

2 Narrative Poems by Chris Giovacchini

Pieces of My Father

1.

He's in the decisions made, while pruning fruit trees,
Cut that one out it's crossing,
Prune this one short, it will make fruit,
Top those, the fruit up high not practical,

He's there during grafting demonstrations,
Explaining choices amongst branch stock,
During the cut and split, with
The old butcher knife and hammer,
Big screw driver as a wedge,

While whittling the tips of the scions carefully,
Inserting, aligning them, taping,
He watches the daubing of black sealing putty,

He's in the waiting, for the push of Spring,
With delight and awe when they take,
Mild disappointment when they fail,

2.

He's in hard working restlessness of cousins, in the Old Country,
Tending grapes, tying them with willow strips,
Decanting demijohns of red wine, filtering sediment,

In their difficulty in slowing down to rest,
With influenza, hand injuries, fevers,
He's in their weary smiles, affectionate words,
rustic theories, kind suggestions,

3.

He's in wild ducks working over wetlands,
High in formations of geese singing traveling songs,

In overwhelming repair and remodeling projects
When perseverance furthers,

He's in the early morning hours of wakefulness
Time to be going salmon fishing, pheasant hunting,
To buy produce at the "Market",
He whispers loudly, "Ya coming?"

4.

He's in Clarence, his old paisano, widowed,
Who has never been to Italy, won't even consider it,
Not now, not without his wife,
Like wild geese, they mated for life.

Taking Dad to Italy

He was uncomplaining this trip, different from six years ago when he was cantankerous at times, and crabby... but *la vecchiaia*, as he always said was catching up with him. He was snug, like a wool sock in a sea boot on a wet and windy day. He adapted himself easily to our itinerary, to delays, transfers, and shuttles. It was a comfort to have him around, it felt nostalgic, like old times when we'd do things together, just he and I, taking the dog out, hitting a few golf balls, fishing for salmon, or just shopping for some project. I was delighted to be returning to Italy with him again, where he was born. Tuscany... it sounds romantic, but my Dad was from a region near Lucca, on the west side the tracks from the small town of Porcari... Padule, it is called...Lowlands... made habitable by a series of canals or *fosse*. One in particular was dear to him as a kid, *la fossa nova*, where he fished for eels and rode his uncles big bike by pedaling under the bar, not reaching the peddles from above. "Dino passed like a lightning bolt," a busybody reported to his mamma, so the story went, for which he was severely reprimanded. Emma feared her only child would fall into the swollen *Fossa Nova* and drown. They were very close, he and his mamma as they lived alone together for ten years waiting for Lorenzo, husband and father, who was in California working on coastal artichoke and Brussels sprout ranches, to send for them, when the quota allowed.

One morning we went with our Italian cousins walking club on a route of 12 km, all around Porcari. It was amazing, there were seven thousand participants, complete with *spuntino* pit stops, with: *sardina marinata*, *trippa*, *dolci* . . . Coffee, grappa, and wine,

and prizes at the finish. His knees didn't bother him in the slightest, he was right behind me the whole way.

Another day we went to see his dad and great uncles in the *campo santo*, he loved that, they had really meant a lot to him. We enjoyed reminiscing, freshening up flowers, and fond memories. Another day we hiked way up into the foot hills, *Le Colline*, they are called, just below Matraia, and sat in a spot in an olive grove overlooking the Lucca basin. I removed the tip of my walking stick to dig a little hole, and it went missing, "Okay where is it?", I asked, he likes to play little tricks on me like that, just to remind me of his presence, and after a few moments of foraging he showed me where it was in the wild *rappini* and tall grass where we were sitting. I dug into my day pack for the double zip lock bag with the blue rubber band around it, and sprinkled out what remained of *le ceneri*, the ashes, under that olive tree, in that grove. I'd been spreading them at his various child hood haunts, according to my surreal recollection of his stories. Here, overlooking the Lucca valley, I thought he'd like this spot, it was a great vantage point.