

Our first wedding anniversary.

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I've known Enzo from when he was forty. On leaving school, he started work at Monfalcone's shipyard and at twenty worked as a pipe fitter on board ship. After working on them for ten years, he took up the offer to do clerical work.

I didn't know the type of work he did when he was young, but I do know that he was tall and thin and when he was working on board ship as a pipe fitter, they asked him to work in the most confined spaces.

When we read in "the Piccolo" that widowers were taking action over asbestos, Enzo already ill, asked me to join in. I did so reluctantly as it seemed to presage the future. I joined the Monfalcone Association for Asbestos Exposees and even after Enzo is no longer here still campaign for them each month - there are new asbestos widows and the death toll is rising.

Before his illness, I had no idea that asbestos was hazardous, but gradually I became more and more aware of it as friends and acquaintances died, mainly men and almost all ex shipyard workers. It's just as well that I did not know then as much as I know now.

Enzo's real name is Vincenzo, but family and friends knew him by his nickname. We first got to know each other in 1981 and after living together for eighteen years then married. Against his will, his firm had already pensioned him off on medical grounds – he had been exposed to asbestos. He loved his work and by all accounts well respected by his workmates. He found it difficult to readjust so I soon after asked and got to go part-time – we wanted to be together more so that we could share what precious time remained as we had no idea what the future had in store for us.

Just six months after starting our new life Enzo started coughing.

Our first wedding anniversary was spent at the Aviano Oncology Centre. He was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a gift from a Hydra, the many headed Greek monster. But in this instance, the Hydra was made up of captains of industry and legislators that allowed this killer mineral to be used up until the last decade of the twentieth century.

A week before this he had had a second biopsy, because the first had erroneously shown no lung disease. Unfortunately, the results of the second biopsy coincide with our anniversary.

When I joined him in the hospital room, he said : "I've got some good and bad news – the good is that they've drained my lung , the bad I've got mesothelioma."

I replied: " Don't worry, we'll get over this." With this Enzo calmed down and recovered the rational behaviour he had had throughout his life.

Enzo understood his disease, what had caused it and what terrible path awaited him. Not once did he run down the shipyard, not once did he swear at it. In fact he loved his work so much that when he had to leave it, he was lost.

Being rational and decisive, he diligently followed his chemotherapy and other treatments. We left no stone unturned in exploring new cures for this disease, but unfortunately with mesothelioma, the medical community had and have simply seen any treatment as lost causes; and because Enzo was down to earth, we also never pursued them. Anyhow, the doctors in the end gave us no help, leaving us to fend for ourselves.

After a few months, the cancer had spread to his spine and he lost the use of his legs. Our local surgeons refused to operate on his spine as they considered such a procedure as being too risky, especially in respect with his breathing. So instead we decided that he'd enter a hospital in Verona. They operated and he started to walk again. He was overjoyed not only to be able get around again, but because he knew that without the operation, he would become incontinent.

So what can we draw from these events?

Is it acceptable that doctors refuse to operate because they consider that it's a waste of limited resources to enhance, for a few months more, a person's quality of life.

No it's not right and especially so when dealing with the tragedy that comes from asbestos. As the days go by, I feel this more and more.

My husband was discharged from hospital Maud Thursday, but after a day at home he was rushed to hospital with peritonitis. After this Enzo no longer wanted to be admitted to hospital again. Already taking morphine from the previous Christmas, he only used it when in excruciating pain, otherwise when he was up to it, he read, watched and read about films up to his final moments.

In July he died in his bed and with his family all around. Enzo wasn't religious, but on his bedside table he had a copy of the Apocryphal Gospels, its text he had read time and again over the last ten years since hearing Fabrizio de Andre' album "Good News".

If we leave aside the memories of our fleeting years spent together, Enzo has left me with a legacy of awareness and civic duty because his intuition foresaw the extent of the tragedy that is asbestos. He knew full well that he wasn't its last prophetic martyr.