jesus was born, since before he was born, there was only the Father and the Holy Spirit. When I returned to Ragusa, after the end of the school year, obliged to repeat the latin and mathematics exams in October, with my friends of Ragusa, Pezzino, Sgarioto and Globo, I started doubting also the doctrine of creation out of nothing by a God that was Pure Spirit . How was that possible? It was a concept contrary to Einstein's Theory of Relativity. You could create matter from energy, but not starting from the Spirit, although the Spirit was Pure. That was the greatest of all my heresies.

After being promoted in the October' exams and after celebrating with Rebe and Cam, who had also to repeat their exams (Pradella was promoted in July) the Rector gave me a letter to be delivered to my Aunt where it was written: "Massimo Melli, is an individual refractory to every bond of discipline, despite all our efforts. We are sorry to announce to the family that we can no longer accept Massimo for next year." I thought:" Great, so maybe my Dad will take me with him to Morocco."

But it was not so, and after an exchange of excited letters, my Aunt welcomed me back to her house in Ragusa, where I remained for the next two years to complete

high school. Back in Ragusa I spent an entire year, in fourth grade, to study the Bible, to document my theories.

The office of Franco Pezzino

In the so-called "office" of Pezzino was born my final heresy and perhaps the most important one: we decided that God was immortal, but not omnipotent. Globo, who by nature was always at the opposition, also agreed on that. But let's proceed step by step, first of all by reconstructing the atmosphere of that "Office" where the great heresy was born. Pezzino was the son of the director of INPS of Ragusa and as such he lived on the seventh floor of the building of INPS into two apartments joined together. Pezzino had taken for himself a large room and had told his mother: "Don't you make any problems, this is my private quarters. You get the hell out of here, I'm in charge here." And his mother, smiling as a good servant of her children, had obeyed.

In his study he had his big turntable, the square table for our card games and his desk. There were also many old armchairs. We would gather every afternoon after lunch to spend an hour waiting to go to the movies free of charge, because both me and Pezzino we had free access to all cinemas of Ragusa and each one of us could bring a friend for free.

The trilemma we had discussed for weeks was as follows: either God is not alone, but there is also a god of evil, that is Satan, or if it's just Him, He is guilty of the evil on Earth. The third alternative was that God was not guilty of evil, because He was not all-powerful.

This last was the winning thesis. The fault was not of God, because all decisions on the future of men and the events that occurred in the Universe were caused by an abstract force, that God did not control: The Probability. I had studied in detail the Book of Job, which discussed in detail the subject of evil on Earth, and I concluded that this was a question that in ancient times had never been answered. Except now, with modern scientific progress, things had changed.

It was only after many years later that I realized what was the problem. With the quantum theory and the equation of Erwin Schrödinger who ruled the probabilistic behavior of reality, I finally realized that it was the function Ψ the cause of evil. The

function Ψ was the one who ruled the future and it was she who was in command, not God. So it was after that discovery that for the rest of my life I became the Kabbalist that I still am today. Since the Jewish word Kabbalah means tradition, handed down from father to son or from master to disciple among the Jews, I wanted to show that, like the spider came down from heaven with his web, I descended from my Jewish ancestors who received the revelation in the scriptures.

According to the scriptures, God is one and that is the truth that only late in life, towards the age of seventy, I was able to prove mathematically. God must exist to be not only Spirit and Thought, but also Substance. And the Substance is to be made up of atoms of space-time forming an invisible *ether* from which He created the Universe. The ether possesses existence and potential energy. My Kabbalistic discovery is that the sum of infinite zeros creates the One, that is God.

My kabbalistic writings are contained in this collection of unreal short stories and in my geometrical essays and to prove that I am authorized to deal with these issues, I have documented my Jewish origins from three vital clues, which I will expose below.

Clues

The first clue comes from the site: [in my memoria.com](http://inmy memoria.com).

Most Melli who died in Ferrara (over 90%) were buried in the Israelite cemetery. Very few others were buried in the Christian Cemetery named Monumental Certosa. My paternal grandparents were from Imola and the brother of my father, Ernesto, called Raphael was sure of the Jewish origin of the family.

The second clue comes from the site: Jewish Encyclopedia.com

MELLI:

By: Gotthard Deutsch and M. Seligsohn

Summary

- Eliezer Melli:
- Elijah ben Abraham Melli:
- Jehiel Melli:

- Phinehas Elijah ben Elijah Zemah Melli:
- Zemah Elijah b. Phinehas Elijah Melli:

Family of scholars and rabbis which derives its name from Melli, an Italian village in the province of Mantova. The family can be traced back to the fifteenth century (1400).

Eliezer Melli:

Rabbi of Venice in the sixteenth century. He is mentioned in the *responsa* of Moses Provencal (No. 194).

Elijah ben Abraham Melli:

The first known member of the family; Rabbi of Parma, in the second half of the fifteenth century. Among the *responsa*, Italian manuscript in possession of Mortara, there is one of Elijah Melli, directed (1470) to Joseph Colon, regarding the divorce of a baptized Jew. It was published in Parma, where Melli was a rabbi. Attached to it is the response of Joseph Colon with the approval of the bill of divorce.

Jehiel Melli:

Rabbi of Mantua in the early seventeenth century; author of "Tappuḥe Zahab" (Mantua, 1623), an extract from the book of Elijah de Vidas' religious ethics, "Reshit Hokhmah"; additions are records relating to ritual laws. It was published with "Hanhagot" of Asher ben Jehiel by the son in law of Melli, David Portaleone.

Phinehas Elijah ben Elijah Zemah Melli:

Rabbi of Mantua in the sixteenth century. He graduated from Chief Rabbi on January 15, 1581. He distinguished himself as a Talmudist, and is quoted by Lampronti ("Pahad Yizhak" iv. 24) and Moses Provencal (*Responsa*, n. 97, 112). The *Responsum* n. 231 of 260 *responsa* of Italian rabbis is his.

Zemah Elijah b. Phinehas Elijah Melli:

Rabbi of Mantua in the sixteenth century. He graduated from chief rabbi the same day as his father. His Responsa, addressed to various contemporaries, are among the manuscripts in the possession of Mortara.

In addition to such rabbis is well-known the financier Ser Samuel Melli who had donated the synagogue to the Jewish community of Ferrara in 1485.

Finally there was the rabbi of Trieste Sabato (Saturday) Melli, maternal grandfather of the writer Italo Svevo.

Rav Sabato Raffaele Melli, who was born in Ferrara on 11/21/1825.

He died in Trieste on 08/15/1907.



Saturday Melli

The third clue comes from these calculations, easy to control.

There are about 664 MELLI families in Italy basing the calculation on fixed telephones. If all the households have the landline telephone and if every family consists of 3.3 people (based on the average for Italian families in 1971, before the explosion of divorces occurred in recent years that has dropped this average to 2.4 today), there would be more or less 2,191 Melli in Italy and adding the 10% that does not have the landline you reach about 2400 Melli. If the Melli begin with the two grandfathers of Samuel Melli in 1300, and after seven centuries were multiplied at a plausible rate of 1.4 children per woman for 23 generations (the Jews were persecuted and forced to live in poor conditions with high infant mortality) there would be today 2372 Melli, all Jews in Italy. This suggests that the strain of Melli,

consisting of a few individuals came to Italy in 1300 and multiplied at the pace of 2 to the power of 1.4 from the middle ages would become after 23 generations all the Melli living today in Italy, that is, 2,372, a figure almost equal to the estimate of 2,400 obtained by assigning a landline telephone every 3.3 Melli. Because the Melli that remained Jews, after the Holocaust and the fascist persecution, are a minority in Italy, (perhaps only a few hundred), it follows that all other Melli living today in Italy are most likely the descendants of those few Jews of 1300, which over the centuries have converted to Catholicism to escape persecution.

In comparison to the number of Melli, in Italy there are 624 families with the surname Levi (a typical Jewish name). All Levi, Jews or Christians, are certainly descendants of the biblical Levites.

The book of Exodus starts with these words: *And these were the names of the children of Israel that went (as refugees) to Egypt*, because names and genealogies have been always very important in the History of the Jews.

I'm sorry for this long dissertation, but it was necessary to prove to the Judge that I am authorized to be a Kabbalist and to interpret the Holy Scriptures sent by the Holy Spirit to the Jews.