

Nothing really matters.

Stanislav did not just speak Italian perfectly, but also English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Despite the fact he failed to complete his degree, he could correctly translate Greek and Latin having studied at a seminary. In spite of his talents, he became a manual labourer, kneading asbestos, dirtying his hands, destroying his lungs.

His parents forced him to work where he did. He had to earn a crust to pay for the house they were building and the further education of their sixth and final child, who became a priest and eventually doctor. The baby of the family was given everything, even the compulsory leather swivel chair.

He met Mirella two years after starting work. Barely an adult he married her, although they had barely eleven thousand lire between them and debts, some not being their own. They also had many dreams. He wanted to have a career elsewhere, but not the drive to accomplish it.

It was a sleepy afternoon in June 1992, when we heard the news - the 19th to be exact. My Dad Stanic had just turned fifty. There he was, bare-chested seated on a stool with a needle stuck his ribs. While I stood at the door, I could hear him joking away as the bloody yellow liquid drained into a bag.

When he returned home from his last mountain trek, he had been as white as a sheet, so my mother, a nurse, had insisted he'd get his chest examined. She said, "You can't breathe, you're always tired, you can't go on like this ". It was no mean feat, getting him to go for an X-ray, but after much persuasion he relented. The inevitable happened: a shadow was seen on his lungs.

I saw it too, because I had just completed my first year as a radiologist. The biopsy was clear – there were traces of asbestos. Stanic admitted to Mirella that he had worked with asbestos since he was a young, so there was little left to say. From that point on, we started our task to find someone willing to operate.

A consultant at Cro di Aviano told my mother to simply order a wooden box. But in Trieste, we found a more compassionate professional. After walking out of the operating theatre, the surgeon told us to be hopeful.

Dad started to come round as Fabio Casartelli won an Olympic gold at Barcelona. By then his brother Primario, who works in medicine, became interested in his case. He took all my Dad's medical records to a chemotherapist, but by then, he was starting to really suffer, losing hair and weight and forever vomiting.

We were not rich, not even comfortable, watching every penny. When a new pair of trousers or shirt was wanted there would be endless discussions that really would try the patience of a saint. We weren't privileged, having a life of toil and trouble to make ends meet, but no different from those around us.

My brother and I became adults, he graduating to begin a star-studded career, me to simply retain a bit of dignity. It was a godsend that we both worked as suddenly our household wanted for nothing: fine cuts of meat; the freshest fruit and vegetables. Stanislav and Mirella flew to Paris, for them a new experience. They visited Rome, Vienna, and Florence and even rented a mountain chalet for Christmas. But Dad was always cold. We did our level best to keep him warm by buying him a hi-tech pea green thermal jacket, a warm and cosy sheepskin coat, but to no avail.

At the end of 1994, my father took a turn for the worse and we hastily returned home. On the way, our old banger broke down. I suddenly felt poor again as the skies blackened and the snow made us shiver. We pulled out the toolbox and got to work, but thankfully a guardian angel came along. After one look under the bonnet, he got us on our way..

After that our home life was different and somewhat unnerving. We either ate behind his back, or when he wanted and slept when he did. We never left him alone. Our home became a hospital.

I finished studying but knew it would make no difference.

Stanislav would wait on the stairs for Mirella's return from work and when he was no longer able to do so, the landing, holding a glass with a half measure of white wine.

One March evening my Dad's heart started to beat irregularly. The ambulance arrived, its sirens blaring and lights flashing. The night was torn apart to the tune of its cooling fan cutting in and out. He was taken to hospital, indeed the very room his father had died in a few months earlier, being then moved to one that was squalid and cold. This became his second home.

Except when he thought the floor was a blanket of snow, where he could lay, he was cogent throughout, slowly and finally dying on the 17th March 1995. He was only 52. I watched him take his last breathe and then left. My mother squeezed his hand while my maternal grandmother and brother sat there shell-shocked. Eventually my brother stoically recovered and accompanied my mother and my father's body to the morgue.

There were no announcements or church service, but his more devout mother, accompanied by Primario, ostentatiously insisted on saying a pray for him in church. During his illness they had never visited him, but now gone, they didn't want to miss his final send off. Lifting the coffin veil, his mother placed a rosary inside my father's cold hands that already held a bunch of violets from my mother. I asked the funeral director to remove and dump the rosary. As he personally knew my father, he did so. He then sidled up to me to show me his palm which held the religious offering.

The funeral was packed. After a few words he was buried. I felt a pang of guilty relief because our nightmare, which had destroyed us, was now over.

A few months later, another ordeal commenced when the relatives of the killer mineral's victims got together and clamoured for justice. The media took an interest because of the impending legal action, but we felt our prospects of being successful were slight as, whether out of fear or friendship, did our solicitor.

After endlessly toiling away campaigning, my mother said enough was enough, possibly because her actions had generated so much maliciousness. The media always focused upon the sufferers and bereaved, which in turn attracted hangers on, hell bent on making a name for themselves. Everyone wanted justice but one that valued a person's life in monetary terms, a simple means to recompense those remaining.

Two days ago a trapped bird was crashing against walls and glass doors in an attempt to escape from a hospital corridor. By means of flapping sheets of paper, a good soul of a doctor and I ushered the bird towards an open door. It flew out. The last time I visited my Dad, a bird sat on his grave. Seeing me, he cautiously remained there until I left. This got me thinking.

If the media promotes good causes from around the world, I would demand the same. I started to mull over a show presented by Marco Paolini. At the end, he asks the audience if they know of any worthwhile campaigns that could do with further exposure, but only something novel.

Restraining myself, I told Paolini and his audience that we could start by treating each other a bit better, for how could we clamour for justice and solidarity while remaining indifferent to those around us?

Are the dead of one country different from another?

Is the illness and death of a Bangladeshi ship worker worth less because he strips asbestos from scrapped ships, by hand, simply to feed his family?

Is a child worth less because he simply dies of hunger?

Is a wrong against me worth more than that against you or do all wrongs have equal weight?

By standing up to those against me, am I not doing the same for those against you?

How can I ask for support from others when I don't offer any?

If I was a Buddhist, I would be certain that my prior actions would affect my ensuing Karma, as amazingly shown by hearing how a persecuted monk only became frightened when he ceased having pity on his persecutor.

It's only now I understand that man's necessary and indispensable laws are flawed, for until they also draw upon compassion, they will regretfully remain divisive. Campaigns against abuses of power - landfills, nuclear power and urban sprawl - will always only be instigated by a few pressure groups rather than the general public.

If the loss of a love one does not kindle an alternative then we are all lost and the bad guys have won.

. I would like to think that the bird I helped was perhaps my Dad , because if it wasn't, nothing really matters.

They came for the gypsies first,

I was delighted because they were thieves;

Then the Jews,

I kept quiet because they were unpleasant;

Then the homosexuals,

That was a load of my mind as they got on my nerve;

Then the communists,

I didn't say anything as I didn't vote for them;

Then they came for me,

And there was no one left to protest

Rebecca. Do you think we should reference this as it's so close to the original below?

When they came for the Jews, I did nothing, for I am not a Jew. When they came for the Socialists, I did nothing, for I am not a Socialist. When they came for the labour leaders, the homosexuals, the gypsies, I did nothing, for I am none of these.....

... and when they came for me, I was alone, there was no one to stand up for me.

-- Martin Niemoller, a Lutheran pastor from Nazi Germany