

MY LIFE

IN THE NAME OF ALL MY LOVED ONES



Renato Rossi

Everything you do for someone else, you do for yourself.

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This is a personal memoir. Events are recounted as the author experienced them and was later able to reconstruct them.

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The practical information about bipolar disorder and crisis support is general and does not replace a diagnosis, treatment, or personal medical advice.

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DEDICATION

IN THE NAME OF ALL MY LOVED ONES

For my parents, who had the courage to leave their homeland
and build a new future for their family.

For Dorina, Michael, Chiara, Laura, Helena, and Andreas. For
my brothers, my little sister Lidiola, and all the loved ones who
have given meaning to my life.

ABOVE ALL, FOR MARCO

My son, my business partner, and my friend.



Marco, you are not simply a chapter in this book. You are its quiet heartbeat. As I wrote these pages, I heard your voice again, saw your smile, and felt your hand on my shoulder. I write to hold on to what time must not take away: your courage, your dreams, your warmth, and the love you left within us. As long as we speak your name, as long as Chiara and Laura know who their father was, and as long as someone reads these pages, you will remain close to us. Not only in our memories, but in everything you changed within us.

Preface

Why I Wrote My Story

Thousands of books have been written about kings, presidents, artists, entrepreneurs and people who have left their mark on history. I am not one of them. I am not a celebrity. I have never won a war, broken a world record or made an invention that earned me a place in the history books. I am simply Renato Rossi.

A son of Italian parents. A husband. A father. A grandfather. A brother. A friend. An entrepreneur. And above all, a human being who, like so many others, has tried to give meaning to his life. Why, then, did I decide to write my story? Not to put myself in the spotlight. Not to receive admiration. And certainly not because my life is more important than anyone else's.

I am writing this book because I believe that every person carries a story within them—a story that risks being lost if no one tells it. No human life can be captured completely in a single book. Yet I felt an ever stronger need to preserve something of the road I have travelled and of the people who shaped me. As long as someone remembers us and speaks about us, a part of us lives on.

I was born on 5 June 1948 in Loreto Aprutino, a small town in the Italian region of Abruzzo. A few months later, my parents brought me to Belgium, where my father worked as a miner. Like thousands of Italian families, we

left our homeland not in search of adventure, but out of necessity. My parents left behind their family, their language and the life they knew, driven by the hope of giving their children a better future. Their courage forms the first page of my story.

The first thought of this book did not arise at a writing desk. It arose in January 2022, during the coronavirus pandemic, when I suffered a heart attack. At the emergency department, it was also discovered that I had COVID. I was completely isolated in a separate ward. Because immediate treatment was not possible, I lay there between life and death. I could barely breathe, was extremely weak, could hardly move, and felt constantly dizzy.

Only a week later, the first two stents were placed. Three months after that, two more followed. My rehabilitation took a long time. During that vulnerable period, I realised more clearly than ever how suddenly a life can change and how much remains unsaid when someone is unexpectedly no longer there.

Michael had asked me several times, ‘Dad, how are we supposed to carry on when you are no longer here? We actually know so little about you. What are your final wishes?’ Those questions were not easy to hear, but they came from love and concern. I understood that my children knew many events from my life only in part and that some stories risked disappearing if I did not tell them myself.

So, day after day, I began writing down brief memories. At first, I was not thinking of a real book. I gathered everything on a USB drive and designated a special place where my family could find it when I was no longer here. That USB drive was my first way of leaving something behind: not possessions, but words; not a complete history, but the experiences and feelings I did not want to be lost.

Slowly, those separate stories grew into *My Life—In the Name of All My Loved Ones*. Some memories are great because they changed a life. Others seem small: a hand on a shoulder, a conversation at the table, a look between father and son. Often, it is precisely such moments that tell us the most.

This story, therefore, is not only about me. It is about my parents, Antonio Rossi and Guglielmina Di Pasquale, who taught me the meaning of sacrifice and dignity. It is about my brothers and my little sister Lidiola, whose short life nevertheless remained part of who I am. It is about Dorina, with whom I built an entire life, about my sons Marco and Michael, about my grandchildren and about the people who stood beside me at decisive moments.

My professional life is included only when it reveals something about the person behind the business: my curiosity, my dreams, my mistakes, my perseverance and the people who helped me begin again. I worked with coffee and espresso, ceramic tiles, software and innovation. I experienced wonderful successes and painful setbacks.

Today I know that my achievements are not my greatest wealth. My greatest wealth is the people I met along the way.

Marco is the heart of this book. He was far more than the way his life ended on 27 August 2009. He was my son, Michael's brother, a father, friend, colleague, business partner and dreamer. I want to show who he truly was and, at the same time, speak honestly about the bipolar disorder and depression he fought. Not to reduce him to his illness, but to make visible how deeply psychological suffering can remain hidden behind a smile. If these pages help someone to listen, speak or seek help sooner, his story will gain an even deeper meaning.

This book is not an accusation and does not point a finger at anyone. It is my memory, told with the knowledge and feelings I have today. I do not portray myself as a hero. The real Renato is curious and full of plans, but also stubborn, sometimes too trusting, and not always willing to recognize his limits in time. Only when those sides are visible as well can this story truly be mine.

In the later years of my life, I began to think more about the meaning of encounters and the quiet bonds that connect people. I sometimes call this the invisible thread through my life. I do not expect every reader to share that thought, and I do not wish to present what I cannot prove as certainty. To me, that thread is mainly about love, memory, intuition,

gratitude and the people who were close at exactly the right moment.

Above all, I wrote this book for my family: for my children, my grandchildren and the generations that will come after me. One day, perhaps, they will no longer be able to ask me who I was. I hope they will then find me in these pages. And if my story also brings recognition, opens a conversation or gives someone the courage to begin again, then it will have achieved its purpose.

This is not the story of an extraordinary life. It is the story of an ordinary man who had the privilege of meeting extraordinary people. That is why this book is called *My Life —In the Name of All My Loved Ones*. Because, in the end, nothing of what we are belongs to us alone. We are the living sum of everyone who loved, helped, challenged and forgave us, and who gave us the chance to become the person we are today. I dedicate this book to them.

With *profound* *gratitude,*
Renato Rossi

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PART 1

MY ROOTS

*Italy, De Lindeman, and the People Who Taught Me What
Dignity Means*

CHAPTER 1

Where My Story Truly Begins

When people ask me where my life began, they usually expect a simple answer. ‘I was born on June 5, 1948, in Loreto Aprutino, a small village in Italy’s Abruzzo region.’ That is true. But to me, my story does not begin there. I believe that a human life does not begin on the day of birth. It begins with those who came before. With their dreams. Their struggles. Their sacrifices. Their love. Long before I came into the world, my father, Antonio Rossi, had already made one of the most difficult decisions of his life. Like thousands of other young Italians, he left his native region to work in the Belgian coal mines. He did not leave in search of adventure. He left to build a better future for his family. He left my mother, Guglielmina Di Pasquale, and her children in Loreto Aprutino, promising them that the separation would only be temporary.

My mother stayed behind. In a modest house. With almost nothing. But with a courage whose full measure I would only understand many years later. Life was hard. Water had to be fetched and carried home. Bread was precious. Every day demanded new sacrifices. And yet she continued to believe that one day my father’s sacrifice would be rewarded. But life spares no one. Even before I was born, our family was struck by a tragedy from which it would never fully recover. My little sister Lidiola lost her

life in a tragic accident. I never had the chance to know her. And yet she has always been part of our family. We rarely spoke about her. Perhaps because the pain was simply too great. But some absences remain as present as the people who are still beside us.

Perhaps that is also why, later in life, I began to think so often about memories. About family. And about the people we lose without ever truly letting them go. On 5 June 1948, at half past one in the morning, I came into the world. My father was not there. He was working hundreds of kilometres away, deep underground in the Belgian coal mines. I have often wondered what he felt when he heard that another son had been born. Joy? Pride? Or perhaps sadness too, because he could not hold his family in his arms at the moment they needed him most. A few months later, my parents made another courageous decision. I too would leave for Belgium. I was still only a baby when my mother began that long journey. A journey that lasted several days.



My grandmother Elvira and my grandfather Arturo, my mother's parents.

A journey filled with uncertainty. Along the way, we stopped in Milan, where we had to remain in quarantine for several days. Only afterward were we allowed to continue toward Belgium. On October 22, 1948, we finally arrived at what would become our new home: the De Lindeman mining community in Heusden-Zolder. At that age, of

course, I could not imagine that this country would become mine. That I would grow up there. That I would meet my wife there. That my children would be born there. That I would pursue my greatest dreams there. That I would experience my deepest pain there. And that, ultimately, it was there I would discover what truly matters in life. Today, when I look back, I understand that my story did not begin with my first breath. It began with my parents' sacrifices. With my father's courage.

With my mother's love. And with the memory of a little sister I never had the chance to know, but who will forever remain one of us. Perhaps that is also one of the reasons I wrote this book. Not to place my own life at the center of the story. But to make sure that those who came before me are never forgotten. For in the end, we are all the continuation of stories that began long before us. And without those stories, mine would never have existed.

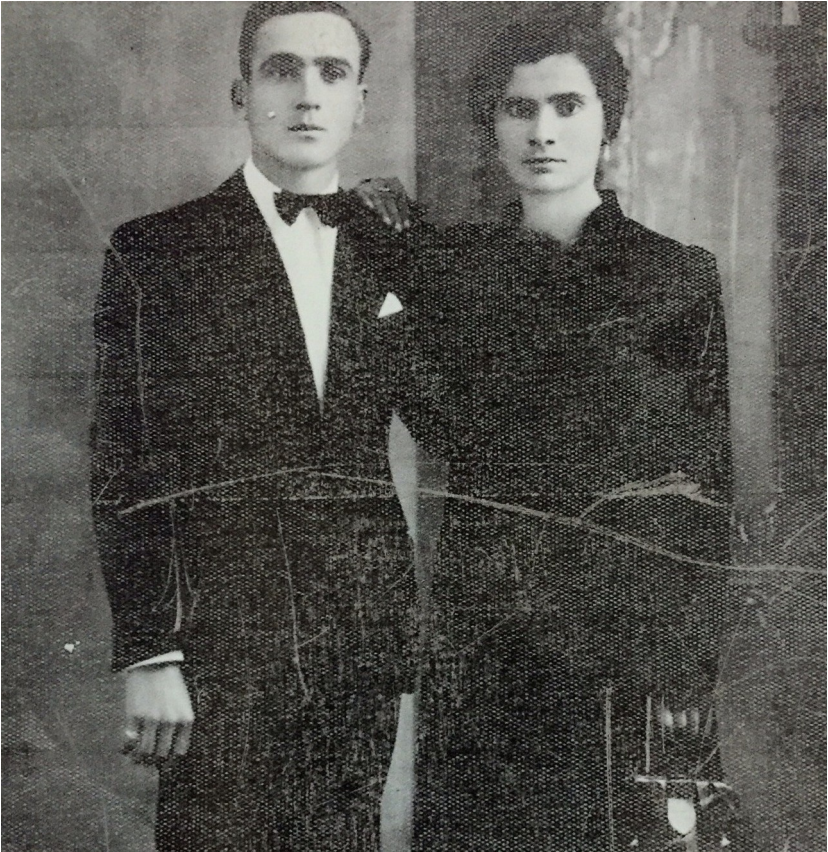
CHAPTER 2

The Courage to Leave Everything Behind

I was not yet five months old when my parents made a decision that would determine the course of my entire life. They left their homeland. Not because they no longer loved Italy. Quite the opposite. Italy would always remain their country. But love alone does not fill an empty table. After the Second World War, thousands of Italian families lived in modest circumstances. Work was scarce and the future uncertain. Fathers faced an almost impossible choice: remain with their family, or leave for an unknown country in the hope that one day they could give their children a better life. My father had already made that choice. He was now working deep underground in the coal mines of Belgian Limburg. Every day, he descended into the darkness within the earth. Not for himself. But for us. When I was born, he could not hold me in his arms.

He knew me only through the letters my mother wrote to him and the photographs that sometimes took weeks to reach Belgium. While I was still a baby, my mother decided that the time had come to reunite our family. With very little luggage but immense courage, she set out on the long journey to Belgium. Today, we board an airplane and reach the other side of Europe within a few hours. In 1948, it was very different. Every mile meant another farewell. Each

stage of the journey carried us farther from the familiar hills of Abruzzo. My mother was not simply leaving her homeland. She was leaving behind her family. Her memories. Her childhood. Everything that had ever given her the feeling of having a place to call home. Of course, I remember nothing of that journey.



My parents, Antonio and Guglielmina, on their wedding day in 1939.

I was far too young. But throughout my life, I have often tried to imagine what may have been happening in her

heart. Was she afraid? Did she cry along the way? Did she wonder whether she would ever see Loreto Aprutino again? I will never know. But now that I have a long life behind me, I understand how much courage that journey must have required of her. Along the way, we had to stay in Milan for several days. Like so many other immigrants, we were placed in quarantine before being allowed to continue. For my mother, it must have been one of the hardest moments of the journey. A young woman. Traveling alone with a baby. Far from home. On her way to a country whose language she did not speak. And yet she continued. Not because she knew what awaited her.

But because she believed in the future. On October 22, 1948, we finally arrived in Belgium. Our new home was the Lindeman mining community in Heusden-Zolder. To my parents, everything was foreign. The language. The climate. The customs. The people. And above all, the homesickness. For however grateful they were to Belgium for the work and opportunities it gave them, part of their hearts remained forever in Italy. I grew up between two worlds. At home, we spoke Italian. Outside, everyone spoke Dutch. Within the walls of our home, the traditions of Abruzzo remained alive. Outside, my Belgian life was slowly taking shape. As a child, all of this seemed perfectly normal to me. Only many years later did I understand how special that world had been. Our mining community was home to families from different regions of Italy, alongside Belgians and people from other

countries. We owned little. But we shared almost everything.



My father Antonio, shortly after his arrival in Belgium.

Neighbors' doors often remained open. Children played together in the street. Mothers helped one another. Fathers understood one another without needing many words. All had made the same sacrifice. Today, when I think back on those years, I understand that my greatest wealth was never

money. My greatest wealth was people. Human warmth. Solidarity. Simplicity. Perhaps it was there, without even realizing it, that I learned the lesson that would remain with me throughout my life. A person does not become great because of what they possess. They become great because of what they give to others. That is probably the most important legacy my parents left me. Not through their words. But through their example. Without their courage to leave everything behind, my story could never have been written.



My mother with Remo, Mario and my little sister Lidiola, before I was born.

And whenever I later faced a difficult decision in my life, I returned - often without realizing it - to the image of that young father and young mother who, in 1948, had found the courage to set out toward an unknown future. Perhaps true courage does not mean being free of fear. Perhaps it simply means deciding to move forward despite it.

On October 22, 1948, we arrived in De Lindeman. I was four months old and naturally have no memory of that day; what I know comes from the stories later told around our table. One detail has always stayed with me: for almost three months, my mother left her suitcases virtually untouched. She did not yet know whether Belgium could truly become a home. Those suitcases were not ordinary luggage. They were her silent possibility of returning to Loreto Aprutino, to the language and the people she knew.



My mother, Remo, Mario and me as a baby, shortly before our departure for Belgium.

Only when she finally unpacked the suitcases did the departure slowly begin to become a life. Today, that small gesture tells me more about emigration than grand words

ever could. My parents did not come to Belgium because they wanted to forget their country. They came because they wanted to give their children opportunities. Their homesickness traveled with them, but so did their determination. My entire life grew out of those two feelings - longing for what had been left behind and caring for what was still to come.

CHAPTER 3

The Long Period I Cannot Remember

Not every important period in a life remains engraved in memory. Some events are known to us only through what others later told us. That is true of one of the first difficult chapters of my life. I was still very young when I began suffering from serious respiratory problems. My health was so fragile that I was admitted to a hospital in Leuven for lengthy treatment. According to what family members later told me, that hospitalization lasted about a year and a half. Over time, the precise dates were lost. I have no clear images of that period myself. No room. No nurse. No bed. No voice I can still remember. I was simply too young. But the absence of memories does not make that period any less real. My parents had only just been reunited with their family in Belgium. They had left their homeland to build a new life together.

And that new life had barely begun when they had to entrust their little boy to the care of a hospital. When I try to imagine today what that must have meant to them, I once again realize how much they endured in silence. My father worked deep underground. My mother tried to keep her family together in a country whose language she still barely knew. And somewhere in Leuven was their little child, far from the familiar warmth of home. I do not want to assign them feelings they never described to me themselves. But

every parent knows how powerless one feels when a child is ill. You want to take away their pain. You would give anything for the certainty that they will recover. And yet sometimes there is nothing you can do but wait. Hope. And trust those who are caring for your child.

Eventually, I returned to my family. My health had improved enough for me to continue my childhood in my De Lindeman community. That is where the part of my life I can remember for myself begins. The streets. The other children. The church. The aromas from the kitchens. The miners returning home. It may seem strange that an absence of a year and a half left so few images. But a human being is not made only of what they remember. The stories others tell us about ourselves also become part of who we are. That long hospitalization belongs to my life, even if I cannot picture it before my eyes. It reminds me how fragile a beginning can be. And how much love and care are sometimes needed before a child is strong enough to begin creating memories of their own.

CHAPTER 4

The Cité That Taught Me Togetherness

My earliest memories take me back to the Lindeman mining community in Heusden-Zolder. When I close my eyes today, I do not see streets or houses. I see people. I hear children laughing. I smell freshly baked bread. I hear mothers calling to one another from doorway to doorway. I see the miners slowly returning home, exhausted after a long day deep beneath the earth. For us children, the mining community was the entire world. We had no computers. No cell phones. No Internet. Our greatest wealth was the street. We played outdoors for hours. A single ball was enough to keep us happy for an entire afternoon. Everyone knew everyone. When a child had misbehaved, his mother often knew before he even reached the front door. At the time, that sometimes annoyed us. Today, I understand how much security it gave us.

We did not grow up only within our own families. We grew up as members of a true community. My father worked in the coal mine. Like thousands of other Italian fathers, he rose before dawn each morning to descend into a world where sunlight did not exist. As a child, I gave it little thought. To me, it was simply my father's work. Only much later did I truly understand the dangers he faced every day. He rarely spoke about them. Like so many men of his

generation, he carried his worries in silence. My mother was the heart of our family. Despite our modest means, she made sure we never felt that we lacked anything. She taught me that dignity has nothing to do with wealth. You can possess very little and still give so much. I watched her embody that truth every day of her life.

Families from different regions of Italy lived on our street. Each spoke its own dialect. And yet we understood one another. Perhaps because we all shared the same dream: to give our children a better life. I can still remember the aromas of Sunday morning. The smell of coffee. Of tomato sauce slowly simmering on the stove. Of fresh bread. Even today, those aromas mean home to me. Sunday was a special day. We put on our finest clothes. After Mass, families gathered. People talked. Laughed. Sometimes they even sang. No one owned very much. And yet no one felt poor. As children, we never questioned it. Happiness seemed natural. One of my fondest memories is of our outings to the cinema. For only a few Belgian francs, we could escape into stories that carried us far beyond the world we knew.



The De Lindeman mining estate, the first home that taught me what living together meant.

Afterward, we often went out for fries. They were simple moments. But today I understand that happiness is rarely complicated. It was also during those years that I became an altar boy. I was still very young, but the church filled me with wonder. Not only because of the ceremonies. But also because of the silence. The candles. The incense. And the feeling that there might be something greater than what our eyes could see. At that age, I did not yet understand it. But perhaps a small seed was planted deep within me then. The seed of the questions that would accompany me throughout my life. Who are we? Why are we here? Does chance truly exist? Or is there sometimes a deeper meaning hidden behind events that we discover only many years later? At

the time, I did not know the answers. Perhaps I still do not know them today.

But I do know one thing. I have never lost my capacity for wonder. When I think back on my childhood, modest circumstances are not the first thing that comes to mind. Nor hardship. Not even the coal mines. I think of human warmth. Of solidarity. Of people who truly cared for one another. Perhaps that is the greatest difference between their time and ours. Today, we possess much more. But I sometimes wonder whether we still truly know one another as we once did. Our mining community may have been small. But it was large enough to teach me some of the most important lessons of my life. That respect cannot be bought. That friendship has no price. And that a person becomes rich not through what they possess, but through the people for whom they make room in their heart. Those lessons have never left me.



My mother Guglielmina and my father Antonio at the De Lindeman mining estate in Heusden-Zolder.

In the mining community, we learned the value of money without anyone giving us a lesson about it. For five francs we could go to the cinema; for three francs we bought fries. An evening like that felt like wealth. We watched the screen, shared what we had, and then walked home through the same streets. No one took photographs of those ordinary

outings. Yet I see them more clearly than many solemn occasions that came later.

Our games were not always innocent. One day, while we were roughhousing, a rope tightened around my brother Carmine's neck. What seemed like a joke became dangerous within seconds. The fear came only when I understood what could have happened. I do not tell this to make my childhood seem darker, but because such a mistake also belongs to a real youth: we were free, sometimes careless, and had to learn by experience where play ended and responsibility began.



My father Antonio with two of his sons at De Lindeman.

I was curious and enterprising, but certainly not a model child who always knew what was right. I could be stubborn, go too far, and understand only afterward what I had done. Perhaps that is precisely where my tendency not to look away after a mistake began. Shame helps no one move forward; honestly acknowledging what happened can, however, be the beginning of change.

CHAPTER 5

My First Return to Italy

In the summer of 1953, I returned for the first time to the country where I was born. I was five years old. Until then, almost all of my conscious life had taken place in Belgium. I knew Italy mainly through my parents' stories. The names of family members. The memories that came alive during conversations around our table. But this time, we were really going back. We traveled aboard a Wastels train, like so many Italian families from Belgium who returned to their native region during those years. The train was packed. The entire family traveled together. Everyone carried luggage. Food for the journey. Drinks. And everything required for a trip far longer and more demanding than those we know today. Travelers often had to remain standing. Some had even brought a chair so they could sit for a while along the way.



Our family in Belgium in 1948, at the beginning of a new life.

Despite the discomfort, there was a special atmosphere on the train. People talked. Laughed. Sang. And played cards. The same anticipation could be felt in every carriage. People were returning to parents they had not seen for a long time. To brothers and sisters. To villages whose every street they still carried in their hearts. For the adults, it was a return. For me, it was a discovery. When we arrived in

Loreto Aprutino, I met family members who knew me through stories and photographs, but who were still almost strangers to me. Aunt Ida. Primo. And my mother's family, connected to the farm where her former life could still be felt. For the first time, I discovered the world my parents had come from. The place where they had lived as children. Where they had worked. Where they had dreamed their first dreams. As a child, I did not yet fully understand its meaning.



With my dearest aunt Ida, my father's sister.

I only knew that people were happy to see us. That names I had heard so often at home suddenly had faces. And that Italy seemed both familiar and new to me. It was the country of my birth. But Belgium was the country of my earliest memories. Perhaps during that journey I began to understand for the first time - without being able to name it - that a person can feel connected to more than one place. I did not have to choose between Italy and Belgium. Both countries would become part of me. Italy gave me my origins. Belgium gave me my life. That first return to Loreto Aprutino was therefore far more than a family visit. It was my first encounter with my own roots. Roots I had not planted myself. But roots that would nourish me throughout my life.



Returning to Italy by train, on a journey organised by Wasteels.

CHAPTER 6

My Father and the World of the Mine

When people ask me from whom I learned the most in life, many expect me to name entrepreneurs, inventors, or people who influenced my professional path. But the truth is much simpler. My greatest teachers were my father and mother. Neither of them ever wrote a book. Neither ever received an important distinction. They were simple people. And yet they taught me everything that truly matters. My father, Antonio Rossi, was a man of few words. He belonged to a generation of men who rarely expressed their feelings through speech. He rose early. He went to work. He came home exhausted. And the next morning, it all began again. As a child, this seemed the most normal thing in the world. Only many years later did I understand that each day he was once again putting his health at risk.

Deep beneath the earth. In the darkness. Far from daylight. Not because he loved the work. But because he believed his family deserved a better life than the one he himself had known. My father had a dream. Not for himself. For his children. He often said that none of his sons should ever have to work in the coal mines. That was his greatest victory. Not what he earned. But what he hoped to spare us. My mother, Guglielmina, was very different. Where my father often hid his feelings, my mother showed her love in

everything she did. In the meals she prepared for us. In the care with which she looked after our clothes. In the way she comforted us when we were sad. She rarely complained. And yet she had a thousand reasons to do so.

She had left her homeland. Left her family behind. Lost a daughter. And despite everything, day after day, she continued to care for those she loved. Only when I became an adult did I begin to understand the strength that must have required. My parents never taught me how to become rich. They taught me to go through life with honesty and dignity. They never told me I had to become someone important. They taught me that every human being deserves respect. Rich or poor. Well known or unknown. Highly educated or barely able to read and write. Later, when I had the opportunity to sit at the same table as executives, industrialists, and successful entrepreneurs, I never felt that they were worth more than the simple miner my father had been.



My father Antonio at De Lindeman.

That is a value I received at home. That is probably also why I have always felt at ease wherever I was. In a neighborhood café. In a factory. In a business owner's office. Or around a table with people I had just met. I always tried to see the human being first. And only then their profession or position. Today, I sometimes wonder how much of my parents still lives within me. I believe it is far more than I

once thought. Whenever I try to help someone. Whenever I show respect to a person who owns little. Whenever I choose to listen instead of speaking, I recognize something of my father. Something of my mother. They do not live only in old photographs. They live in everything they passed on to me.

And perhaps that is the greatest inheritance parents can leave their children. Not money. Not possessions. But values. Values passed from one generation to the next. If only one thought from my childhood were to remain forever, it would be this: my father taught me to work. My mother taught me to live. Only much later did I understand that without both of them, I would never have become the man I am today.



My father with my brother Carmine and me.

When people think back on their childhood, they often remember the major events. A birthday. A journey. A celebration. For me, it is different. The memories that stayed with me most deeply are those of ordinary days. Days when nothing special happened. And perhaps that is precisely why they became so precious. I can still see my mother rising very early in the morning. Outside, it is still dark.

Inside the house, everything is quiet. Only the soft sound of her footsteps breaks the stillness. The coffee already begins to simmer before anyone is awake. Its wonderful aroma slowly spreads through the entire house. Even today, the smell of freshly made coffee is enough to carry me back more than seventy years in an instant. My father prepares to leave for the coal mine. His work clothes are already waiting.

He says little. There is no need. Everyone knows how hard his day will be. My mother looks at him for a moment. No long words. No dramatic farewell. Only a look. A look in which everything has already been said. 'Be careful.' Perhaps those words were never actually spoken. But they were always there. Every morning. When the front door closes behind my father, silence returns to the house. For my mother, however, the day is only beginning. The house must be cleaned. Laundry must be done. Groceries fetched. The meal prepared. The children cared for. In those days, a mother had no days off. No fixed hours. No vacations. Her family was her life's work. We children went outside whenever we could. The street was our playground. We invented our own adventures. An old ball became the World Cup final.



The mining landscape that shaped the lives of so many families.



Miners underground: hard work, comradeship and courage.

A piece of chalk transformed the sidewalk into an enormous game board. A wooden crate became a medieval

castle. We needed so little to be happy. When the sun was high in the sky, somewhere a mother called her children home. Moments later, another mother's voice rang out. Their calls echoed through the entire neighborhood. No one found it strange for a neighbor to scold a child who was not even her own. We were all a little responsible for one another. It seemed perfectly natural to us. Only today do I realize how exceptional that way of living together was. As evening approached, everyone waited for the same moment. The fathers' return. Some still carried traces of black coal dust on their faces. Others seemed dead tired. But almost all shared the same desire. To be reunited with their family.

I can still see my father stepping through the front door. The first thing he did was wash carefully. As though he wanted to remove not only the coal from his skin, but also the weight of the day that had passed. Then we all sat around the table. There was no luxury. No abundance. But no one left the table hungry. During the meal, we spoke about simple things. School. The neighbors. Our family in Italy. Sometimes we laughed. Sometimes we were silent. But that silence was never uncomfortable. We were together. And that was enough.



The Marcinelle disaster became a deep wound in the Italian community.



Grief and devastation after the mining disaster that claimed 262 lives.

It also honors all those men and women who built their lives on hope, courage, and sacrifice. I dedicate this story to

them. On August 8, 1956, a disaster shattered the lives of thousands of mining families. At the Bois du Cazier mine in Marcinelle, 262 people lost their lives. Among them were 136 Italians. I was eight years old. Marcinelle was not located beside our community. But in the world of miners, distance almost ceased to exist at moments like that. Any miner might have been underground. Any wife might have been waiting for news. Any child might have been left without a father that evening. I remember how the atmosphere among the adults changed. People spoke more quietly. The women were worried. People searched for news and continued to hope while despair grew hour by hour. We children did not understand everything that was happening.

But children sense far more than adults sometimes realize. We sensed the silence. The tension. The fear no one wanted to express fully. To the Italian community in Belgium, Marcinelle was not an event read about in the newspaper. It was like a disaster striking one large family. The victims came from different countries. They had different names. They spoke different languages. But underground, they had performed the same grueling work. And above ground, people who loved them waited. My father himself worked at the Zolder mine. He knew its dangers. He knew that no miner could say in the morning, with absolute certainty, that he would return home that evening. He had always hoped that his sons would never have to work underground. After Marcinelle, that wish only

became stronger. His children had to study. They had to know another life.



My father with his bicycle near the De Lindeman mining estate.

Not because he was ashamed of his work. On the contrary. He was proud of what his labor allowed him to provide for his family. But precisely because he knew the price the mine could demand, he wanted to spare us from it. When I think of Marcinelle today, I do not see only a

number. I think of 262 lives. Of 262 families. Of mothers, wives, and children whose world changed forever in a single day. The disaster belongs to the history of Belgium and Italy. But it also belongs to the history of families like ours. It revealed what our parents tried to push from their thoughts every working day: the mine put bread on the table,

Marcinelle remained a warning to every mining family: the mine provided bread, but it never promised that every man would return home safely.

CHAPTER 7

Lidiola, the Little Sister Who Remained

Some people accompany us throughout our lives. Others leave before we ever have the chance to know them. And yet they, too, can forever retain a place within a family. That was true of my little sister, Lidiola. I never saw her. I never heard her voice. I never played with her. And yet I have always felt that she held an invisible place in our family's heart. When my father left for Belgium to work in the coal mines, my mother remained in Loreto Aprutino. She had to care for her young children. It was a time when life was simple but hard. Our home was modest. There was no running water. No central heating. The fireplace was our kitchen, our source of warmth, and the living heart of the house.

Our entire family life unfolded around that fire. My father knew the dangers of the mine. My mother knew the loneliness of the one who remained behind. She lived in the hope that one day our family would be together again. But life decided otherwise. Then came the day no parent should ever have to endure. Little Lidiola fell into the fireplace. Despite every attempt to save her, it was too late. My mother lost her daughter. My father lost her too, hundreds of miles from home. He could not even return immediately to say goodbye. When I try to imagine that moment today, what I

feel most is an overwhelming silence. How many tears must have been shed? What guilt must my mother have carried in her heart? How powerless must my father have felt? These are questions that will never be answered.

Perhaps that is why so little was said about Lidiola in our home. Not because she had been forgotten. But because the pain was simply too deep to express. And yet Lidiola never truly left our family. Some people continue to live in the stories we tell. Others in photographs. She lived in an empty place. In a chair that would never be occupied. In a name spoken with infinite tenderness. In my mother's eyes when her thoughts quietly wandered to a distant place. I have often wondered what our family would have been like if Lidiola had lived. Would she have come with us to Belgium? Would she have had children of her own? Would I have had a sister with whom to share my life? These are questions no one will ever be able to answer.



Lidiola, the little sister I never had the chance to know.

And yet they have accompanied me throughout my life. Perhaps that is also one reason family has always meant so much to me. Because I learned very early that nothing in life can be taken for granted. The person sitting beside us today may tomorrow exist only in our memories. We often think that our lives are shaped by the people who are present. But sometimes they are shaped just as much by those we have

lost. To me, Lidiola will always remain my older sister. Not because we were able to create memories together. But because she is part of the story from which I came. And perhaps that is, ultimately, the deepest meaning of this book's title: MY LIFE - IN THE NAME OF ALL MY LOVED ONES. Not only for those who are still beside us. But also for those who left far too soon and who, despite their absence, remain forever present in our hearts.

CHAPTER 8

My Mother, the Silence Where Love Lived

When I think of my mother, it is not her voice I hear first. It is her presence I feel. Some people fill a room with their words. My mother filled a home with warmth. Her name was Guglielmina Di Pasquale. To the outside world, she was simply an Italian woman. To us, she was the heart of our family. She never tried to draw attention to herself. She wanted neither praise nor admiration. Her greatest wish was simply to see her children happy. My mother did not have an easy life. She lost her daughter, Lidiola. She watched her husband leave for Belgium to work in the coal mines. Then she, too, left her native country so that our family could be reunited. When I think back today, I often wonder where she found such extraordinary courage. For she almost never complained.

Perhaps she believed that a mother had to be strong. Perhaps she did not want her children to see her sorrow. Or perhaps, to her, love was simply something one lived. Not something one spoke about. I remember her hands. Always busy. Kneading bread. Cutting vegetables. Mending clothes. Sewing on a button. Wiping away a tear. Those hands scarcely knew rest. As a child, you do not notice such things. You simply believe that mothers will always be there. Only as you grow older do you begin to understand all the love

hidden in those small daily gestures. My mother did not need expensive gifts. Or distant journeys. Or luxury. Her greatest happiness was seeing her children gathered at home. When the entire family sat around the same table. When laughter filled the house. When everyone had enough. That was her wealth. And I believe that way of looking at life became part of me.

Later, I traveled widely. I met thousands of people. I sat at the tables of successful entrepreneurs and businesspeople. But I never felt richer than I did at my mother's kitchen table. That is where I learned that happiness does not depend on what is on the table. It depends on who is sitting around it. Sometimes I wonder whether I thanked her enough. Probably not. Children always think their parents will be there forever. Only when they are gone do we truly understand all they gave us. My mother did not give me long speeches. She never explained how I should live my life. She showed me. Through her patience. Through her simplicity. Through her faithfulness. Through her love. And perhaps that is why I still feel her so close to me today.



Our family gathered around my mother Guglielmina.



My parents, Guglielmina and Antonio, together.

Not because I see her every day. But because every day I find something of her again. In a gesture. In a memory. In

the way I look at others. If someone asked me who the most important woman in my life had been, many would expect me to answer immediately: 'My wife.' But that would not be fair to my mother. For before I learned to love as a husband, I first learned to love as a son. And we carry that first love within us for the rest of our lives. I sometimes think that mothers never truly die. As long as their children continue to live by the values they passed on, they remain beside them. That is how it is with my mother. She continues to live. In me. And in everything that, because of her, I had the chance to become throughout my life.

In addition to running her own household, my mother also cooked, washed, and ironed for unmarried miners. That extra work brought in some money, but it demanded still more hours of her day. I do not remember her ever complaining about it. The table grew larger when someone was hungry; the laundry basket grew heavier, and still she carried on. Her care was warm, but never weak. She knew what was needed and did it.



My parents on their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

In some years, we spent three or four months in holiday colonies. There I learned to manage among strangers and understood how deep the longing for home can run.

CHAPTER 9

When I Had to Leave My First Home

Some farewells last only a few minutes. And yet we carry their meaning within us for the rest of our lives. That is how I felt when we left my De Lindeman community. I was about twelve years old. To many adults, at that age you are still only a child. But to a twelve-year-old boy, it is already an entire world. At that age, I did not yet understand how deeply a place can become part of you. I only knew that we were moving. My parents had their reasons. My father had worked hard for years. Life was changing. A new chapter was beginning for our family. But as a young boy, I did not think about any of that. I thought about my friends. The street where I had learned to ride a bicycle. The houses whose every front door I knew. The familiar voices that echoed through the neighborhood each evening.

And suddenly, I had to leave all of it behind. I still remember those final days very clearly. You look at the street one last time. The trees. The church. The houses. You promise yourself you will remember every detail forever. And yet over the years, many of those details fade. What remains is the feeling. We moved to Liège. For my parents, it was the beginning of a new chapter. To me, it felt as though I were leaving part of myself behind. Suddenly, I heard other languages. I discovered other customs. I met new people. Once again, I had to find my place. In De Lindeman,

everyone knew me. In Liège, no one outside my family knew me. Meanwhile, my father continued working at the Zolder mine.

He still had to repay the debts he had incurred so that his two oldest sons, Remo and Mario, could study at a technical boarding school in Seraing. That is why he stayed in De Lindeman during the week. Every weekend, he returned home to us, and every Sunday evening he left again for De Lindeman so he could resume work at the mine the next day. He continued this way until 1963. It may sound like a small thing. But to a twelve-year-old boy, it is like having to learn to breathe all over again. I quickly discovered that not everyone welcomed a newcomer with open arms. Some children mocked my origins. My name. And especially the fact that I did not yet speak French. So I asked my parents whether I, too, could attend boarding school in the Ardennes. I wanted to learn French as quickly as possible and find my place in this new world.

Sometimes I laughed along with the others. But deep inside, certain words hurt me. Not because children are cruel by nature. Children often repeat what they hear at home. I understood that only much later. Nevertheless, that period taught me something that remained with me throughout my life. I learned how it feels to be different. Perhaps that is why, later, I always tried to make sure no one felt excluded. Throughout my professional life, I met people from many countries. Those differences never frightened me. On the contrary. I always felt at home among

different languages and cultures. Perhaps because my childhood had already taught me that behind every accent is a human being. Behind every unfamiliar name, a family. Behind every immigrant, a story. Today, I sometimes hear immigration discussed as though it were only a matter of numbers.

To me, they are not numbers. They are faces. Mothers saying goodbye. Fathers leaving home. Children having to leave their friends behind. I know what that means. Because I lived it myself. I do not want this to be a chapter of sadness, however. Liège also gave me a great deal. New friends. New experiences. New possibilities. And it was ultimately there that a large part of my life truly began. My first job. My dreams. My failures. My victories. When I look back today, I understand that life sometimes asks us to give something up before it can offer us something else. I had to leave my first home before I could find my second. I did not understand it at the time. Today, I do. And perhaps that is the most beautiful gift memories can give us. Only many years later do they allow us to understand why certain moments in our lives were necessary.



Me at the age of ten at the De Lindeman mining estate.

The boy leaving De Lindeman could not possibly imagine the road still waiting ahead. And yet he took that first step. Not because he was especially brave. But because life was gently pushing him forward. And sometimes that is how a new chapter begins. In 1960, we left my De Lindeman community and moved into a house near Liège. Our new home stood beside the railroad tracks leading to Liège-Guillemins station. The station itself was a few miles farther away. Everything was still new to me. The surroundings. The language. The people. And soon after we moved, the country around us also became restless. During the winter of 1960-1961, the great strikes against the Unitary Law began. I was twelve years old. I did not yet understand

exactly what that law contained. I knew nothing of the political debates. But I saw what was happening very close to our home.

Belgian soldiers patrolled the railroad tracks day and night. They marched with weapons in hand. To a twelve-year-old boy, it was an impressive and frightening sight. Until then, I knew soldiers mainly from stories and films. Now they were marching right beside our house. Not in some distant country. But along the tracks we looked at every day. During the daytime, I could follow their movements. At night, too, their presence remained noticeable. The railroad, which had usually been just part of our surroundings, suddenly took on another meaning. It was being guarded. As though something might happen at any moment. The strike paralyzed much of Wallonia. For many workers, their jobs, income, and future were at stake. I understood that only later. As a child, I mainly saw the consequences. The tension among people. The uncertainty. And the armed soldiers who continued patrolling the tracks.

Security could not be taken for granted within our own family either. My father still worked at the Zolder mine and stayed in De Lindeman during the week. Meanwhile, we were trying to build a new life in Liège. The world into which I had arrived was very different from the protective community I had left. In my community, everyone knew one another. Here, I discovered how quickly a society could become divided and agitated. Perhaps it was one of the first times I understood that politicians' decisions do not remain

confined to meeting rooms. They end up in the streets. In factories. In families. And even along the railroad tracks outside a twelve-year-old boy's home. I do not want to turn this memory into a political lesson. I was too young for that then, and the events are too complex. I am only telling what I saw. Soldiers.

Day and night. Along the railroad. Weapons in hand. An image that stayed with me after all these years. Not because I understood then what the Unitary Law meant. But because, for the first time, I saw the great course of history suddenly appear right outside my own door.

CHAPTER 10

My Brothers - Shared Roots, Different Paths

My brothers Remo, Mario, Carmine, and Maurizio form one of the longest threads running through my life. We came from the same family, carried the same Italian roots, and grew up in Belgium, yet each of us found his own path. As in every family, we were not always alike in character or conviction. Yet beneath everything remained the knowledge that we belonged together.

Remo was eight years older than I was, and Mario four years older. In my early years, they were not only brothers to me, but also examples of a world I still had to learn about. Later came Carmine, born in 1950, and Maurizio, born in 1955. And so our family continued to grow around my father and mother, each person with his own place at the table and in the story.

I remember Mario as a warm and generous man, someone with a good heart. His death once again left an empty place in our family. When we gather today, he is not visibly present, but his name and his character live on in our conversations.

Over the years, you learn that brotherly love does not mean always sharing the same opinion or constantly being together. It also lies in knowing that you share a common

origin, in memories no one else fully understands, and in the certainty that part of your youth is preserved in the other person.

When we return to Loreto Aprutino, past and present meet. The family homes, the streets, and the faces take us back to those who came before us. At such a moment, I see not only the men we have become, but also the boys who once began their lives within the same family.

That is why these photographs have a place in this book. Not to claim that everything was always easy, but to preserve what proved stronger than time and distance: the bond between brothers and the gratitude that we were allowed to travel part of the road together.

We carried the same family name and the same earliest memories, but we did not become copies of one another. Remo, Mario, Carmine, Maurizio, and I each chose our own path. In a large family, camaraderie and clashes exist side by side. We could tease one another, disagree, and then stand side by side again without many words. Blood ties do not automatically make a relationship simple; they do give it a history that can never be recreated elsewhere.

In my memory, Mario remains an exceptionally warm and generous man. His death brought another silence into our family. When we later stood together in Loreto Aprutino, the happiness was real, but never entirely innocent: in every photograph, you also know who can no longer come and stand beside you. Yet for this book I did not

choose a solemn group photograph in black suits. I want to preserve my brothers as I most like to see them: outdoors, in our birthplace, close to the ground where our family began.

PART 2

BUILDING A LIFE

*Love, Fatherhood, Work, Mistakes, and the Drive to Create
Something New*

CHAPTER 11

Young Renato Chooses His Own Path

There comes a moment in every child's life when the world suddenly becomes much larger. Not because the streets have changed. But because our way of seeing has changed. For me, that moment had arrived. The quiet years of the mining community were behind me. Liège was slowly becoming my new home. I was no longer a little boy. But I was not yet a man. I stood between two worlds. Like so many young people of my generation, I knew my childhood would not last forever. Soon, I would have to find my own path. Earning my own living was not a distant prospect in those days. It was simply part of life. My parents had worked hard throughout their lives to give us opportunities they themselves had never known. And that was exactly why they wanted what was best for my future. My father and my oldest brother had chosen a field of study for me: electromechanics.

Their choice was understandable. We lived in the Liège region, where the steel industry was a major employer. They were convinced that technical training would give me the best chance of finding a secure and respectable job later. To them, a diploma meant security. And after everything my parents had endured in life, security was no small word. But deep inside, I felt that my interests lay elsewhere. I wanted to learn languages. I was drawn to commerce. To people. To

sales. To the world beyond the factory gates. Even though I had always been among the best students, I was never truly motivated by that technical program. I was capable of following the lessons. But my heart was not in it. Over the years, that difference became increasingly clear. At home, it regularly caused disagreements. My father and oldest brother saw a secure future for me.

I saw a life that did not fit who I was. None of us had bad intentions. We simply viewed my future differently. But as a young man, I did not yet have the calm or experience needed to understand it that way. The tensions continued to rise. Until one day, barely three months before I could earn my A2 diploma, I impulsively decided to leave school. It was not a carefully prepared decision. It was the decision of a young man who felt he should finally be allowed to determine his own life. That choice caused serious tension within our family. My father could not understand why I was giving everything up so close to the finish line. Today, so many years later, I understand his disappointment much better than I did then. He had worked and sacrificed all his life so that his children could study.

My decision must have been difficult for him to accept. But it was not an easy period for me either. I knew very clearly what I did not want. I simply did not yet know exactly how to reach what I truly wanted. Alongside that uncertainty, however, something else was growing within me. Curiosity. I wanted to discover the world. Meet people. Speak languages. Engage in commerce. Understand how

businesses worked. How products were made and sold. Why some entrepreneurs succeeded while others did not. Without my realizing it, the entrepreneur within me slowly began to awaken during those years. Not the entrepreneur who dreamed of becoming rich. But the one who saw new possibilities everywhere. Who believed almost anything could be improved. That part of my character would accompany me throughout my life. Sometimes it would lead me to great successes. And at other times, to painful disappointments.

But I could not change it. I always preferred trying to open a new path rather than simply following one others had already laid out for me. My parents would recognize that quality in me many more times. Sometimes with pride. Sometimes, undoubtedly, with concern. For those who choose their own path also risk losing their way. And that happened to me more than once in life. But each time, I had to learn again. To fall. Rise. And begin again. Perhaps that was precisely where my true passage into adulthood began. Not on the day I left school. Not on the day I found my first job. But at the moment I began to understand that choosing your own road also means taking responsibility for its consequences. At the time, I did not know which people I would later meet.

I did not know that coffee would become my first great passion. I did not know that ceramic tiles would one day change the course of my life. I did not know that Marco would later become my business partner. Nor that life

would bring me both extraordinary successes and profound pain. All of that still lay hidden beyond the horizon. I was simply a young man. With countless questions. Countless dreams. And unshakable confidence in the future. Perhaps that is youth's greatest wealth. We do not know what life has in store for us. And that is precisely why we dare to dream. When I think of that young Renato today, I cannot help smiling. He still knew so little. Sometimes he made decisions he would have done better to consider a little longer. But he possessed one priceless quality. He never gave up before he had at least tried. That quality would help shape my entire life. For better. And sometimes for worse. But without it, I would never have become the man I am today.

CHAPTER 12

My First Love

Some people remain in our lives forever. Others stay beside us for only a few weeks or months. And yet they, too, remain in our hearts for a lifetime. My first love was one of those people. I was sixteen years old. It was 1964. I was still young, but at an age when we slowly begin to discover the adult world. To me, love was still only a word whose true meaning I had yet to learn. Then she entered my life. Her name was Michalizza. She was a young woman of Greek origin. We met in Schaerbeek, Brussels. Even today, a smile comes naturally to my face when I think of her. She was very beautiful, but what stayed with me most was her magnificent long, dark hair, which fell in gentle curls over her shoulders.

I found it especially beautiful. Perhaps that is why one memory of her remains so clear in my mind after all these years. We were dancing together. In the background, Adamo was singing *Une mèche de cheveux*. At that moment, it was simply a beautiful song to which the two of us danced. But moments later, that song would take on a meaning for me that I would never forget. It was our last dance. I knew I had to leave. She, too, knew that the moment of our farewell had come. There were no grand words. No dramatic promises. Only the silent awareness that a beautiful moment was coming to an end. Michalizza then

did something I have never forgotten. She took a pair of scissors. She cut a small lock of her long black hair. Very carefully, she placed it in an envelope.

On that envelope, she drew a little heart. Then she gave it to me. And before we parted, she placed a tender kiss on my cheek. I was sixteen years old. Perhaps I could not yet fully understand why that small gesture touched me so deeply. But I sensed that there was something special about it. It was a small piece of herself that she was entrusting to me. A memory of what we had shared. From that day on, *Une mèche de cheveux* would never again be just a song to me. Whenever I heard it later, it carried me back for a moment to that final dance. To Michalizza. To her long dark hair. To that envelope decorated with a heart. And to that tender kiss on my cheek. Perhaps that is what makes a first love so special. At that age, everything is experienced more intensely.

A look. A smile. A few exchanged words. And suddenly the heart begins to beat faster. We needed no expensive journeys. No gifts. No grand promises. Simply being together was enough to make us happy. Little by little, I discovered what it meant to wake with someone in your thoughts. To wait impatiently for the moment you would see her again. To feel happy the instant her face appeared. And to feel an emptiness when she was not there. It was a youthful love. A sincere love. An innocent love. As only a first love can be. At that age, we often believe such moments will last forever. Later, life teaches us that it sometimes takes another road.

In time, our paths separated. Without anger. Without drama. Simply because life led each of us toward a different future.

At the time, I did not understand why some encounters had to be so brief. Today, I see them differently. Some people do not enter our lives to stay forever. They enter to help us grow. To teach us something about ourselves. Michalizza introduced me to the beauty of a first love. The tenderness of feelings that were only beginning to blossom. And she taught me that we can be grateful for a beautiful chapter in our life even when it did not last forever. I do not look back on that time with sadness or regret. Only with gratitude. For every person who crossed my path contributed in some way to the man I eventually became. Later, when I met Dorina, I was already a different man. More mature. More aware of who I was. And better prepared to build a life with someone.

When I hear *Une mèche de cheveux* today, I see the envelope with the little heart again. A first love does not have to last in order to have been true forever.

CHAPTER 13

My Hands and My First Real Work

When I left school, I had no grand plan for the future. Like so many young men of my generation, I was expected to begin working. Not because I knew exactly what I wanted to become. But because it was simply the next step in life. I had been hired to work in a factory. Everything was arranged. All I had to do was walk through the gate and begin my first day of work. But when I arrived at the factory entrance, something happened. I stopped. I looked at that gate. At the people going inside. And deep within me, I felt something I could barely explain at the time. This was not my path. I did not yet know what my road would truly be. No other job was waiting for me. No certainty.

No grand plan for the future. But I knew one thing. I did not want to go inside. So I turned around. I never worked in that factory. Today, it may seem like only a small moment. But when I look back on my life, I realize how important that decision was. For the first time, I was not choosing the path that had been prepared for me. I was choosing the uncertainty of a road I still had to discover for myself. It required no grand words. Only the courage to turn around and keep searching. My father and oldest brother had chosen technical training for me. They believed electromechanics would offer me a secure future in the Liège region. I understood their reasoning. But my heart

was drawn to languages, commerce, and human contact. I did not have a diploma that would bring me security. I had only my curiosity, my willingness to work, and my hands.

Those hands wanted to understand how things worked. They wanted to try, repair, and improve. They learned by actually touching objects. Not through theory, but through practice. Later, I often discovered that a person is not shaped only at school. Work teaches us too. People teach us. Mistakes teach us. And sometimes a single decision teaches us more than an entire school year. At that factory gate, I learned to listen to my inner voice. I did not know where it would lead me. I only knew I must not pretend I could not hear it. My hands had not yet found their trade. But I had made my first personal choice. The road that followed would first lead me to Rubens. Then into a world that would change my entire life. The world of FAEMA and espresso.

My first real step toward the world in which I would later work began at a company called Rubens. Rubens supplied equipment and solutions for institutional and commercial kitchens. Restaurants. Hotels. Businesses. Schools. Hospitals. For the first time, I discovered all the technology, planning, and expertise hidden behind every professional kitchen. That is where I met Benoit. He became far more than a colleague to me. I admired his calm, his professional knowledge, and the seriousness with which he carried out every assignment. He taught me that work done well begins with attention. Not only attention to a piece of equipment. But also to the person who would have to use it. During

those years, many installations were converted from town gas to natural gas. It was precise work that carried real responsibility. Every burner had to be adapted and then checked. A small error could have serious consequences. So I did not only learn to work with my hands. I learned to think ahead. To verify. And to accept responsibility for what I left behind.

Some assignments demanded almost the impossible. I remember one period of work that began on a Sunday around six in the evening and did not end until Wednesday morning at about ten. We had been at work for nearly forty-eight hours. The fatigue was immense. But the installation had to be completed and operate safely. We continued. That work was hard on my body. I had to move equipment. Bend. Lift. Stand for long hours. My back began warning me more and more clearly. I was young and thought the pain would eventually disappear on its own. But it kept returning. Looking back, I understand that this was the first time my body reminded me that even perseverance has limits. Nevertheless, Rubens gave me a great deal. There I learned to listen to customers. To search for the true cause of a problem. And I learned that service goes far beyond simply delivering a piece of equipment.

CHAPTER 14

At FAEMA, I Discovered the Soul of Espresso

At FAEMA, I had the opportunity to connect my technical curiosity with my love of people. I began by installing and adjusting professional espresso machines and soon discovered that good coffee did not depend on the machine alone. The grind, the water, the temperature, and above all the care of the person behind the counter determined the result together.

Those years taught me to look and listen more carefully. A problem that seemed large could sometimes be solved with one small, precise adjustment. I also learned that trust does not arise from fine words, but from being there when a customer needs you.

Later I returned to FAEMA for a time, this time as a salesman. That experience became an important step toward entrepreneurship. What remained above all was my respect for craftsmanship and my conviction that a product gains value only when it truly helps people.

CHAPTER 15

Seeing Coffee Through Different Eyes

After FAEMA, I worked briefly at Douwe Egberts. There I came to know the coffee world from another perspective and, in my spare time, began experimenting with prefilled paper coffee filters and a simple prototype. My idea was not developed further at the time, but it confirmed something that had always been part of me: I did not want merely to sell; I wanted to understand how something could be improved.

Later, Mokafina and Brasilia espresso machines also crossed my path. They were part of my professional development, but were never the true center of my life. More important were the people I met, my responsibility for my family, and the lessons each new step taught me.

I discovered that ideas require courage, but also realism. Not every experiment becomes a success, and not every door remains open. Yet no attempt ever lost all its value for me: each experience brought me closer to the entrepreneur and the person I would later become.

CHAPTER 16

Dorina and the House That Became a Home

When Dorina and I married in 1971, we did not begin with the certainty that everything would work out by itself. We were young, in love, and ready to build a life together. She was a teacher and sought stability, regularity, and security. I was the man who saw possibilities everywhere and was often already thinking about a new plan before the previous one had fully settled. At first, those differences complemented one another. Later, they sometimes clashed.

I do not want to portray Dorina as better than any human being can be, but neither do I want to do her an injustice. She did not understand or support every dream of mine. Sometimes she longed above all for peace while I wanted to take another risk. At times I experienced that as a brake; she may have experienced my drive as a threat to our family's security. Neither feeling was untrue. We looked at the same future from different responsibilities.

There are moments in life that, at first glance, seem completely ordinary. Only many years later do we understand that a new chapter began at precisely that moment. That was how it felt when Dorina and I held the key to our first bungalow in our hands. It may be difficult for today's younger generations to understand fully what that meant to us. Buying our own home was anything but

self-evident. We both came from simple families. No one had given us anything. Every franc we managed to save had been earned through our work. When we first entered our new house alone together, we spoke very little. We walked slowly from room to room. We looked at the still-bare walls. The windows without curtains. The garden where nothing yet grew. And yet... We saw far more than what stood before our eyes.



With my beautiful future wife Dorina in Italy, one year before we married.

We saw our future. ‘Here we will grow old together.’ ‘Here our children will grow up.’ ‘Here we will celebrate birthdays.’ ‘Here our friends will always be welcome.’ The house was still empty. But our dreams already filled every room. We had no expensive furniture. No luxurious kitchen. No large television. And none of that mattered to us. Every

chair we bought felt like a small victory. Every cabinet. Every lamp. Every flower and plant we put in the garden. Everything we owned carried a story. Because we had earned it ourselves through work and sacrifice. But very soon, that bungalow became far more than an arrangement of walls, furniture, and dreams. It became a home. A place where our family life truly began to take shape.

But a home is not formed only by those who live there. The people around us also became an important part of our lives. We were fortunate to have wonderful neighbors. Among them were Jules and Alphonsine. What began as an ordinary relationship between neighbors became a friendship that would withstand time. More than fifty years later, we are still friends. When I think about that today, I find it something very special in itself. Because over the years, we shared far more than a street or neighborhood. We celebrated holidays together. Birthdays. We gathered around the same table. We laughed. Our children played together and grew up side by side. We even went on vacation together. To Italy. France. England. They were not spectacular journeys meant to impress others. They were the journeys of young families enjoying life together.



Dorina and I in Italy, one year before our wedding—young, in love and full of dreams.

The children played. We talked. We ate together. We discovered new places. And without realizing it then, we were creating memories that would still exist more than half a century later. Perhaps those were precisely our richest years. Not because we possessed a great deal. But because we shared so much. When I think of that bungalow

today, therefore, I do not see only the house. I hear the children's voices. I see Marco and Michael. I see Dorina. I see Jules and Alphonsine. I see friends around the table. Birthdays. Celebrations. Vacations. Long conversations. And all those ordinary moments whose extraordinary value we understand only much later. I believe that is why so many people of my generation respected what they owned so deeply. Not because they were miserly. But because they understood the effort hidden behind every purchase.

And perhaps more importantly: because we had learned that the value of a home ultimately does not depend on what it contains. But on what is lived there. When I look back on those years today, the bungalow is not the first thing I see. I see Dorina. I see our children. I see two young people looking toward the future with confidence. We spoke about our children. The journeys we would make one day. Our dreams. We truly believed life would become more beautiful with every passing year. And when I think back today... It was precisely that belief that made us happy. We could not possibly guess the unexpected turns life still held for us. That moments would come when we would have to begin all over again. That we would experience periods of immense joy. But also moments of profound pain.



Dorina, my eternal schoolteacher.

Fortunately, life does not show us in advance what the future will bring. And perhaps that is one of its greatest blessings. For if, in our youth, we already knew which difficulties awaited us later, many of us would lose the courage to move forward. Instead, life gives us something far more precious. Hope. And hope was the most faithful guest in our first bungalow. Even today, when I close my

eyes, I hear the sound of that key turning in the lock for the very first time. It lasted only a few seconds. And yet that key opened the door to far more than a house. To our sons' childhood. To friendships that would last a lifetime. To birthdays and vacations. To laughter around the table. To ordinary days that would later become precious memories.

To a life that, at that moment, we could only imagine. Sometimes I wonder whether happiness is much simpler than we think. Perhaps it does not begin with great wealth. Perhaps happiness begins on the day two people find the courage to look at each other and say: 'This... will be our home.' And perhaps only many years later do you discover what that small word truly meant. Our home was never only the house. Our home was the people who built a life there with us.



Jules and Alphonsine, our dear friends for more than fifty years.

Our love therefore did not consist only of tender photographs. It also consisted of misunderstandings, disappointments, reconciliations, and the daily work of staying. Dorina stood beside me in the good years and in the years when our home was filled with worry. After losing Marco, we did not always grieve in the same way. I wanted to talk, search, and write; she carried much of it in silence.

In that too, we had to learn that two people can love the same child and still deal with the same sorrow differently.

What binds us is not the story of a perfect marriage. It is a shared life: our sons, the houses we lived in, the bills that had to be paid, friends at the table, arguments that subsided, illnesses, journeys, loss, and the ordinary mornings when we nevertheless got up together again. That faithfulness is less conspicuous than being in love, but after so many years, perhaps even more precious.

CHAPTER 17

The First Time I Became a Father

There are days when life changes little by little. And there are others when everything changes in a single instant. October 10, 1972, was one of those days. But to understand what Marco's birth meant to Dorina and me, I actually have to go back a few months. Before Marco arrived, we had lost a child. Dorina had suffered a miscarriage. It was a painful experience that may have been spoken about less in those days than it is today. We tried to continue. But what had happened remained in our thoughts. After the miscarriage, the doctor had expressly advised us to wait at least a year before considering another pregnancy. In his view, the risk of further complications was too great. We took that warning seriously. We were young. We deeply wanted children. But Dorina's health came before everything else.

So we absolutely did not expect another pregnancy to happen so quickly. And yet it did. Only a few months after the miscarriage, Dorina discovered she was pregnant again. With Marco. Normally, such news should bring nothing but joy. For us, it was different. Of course, we were happy. But that joy was immediately accompanied by fear. The doctor's words were still fresh in our minds. We should have waited a year. That year was far from over. What would this new pregnancy mean for Dorina? Would her health be endangered? Would the child be healthy? Would there be

further complications? Suddenly, what we had wanted so deeply also became a source of fear. We hoped. But we doubted. We had faith. But we were also afraid. Looking back, many of those worries fortunately proved unnecessary. But at that moment, we had no way of knowing.

We could do nothing but move forward carefully. Day by day. Week by week. And hope everything would go well. There was another uncertainty as well. Our financial situation was far from easy. Dorina worked as a teacher, but she did not yet have a permanent appointment. Her salary was not always paid regularly. Sometimes we had to wait a long time before she received her money. For a young couple who had barely begun their life together, this regularly caused financial difficulties. At the time, we lived in an apartment on Hasselt's inner ring road. We had no large reserves. Every franc mattered. There were bills. Daily expenses. And now a child was coming. Yet I do not remember us ever asking whether we wanted Marco. That question did not exist. From the moment we knew he was on the way, he was our child.

Our concern was not about his arrival. It was about the safety of Dorina and the baby during the pregnancy. Month after month, the child was not the only one growing. Our hope grew too. Every week that passed without major problems brought us closer to the moment when we would finally dare to believe everything would be all right. Then came October 10, 1972. At Virga Jesse Hospital in Hasselt,

our son was born. Marco. When I saw him for the first time, something happened within me that I will never forget. To me, his birth was the greatest miracle I had experienced until then. After all those months of uncertainty. After the miscarriage. After the doctor's warning. After all our fears and hesitation. He was there. Healthy. Alive. Our son. I thought he was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen.

Of course, perhaps every father says that about his own child. But to me, it was truly so. I looked at him and could barely believe this little being was our child. All the tension I had carried for months seemed to release at that moment. I cried. Not merely a few tears. I cried for hours. With happiness. Relief. Gratitude. Everything came out. All those worries that had fortunately proved unnecessary. All those unanswered questions. All those nights when we had hoped everything would go well. Suddenly, none of them mattered anymore. Marco was there. And he was beautiful. When I held him for the first time, I barely dared to move. He was so small. So vulnerable. So perfect in my eyes. His little hand closed its fingers around one of mine.



My two sons, Michael and Marco, in their teenage years.

It was such a simple gesture. And yet it changed my entire life. I looked at him and only one thought filled me: this is my son. At that moment, I understood that I was no longer responsible only for myself. Dorina and I were no longer merely husband and wife. We had become father and mother. From that day forward, a little human being would depend on us. He would look to us. Learn from us. Seek our protection. And without knowing it, he would teach us what it truly means to love someone unconditionally. That realization humbled me. I wanted to be a good father. Not a perfect father. Such a thing does not exist. But a father who would always be there. A father who would teach his children honesty. The value of keeping

one's word. Respect for others. And the courage never to be afraid of work.

I knew I would make mistakes. All parents do. But I made myself a promise. Marco would always know he was loved. He would always know that, whatever happened, he could count on his father. Our apartment on Hasselt's inner ring road was not large. Our financial situation was not easy. We did not yet own a home. There was no certainty about what the future would bring. But when we brought Marco home, I felt richer than I ever had before. Not because of what we possessed. But because of who was with us. We had become a family. When I think back on that period today, after so many years, I perhaps understand even better what happiness truly means. Happiness is not always the absence of worries. Sometimes it comes precisely after a long period of fear.

And perhaps that is why it is felt with even greater intensity. On October 10, 1972, Dorina and I did not have a large house. No financial security. No idea what the rest of our lives would be like. But we had Marco. And that day, it was all that mattered. In the years that followed, he would become a man with his own character, dreams, and special talents. Life would lead us together along roads we could not possibly foresee that day. But that story belonged to later. I want to preserve October 10, 1972, as that day truly was. Not with what I know today. But with what I felt then. Pure joy. A happiness so great I could not express it in words. Only in tears. When I think back on everything I was

given the chance to experience, the first time I saw Marco remains one of the most moving moments of my life.

CHAPTER 18

With Michael, Our Family Was Complete

Nearly four years after Marco's birth, life gave us another wonderful gift. On May 30, 1976, our second son was born. We named him Michael. It was a year many people would later remember for its exceptional heat. The summer of 1976 would become one of the hottest of the century. But to Dorina and me, that year would remain forever engraved in our memory for an entirely different reason. Michael's birth was far from easy. Dorina endured an especially difficult labor that lasted more than twelve hours. The hours passed, one after another. And like any man standing beside the woman he loves, I once again felt all the helplessness such a moment can bring. You cannot take anything in her place. You cannot remove the pain. You can only be present. Wait. Hope. And long to hear someone finally say that everything ended well.

But the delivery was made even more difficult by Michael's position. He came into the world feet first. For Dorina, it must have been an incredibly painful ordeal. For more than twelve hours, she had fought to bring our child into the world. I could only admire her strength. And when he was finally there... Michael. Our second child. Our second son. I once again felt that overwhelming emotion that had filled my heart nearly four years earlier at Marco's birth.

But this time, immense relief was mixed with it. After all those hours of tension, he had finally been born. And Dorina had overcome that difficult delivery. When you experience something like that, you realize once again how fragile life can be. One moment, you wait in fear and uncertainty. The next, a new human being is there. Your own child.



Dorina and I on our wedding day in 1971—the beginning of the life we would build together.



Together at the table—a simple moment that means so much to me.

And suddenly everything else seems unimportant. When I first saw Michael, my thoughts also went to Marco. He was still only a little boy of three himself. But from that moment, he was no longer an only child. He had become a big brother. Even today, I have to smile when I think back on that period. I wondered whether Marco truly understood what had happened. Probably not entirely. But I saw his curiosity as he carefully looked at his little brother. From that day, a new chapter began for our family. Our home became even livelier. Toys lay everywhere. There was laughter. Sometimes tears. And as in every family, there were small arguments in ours as well. But above all... There was life. A house full of life. Dorina and I did what thousands of young parents try to do every day.

We wanted to give our children everything within our power. Not luxury. But love. Not abundance. But the warmth and security of a united family. We wanted to teach them to respect others. To be honest. To keep their word. And never to forget where their family came from. Language was also part of the special world in which our children grew up. Because Dorina taught French, we mainly spoke French at home. Outside, Dutch was the language of our daily lives. And when I returned to my De Lindeman community, I still often heard and spoke the Italian in which I myself had grown up. Three languages. But also three worlds that were part of who we were. Our Italian origins always remained present. In our habits. In our memories.

And above all, in our stories. Stories about Loreto Aprutino.
About our parents and grandparents.



A tender moment with Dorina, the woman who has remained by my side all these years.



Dorina and I with our son Marco.

About Abruzzo. About my De Lindeman community. About the coal mines. And about the sacrifices our parents made to give their children a better future. It was important to me that Marco and Michael understand that their lives were part of a story that had begun long before their births. I wanted them to know what their grandparents had been forced to leave behind and how much they had sacrificed so that their children and grandchildren could receive opportunities in Belgium that had never been self-evident to them. That was the inheritance I wanted to pass on to them. Not as a burden. But as something precious. Something to preserve. And perhaps one day to pass on themselves. When I look back today, I see two boys who were very different from one another. Each with his own character. His own talents. His own dreams. A father quickly learns that he must not compare his children.

Every child is unique. From an early age, Marco showed great curiosity. He asked questions. He wanted to understand how things worked. Michael had his own character and qualities. And it was precisely those differences that made them who they were. The most beautiful thing was that they grew up together. They played together. Laughed together. And yes... Every now and then, they also got up to a little mischief together. Exactly as childhood should be. Our family was now complete. When I came home after a long working day and heard my children's voices, the day's worries seemed to fade into the background by themselves. In those moments, I began truly

to understand where real wealth is found. Not in a bank account. But around the kitchen table. In a child's smile. In the hand of the person you love. In the quiet security of a home where everyone feels protected.



A portrait of Marco as a young boy.

That was the happiness we lived then. A simple happiness. But perhaps that simple happiness is one of the most precious gifts a human being can receive in life. At the

time, I did not yet know which paths life would later trace for Marco and Michael. Nor did I need to know. At that moment, they were simply our two boys. Our children. And after the difficult hours in which Michael had come into the world, I felt gratitude above all. Gratitude for Dorina. For her strength. For Marco. For Michael. For our family. I knew only one thing. I would do everything in my power to give my children the opportunities my parents and I had never had.

CHAPTER 19

DOROMA - When a Dream Was Given a Name

DOROMA was the first business I gave a name drawn directly from my family: DO for Dorina, RO for Renato, and MA for Marco. The she-wolf in the logo referred to my Italian roots. In this way, the brand carried something of our family and of my desire to build something independently.

DOROMA grew one customer at a time through hard work, personal service, and trust. At the same time, a new path opened toward Italian ceramics and design, and my attention and resources became increasingly divided between DOROMA and ITALIA IN.



FAEMA and DOROMA—two names that shaped my love of coffee and my path as an entrepreneur.

When I entrusted the day-to-day management to someone else, I lost sight of what was really happening. Decisions were made that weakened DOROMA, but the ultimate responsibility remained mine. I should have kept a closer watch and intervened sooner. The ending was painful and taught me that trust must never mean handing over your own responsibility.

CHAPTER 20

Italia In and My First Trip to Sassuolo

While DOROMA was slowly finding its first customers, a second door opened in my life at almost the same time. It was a door that led neither to coffee nor to espresso machines, but to ceramic tiles and Italian design. After spending so many years in the world of coffee, I had been convinced that my future would always remain connected to that industry. I knew the products. I knew the technology. I knew the customers. It was a world in which I felt completely at home. And yet, without realizing it at the time, I was beginning an entirely different journey. As so often happened in my life, it did not begin with a grand plan. It began with a family conversation. My cousin Leonardo stayed with us for a while. He was an experienced tile setter who knew every detail of his trade. Our entire family, including my brothers and me, helped him start his own business in Liège.

At first, he worked as a tile setter. He knew how to lay tiles. He knew the materials. And he understood what customers expected from a craftsman. But Leonardo had an entrepreneurial spirit. He did not want to limit himself to laying tiles. He began looking further ahead, established contacts with Italian manufacturers, and eventually became an importer of Italian ceramic tiles. At that time, this world

was still almost completely unknown to me. My experience was in coffee. In machines. In sales. I still knew very little about ceramic tiles. Leonardo spoke to me more and more often about his business and the exclusive Italian products he imported. His company was based in Liège and primarily served French-speaking customers. But he also saw opportunities in Limburg and throughout the rest of Flanders.

One day he asked me, “Why don’t you open a shop in Limburg where you can offer my exclusive products to the Flemish public?” That question stayed with me. I did not yet know enough about the world of tiles. But I knew Flanders. I spoke Dutch. I knew the mentality of the people. And I had experience in sales and prospecting. Perhaps I could use what I had learned in the coffee business in this new field. The product was completely different. But the customers’ desire for quality and good guidance remained the same. Little by little, the idea took shape. In 1977, ITALIA IN was born. Beneath the name ITALIA IN also appeared the word BELGIUM. That addition was a deliberate choice. The purpose of my company went beyond simply selling ceramic tiles. ITALIA IN - BELGIUM was meant to express what I wanted to accomplish: bringing Italian design to Belgium.

Ceramic tiles formed an important part of the offering. But I did not want to stop there. I also offered modern Italian bathroom furniture. Products that combined beauty, practicality, and Italian craftsmanship. ITALIA IN thus

became a company through which I wanted to introduce the Flemish public to different products of Italian design. Products that, at that time, were not yet widely available in Belgium. That is how I took my first real steps into the world of ceramics and interior design. Meanwhile, DOROMA continued to exist. For several years, I combined the two businesses. Coffee and Italian design. Two completely different product worlds. Two different kinds of customers. And, for me, two ways to rebuild an income for my family after the uncertainty caused by FAEMA. My collaboration with Leonardo did not last long. We realized that our ideas about the company's future development did not entirely coincide. Leonardo's strength lay in his experience as a craftsman and in the products and working methods he knew well.

I was looking more and more toward new developments. I saw tastes changing. I noticed that customers were becoming interested in new colors, modern designs, and different ways of furnishing their homes. I wanted to follow those changes. More than that: I wanted to try to stay ahead of them. That did not mean one of our visions was better than the other. We simply looked at the future differently. I retained great respect for Leonardo's experience. It was thanks to him that I had found the door to this new world. But I understood that I had to choose my own direction. Beginning in 1978, I therefore continued developing ITALIA IN entirely on my own and independently of Leonardo. I began establishing contacts with other Belgian importers

and wholesalers. That gave me access to a wider selection and enabled me to offer my customers more choices. At the same time, I cautiously began importing products directly from Italy myself.

When I decided to continue developing ITALIA IN independently, catalogs and samples were not enough for me. I wanted to know where the products came from. I wanted to see the factories. Meet the people. And understand how ceramic tiles were actually made. That is how I made my first journey to Sassuolo. There are places one visits. And then there are other places where, from the very first moment, one feels at home. That is exactly how I felt in Sassuolo. Until then, I had mainly known Italy through my childhood memories. Loreto Aprutino. My grandparents. The summers spent with my family, filled with simplicity, affection, and warmth. But northern Italy was an entirely different world. As I entered the Modena and Sassuolo region, I saw tall factory chimneys everywhere. Trucks were constantly coming and going. Long freight trains waited on the tracks.

In and around the warehouses, enormous stocks of ceramic tiles stood ready to leave for every corner of Europe. I immediately understood that I had arrived in the beating heart of the ceramic industry. The first thing that struck me was the energy. Everyone seemed to know exactly what had to be done. The machines ran without stopping. Forklifts moved constantly through the immense warehouses. Conversations were brief and focused.

Decisions were made without endless meetings. There was an atmosphere of confidence, but also of discipline. For someone like me, coming from the world of coffee, it was especially fascinating. During my first factory visit, I was given a hard hat. I put on a dust-protection coat and followed the director along the production lines. I heard the deep rumble of the gigantic presses. I felt the heat escaping from the enormous kilns. And I watched clay, water, and minerals transform, step by step, into a finished ceramic product.

It looked almost like magic. But it was not magic. It was knowledge. Craftsmanship. Experience. And passion. I kept asking questions. Why were those particular raw materials used? Why were such high firing temperatures necessary? Why did one tile receive a matte surface and another a glossy finish? How did firing affect strength? And how did they ensure that thousands of tiles kept the same dimensions and colors? The engineers smiled. Perhaps they thought I was a far too curious Belgian. But at the same time, I sensed that they appreciated my interest. I was not asking those questions to test their knowledge. I asked because I genuinely wanted to understand what I would be offering my customers. At noon, we ate together. Not a quick meal behind a desk. Instead, we sat around a single table, where directors, sales representatives, technicians, and factory workers sat side by side.

We laughed. We talked. About ceramics. Soccer. Politics. Family. That touched me too. Despite the size of the factories

and the speed of the work, human relationships remained important. Perhaps that is why I felt at home so quickly. Once again I heard the language in which I had grown up. I ate dishes that reminded me of my mother's cooking. I recognized the familiar gestures. The lively conversations. The pride with which people spoke about their work. In those moments, I understood once again that, even after so many years in Belgium, a part of my heart had remained deeply Italian.

But that was not the only cause of what went wrong. My own attention had shifted too. I had invested far more time and money in ITALIA IN. I was no longer present enough for the customers who had helped DOROMA grow. I must admit that honestly. Just as DOROMA had once grown one customer at a time, it now lost its strength one customer at a time. By the time I fully understood what was happening, much had already been lost. DOROMA slowly faded away. That hurt me. To me, DOROMA had never been just a business name. Within that name lived Dorina, our family name Rossi, and Marco. The brand carried our family, our dreams, and an important part of my life. I had built it from nothing. I had personally visited every customer. I had experienced every first order as a victory. And now I watched something that had begun with so much hope disappear.

It would be easy to place all the blame on someone else. But I do not want to do that. In the end, DOROMA was my company. I had made the decision to devote more and more

time and resources to ITALIA IN. I had entrusted DOROMA's daily management to someone else. I had not exercised enough oversight. And I had realized too late how closely the company was tied to my personal presence. The final responsibility therefore remained mine. Not because my trust had not been betrayed. It had. But because an entrepreneur remains responsible for what he has built, even when he delegates certain tasks. It was not an easy truth. But it was mine. I learned from it that trust is indispensable. Without it, people cannot build anything together. But trust alone is not enough. A company that developed around personal contact cannot lose that contact without customers feeling the difference.

And anyone who divides his attention among several activities must keep checking that none of them is slowly slipping from his grasp. Perhaps that, too, is part of entrepreneurship. It is not only about taking pride in what went well. It is also about having the courage to accept responsibility for what was lost. When I think back to that first journey to Sassuolo, I therefore see more than factories, machines, and endless rows of ceramic tiles. I see a new horizon. But I also see what I was beginning to leave behind. One chapter of my professional life was slowly closing, while another was opening wider and wider before me. In Sassuolo, I discovered a world in which my Italian roots and my Belgian experience could complement each other. In Italy, I found the products, the craftsmanship, and the

passion. In Belgium, I knew the market and the people to whom I could introduce those products.

At that moment, I could not possibly know where that combination would lead me. Yet during that first return journey to Belgium, I felt one thing very clearly. In Sassuolo, I had not merely discovered new products. I had found a destination that would give direction to my life for many years.

CHAPTER 21

1981 - The Year We Lost Our Home

In 1981, I reached a point where my entrepreneurial spirit no longer meant freedom alone. The bills had caught up with me. There was a loan of roughly two million Belgian francs, and about four hundred thousand francs in VAT was still outstanding. For a young family, those were not figures on paper; they sat at the table with us and kept me awake at night.

Looking back, it is tempting to blame a crisis entirely on adverse circumstances or on people who failed to keep their promises. I, too, experienced disappointments. But I had made choices of my own. I had divided my attention, trusted too easily, and believed for too long that I could solve a problem simply by working even harder. Optimism is a strength as long as it does not replace reality. In 1981, I had to admit that my enthusiasm had outpaced my caution.

To avoid bankruptcy, we sold our home. That was far more than a financial measure. Dorina and I had filled every room with dreams; that was where our children felt at home. The day a house that was yours becomes someone else's property again, you feel how fragile security can be. I was ashamed. Not because working and failing is dishonourable, but because my decisions had also affected the people who relied on me.

Even so, I did not want to disappear behind my shame. I sought out conversations, made arrangements, and tried to settle every debt properly. Bankruptcy was avoided, but the pain did not disappear with it. We had to live more modestly and begin again. Some people distanced themselves. Others unexpectedly reached out a helping hand. In years like those, you learn more than lessons about money; you also discover who you are when no one is impressed by your plans anymore.

I have never wanted to turn that period into a heroic tale. I did not get up every morning without fear. There were days when I doubted, slept badly, and wondered whether my family would have been better off with a man who took fewer risks. But the next step still had to be taken. I called a customer, visited a supplier, and once again looked for work I could do honestly.

The crisis took a home and much of my self-confidence from me, but it left me with one conviction: beginning again is not a grand gesture. It is a series of small actions taken while you are still afraid. Later, when Marco went through his own dark period, I was too quick to think that the same willpower could save him as well. At the time, I did not yet understand well enough that a financial crisis and a psychiatric illness cannot be compared. That understanding came too late, and it is one of the most painful lessons of my life.

CHAPTER 22

Medardo Maseroli, the Man Who Believed in Me

Very soon, our conversations went far beyond ceramic tiles alone. We spoke about entrepreneurship. Responsibility. Family. Trust. One day, he said something I have never forgotten: “You can lose an order, but never lose your credibility.” Those words have remained engraved in my heart forever. Because, in the end, credibility may be an entrepreneur's greatest capital. Everything else can disappear. A company. A contract. A factory. But as long as people continue to trust your word, you can always begin again. Medardo saw that I was willing to work without counting the hours. He knew I did not hesitate to travel thousands of miles for a customer. He understood that selling a product was not enough for me. I wanted to understand. I wanted to improve. I wanted to build something with others.

Little by little, a bond of mutual respect grew between us. To me, his confidence was worth far more than any contract. When someone so experienced believes in you, he also gives you the courage to go further than you ever thought possible. Medardo did not merely offer me opportunities. He entrusted me with responsibilities. And responsibility may be one of the greatest gifts one human being can give another, because it means that someone truly

believes you are capable of carrying it. At an important moment in my life, he went even further. He supported me with one hundred thousand Belgian francs. At the time, that was a considerable sum. But what touched me most deeply was not only the money. It was the trust behind that gesture. He believed in me. He believed in my projects.

And he was prepared to turn that belief into action. His support did not merely give me greater financial freedom. Above all, it gave me renewed courage. I felt that I was not alone. That a man of experience and wisdom saw possibilities in me whose full extent I perhaps did not yet recognize myself.

That was precisely where the strength of our collaboration lay. Medardo was also much more than a businessman. He was a very well-known sculptor. His art revealed another side of his personality. The sensitive man. The artist who looked not only at outward form, but also at what lived deep within the human being. He worked with stone, yet knew how to make feelings visible in it. Peace. Joy. Sadness. Hope. Perhaps that is why he understood people so well. A sculptor does not look only at what is visible on the outside. He tries to discover what is hidden within. After his death, a very special and moving gesture awaited me. According to his final wish, I was to be the first person allowed to choose a work from his collection. His wife Rita and his sons Yvan and Igor honored that wish and gave me the opportunity to select a work myself.

I was deeply moved. It meant that Medardo had thought of me before he died. Of all the works I could have chosen, I selected a sculpture that touched me immediately. Carved from white Carrara marble, it represented the Madonna. The work had two different faces. When I turned the sculpture, I saw on one side a Madonna who expressed repose, peace, and happiness. On the other side appeared an entirely different face. It was the face of a woman in white with a sad and sorrowful expression. It was the same work. The same stone. And yet each side told a completely different story. Of all the works I could have chosen, I felt that this one was meant for me. It showed the two faces of life. Joy and sorrow. Hope and pain. Calm and turmoil. Light and darkness. One cannot always exist without the other. Like every human life, mine too is made up of bright days and dark days.



The Madonna in white Carrara marble, created by Medardo Maseroli and entrusted to me after his death.

Of trust rewarded. And trust sometimes betrayed. Of successful projects. And lost dreams. Perhaps that is why the work touched me so deeply. It reflected something of my own life. The man who always wanted to keep moving forward. But also the man who often carried his worries and grief deep within himself. To me, this sculpture was far

more than a work of art. Medardo had carved it himself from white Carrara marble. His hands had shaped the stone. His thoughts and feelings continued to live within it. The fact that, according to his final wish, I was the first person allowed to choose a work remains one of the most personal and precious testimonies to our friendship. When I look at the sculpture, I think of Medardo. Of the opportunities he gave me. Of everything we built together. Of his faith in me. But also of the pain left behind when someone disappears from our life forever.

In the years that followed, when I had to make difficult decisions, I often thought back to our conversations. Not because he had an answer to everything. But because he had taught me to ask the right questions. And the right question is sometimes worth far more than a quick answer. Only after he was gone did I truly understand how profoundly he had influenced my life. Some people leave buildings behind. Others, successful companies. Medardo left me something far more valuable. Memories. His trust. And a work in which his hands, his soul, and his friendship will remain present forever. I remember a man who was willing to place his trust in others, sometimes even before they had fully proven themselves. A man who judged people by their character, not only by what they could accomplish. Even today, when I say his name, I feel the same profound gratitude.

Not only because he helped me grow professionally. But because he confirmed something in which I had always

believed. Business always begins with people. And a sincere handshake can sometimes be worth far more than a hundred-page contract. That is why Medardo Maseroli will always hold a very special place in my heart. Not merely as a business partner. But also as a friend. As a mentor. As an artist. And as the man who, at one of the most important moments of my life, said to me, “Keep going. I believe in you.” Sometimes a single sentence is enough to change the course of a person’s life. For me, Medardo was that man.

CHAPTER 23

Pastorelli and the Finest Years of My Work

In the fall of 1986, my life took another unexpected turn. Thanks to Medardo Maseroli, I met Alberto Pastorelli and was given the opportunity to represent Ceramiche Pastorelli throughout the Benelux. Alberto was a co-owner of the Ceramiche Pastorelli group. Half of the company belonged to Alberto and his sister. The other half was owned by their three cousins. It was therefore a true family business, in which tradition, craftsmanship, and responsibility were passed down from one generation to the next. The first time I saw their collections, I immediately understood that they were far more than simple ceramic tiles. Every collection had a character of its own. Special attention was paid to the colors. The surfaces. The finishes. But above all, to quality. Once again, I felt like the young sales representative who, years earlier, had discovered the world of espresso.

Only now, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee had been replaced by the smell of clay and glaze, and by the heat of blazing kilns. From the very first day, I promised myself that I would not be merely a representative. I wanted to be a partner. To the factory. To the importers. To the architects. To the tile dealers and installers. I wanted everyone to feel that they could rely on me. Alberto gave me all the freedom and responsibility I needed to do that. He entrusted me with

the assets of his company. The quality of its products. The Pastorelli name. Its customer relationships. And the development of the brand in the Benelux. That trust was priceless to me. Alberto had a wonderful personality. Despite his position within a major ceramic group, he had remained a humble and approachable man. He listened. He showed respect.

And he understood that a good collaboration rests not only on figures and contracts, but above all on mutual trust. Our collaboration was held in very high regard throughout the ceramic industry. Not only in the Benelux. Even many Italian competitors knew and respected the way Alberto and I worked together. Everyone could see how well we complemented one another. Alberto knew the factory, the production process, and the possibilities of his collections. I knew the Benelux, its customers, and the best way to present Italian products there. Together, we formed a strong team. It meant long days. Very long days. Every morning, I left home early. On some days, I drove hundreds of miles. From Antwerp to Luxembourg. From Ostend to Maastricht. From Brussels all the way to the north of the Netherlands. When most people had already finished their day, I was often still writing reports or preparing the next day's appointments.

Yet I never considered those endless miles a burden. Quite the opposite. My car had become my second office. It was where I thought. Where new ideas were born. Where I prepared my conversations with customers. And sometimes

I drove for hours in silence, watching the landscape pass by while thinking about the future. Alberto came to Belgium three or four times a year. Together, we visited our customers throughout the Benelux. We listened to their experiences. We discussed what was working well and what could be improved. But his visits were also important moments for thinking about the future. We spoke about new collections. Colors and sizes. Changing tastes in the market. And projects we wanted to develop together. Those meetings were never merely professional obligations. They brought us closer and strengthened the trust that had grown between us over the years.



With Alberto Pastorelli, mentor and friend.



One of the tile displays I had made for shops and showrooms.

It did not take long for me to notice that many showrooms failed to do justice to the beauty of Italian

ceramic collections. Boxes were stacked one on top of another. Samples lay everywhere. Architects had to try to imagine what a floor or wall would look like without being able to see the final result. I found that especially unfortunate. A beautiful tile deserves a beautiful presentation. So I began developing new display systems myself. I made large wooden panels onto which complete tile compositions were carefully glued and grouted. They were no longer mere samples. They were complete presentations. An architect could see the harmony among the colors. A dealer could show customers what the final result might actually look like. Today, that may seem perfectly natural. But at the time, it was an innovative way to present ceramic products. I devoted countless hours to finding the best compositions.

Choosing the right grout color. Perfecting every detail of the finish. I wanted each panel to tell a story. When I later saw such a presentation in a showroom, I perhaps felt the same satisfaction as an artist standing before a completed work. Not because my name appeared anywhere, but because I knew it would help people make a better choice. Little by little, other Italian manufacturers also began taking an interest in the way I worked. They saw how I represented Pastorelli in the Benelux. They noticed how I presented the products. How I built relationships with customers. And how I tried not only to sell a brand, but to give it a genuine place in the market. More and more

manufacturers wanted me to introduce their brands in the Benelux alongside Pastorelli.

That was a great compliment. It meant that my work was not going unnoticed. Even so, my collaboration with Alberto and Pastorelli remained very special to me. The trust he placed in me formed the foundation of one of the most important and fruitful periods of my professional life. I did not merely sell products. I actively participated in their development. I passed on what customers told me. I reported which colors were increasingly in demand. Which sizes architects preferred. And which technical aspects I believed could be improved. I no longer felt like a simple representative. I had truly become a bridge between Italy and the Benelux. On one side were the Italian factories, with their craftsmanship, creativity, and technical knowledge. On the other were the importers, architects, dealers, and installers in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. My mission was to connect those two worlds.



Later, large modern tile display units were also made for the showrooms.



Unfortunately, very few photographs of those complete displays have survived.

I did not merely have to translate the language. I also had to understand the mentality, expectations, and needs on both sides. That trust grew year after year. And with it grew my network of human relationships. I met entrepreneurs who became lifelong friends. Architects who continued calling me whenever they needed advice. Importers who no longer saw me simply as a supplier, but as a genuine partner. To me, that was the greatest reward. Not only the sales figures, but above all the trust. Alberto, like Medardo, contributed greatly to the remarkable success I was fortunate enough to experience for more than fifteen years. Medardo had shown me the door to Pastorelli. Alberto then gave me the trust and freedom I needed to walk through it and fully develop my own abilities. Each in his own way, both men hold an indelible place in my professional life.

When I think back on those years today, I still feel the same warmth in my heart. They were intense years. Years of hard work. Thousands upon thousands of miles on the road. Countless encounters. But they were also years in which I rose every morning with enthusiasm, because I felt I was building something meaningful. Not only for myself. But together with so many other people. Even today, Alberto and I are still in contact. The years have passed. Our professional lives have changed. But the respect and admiration we feel for one another have remained. Perhaps that is the finest proof that our collaboration was always based on far more than business. It was built on trust. On

loyalty. And on a sincere appreciation of one another as human beings.

CHAPTER 24

The Question of Whether It Could Be Better

The display panels had shown me how much difference a better way of presenting products could make. But the more I worked in the ceramic world, the more clearly I understood that the problem went far beyond the way a tile was shown in a showroom. Something was missing in the way our entire industry operated. Product quality improved year after year. Factories invested in new technologies. Tile sizes became larger. Designs became more refined. And yet the way all those products and all that information reached the customer remained almost unchanged. Architects still leafed through heavy catalogs. Dealers carried large display panels from one showroom to another. Importers worked with stacks of price lists that constantly had to be updated. Quotes were still calculated by hand. And at the slightest change, everything often had to be started over. I observed all of this with growing curiosity.

Not because that way of working was wrong, but because I was convinced that it had to be possible to make it simpler and more efficient. One question would not leave me: “Would it not be possible to connect all those separate steps?” I kept thinking about it during my long drives. In the evenings, I sat at our kitchen table and filled sheet after sheet with sketches. I was not drawing new tiles. I was

drawing a new way of working. I imagined a system that would allow an architect to see immediately what a completed room would look like. A system that would spare a dealer from spending hours making calculations. A system in which colors, sizes, prices, and technical information would all be connected. Today, that seems perfectly obvious. But at the time, it appeared almost impossible. In many companies, computers were still far from commonplace.



A ready-made modular mosaic panel by PRONTO MOSAICO.



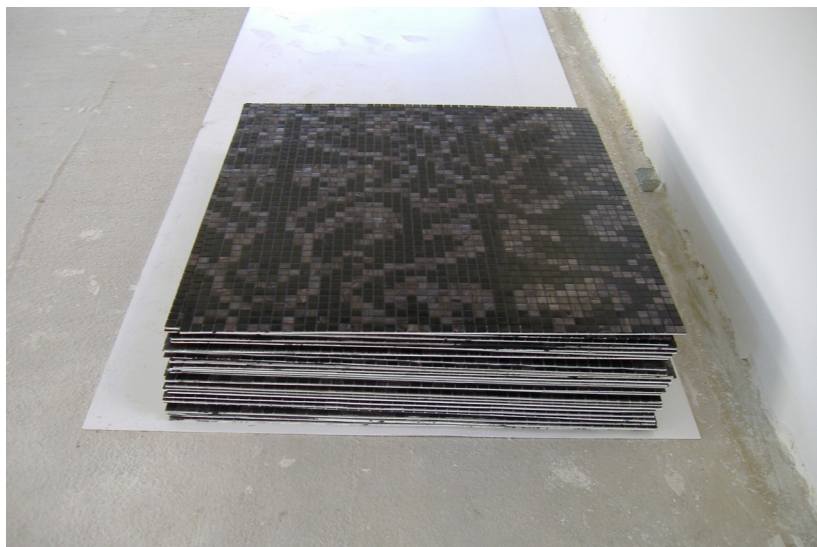
The flexible construction of the PRONTO MOSAICO mosaic covering.

To many people, they were complex and unfamiliar machines. To me, they represented something entirely

different. A possibility. Not because I was a programmer. I was not. But because I sensed that technology could help people. Not replace them. Help them. Little by little, I began speaking more and more often about these ideas with Marco. He was still young. But I could already see in him the same curiosity that had driven me at his age. When we spoke about the future, he did not see obstacles. He saw possibilities. That touched me deeply. Sometimes we remained together for hours at the kitchen table. Often, there was nothing between us but a sheet of paper. I drew how I imagined such a system might work. Marco would then take the idea one step further. He asked questions I had not yet considered myself. Little by little, something special began to take shape. Not merely an idea, but a dream we shared.



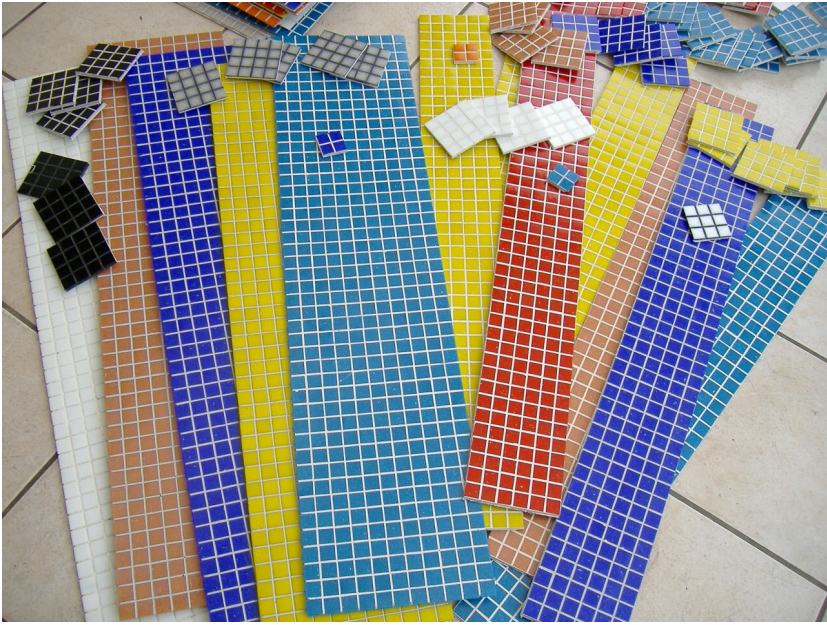
Ready-made modular mosaic panels by PRONTO MOSAICO, ready for installation.



The stacked modular panels show how compactly the system could be transported and handled.

Little by little, something special began to take shape. Not merely an idea, but a dream we shared. For the first time, I felt that Marco and I did not complement each other only as father and son. We were also beginning to inspire one another professionally. I brought the experience I had accumulated in the field over all those years. Marco brought his open view of technology and the future. Together, we complemented each other beautifully. At that moment, I still had no idea where this road would ultimately lead us. I knew only that we wanted to build something together that would genuinely move our industry forward. Not to impress people. Not to become the biggest. But because we believed people deserved better tools. When I look back today, I understand that the first outlines of what would later become Piramedia were never drawn in an office. They were born in our home. Around the kitchen table.

From conversations. Sketches. Dreams. And our shared conviction that one day the future could be different. Perhaps that is the most beautiful thing about every great dream. It does not begin with a building. Nor with an investment. Nor even with a computer. It begins with two people looking at each other and saying, “Imagine if it could be better.”



Ready-made PRONTO MOSAICO mosaic covering panels, available in different colours and patterns.

My drive to improve did not stop at an attractive display panel. I worked on ready-made mosaic elements, modular floors, and systems that could be installed more lightly, quickly, and precisely. Not every idea found a market straight away. Some designs were ahead of their time; others proved too expensive or required partners I did not yet have. Even so, I kept drawing, testing, and refining.



The mosaic panel inspired by Leonardo da Vinci, made with my Dai di Più system.

In 2009, an international patent application was filed for one of my modular systems. A patent does not prove that an idea will automatically succeed; it merely confirms that something new was conceived and recorded. For me, it was above all recognition of a lifelong habit: looking at an existing problem and asking whether it could be made

simpler. The real Renato was never satisfied with, “This is how we have done it for years.” Sometimes that attitude brought progress, sometimes frustration, but it kept me alert and curious.

CHAPTER 25

The Glass Pyramid

What had begun around our kitchen table eventually needed a space of its own. Some buildings fade from your memory as soon as you leave them. Others remain part of your life forever. For me, the Glass Pyramid in Lummen, close to the major interchange where several highways converge, was such a place. The first time I saw it, I stopped for a moment. It was not an ordinary office building. There was something special about it. It was almost as if the building whispered to me: It was almost as though the building whispered to me, “This is a place where new ideas can be born.” Was that only my imagination? Perhaps. Perhaps not. All I know is that I immediately felt this was where I wanted our dream to grow. In the early 1990s, the world was changing ever faster. Computers were slowly finding their way into companies.

The fax had become an indispensable tool. Mobile phones were cautiously beginning to enter everyday life. And yet the ceramic industry still worked almost as it had twenty years earlier. With catalogs. Printed price lists. Hand calculations. Photographs. And samples. I was convinced that the future would be different. Not only for the factories, but also for architects. Tile dealers. Installers. For everyone who worked with ceramic materials every day. Marco shared that conviction. He did not simply listen carefully to

my ideas. He developed them further. Where I saw the practical problems in our industry, he saw the possibilities offered by computers. One evening, after yet another long conversation about our plans, Marco looked at me and said, “Dad, if we truly want to do this, we must also have the courage to think big.” I have never forgotten those words.

He was right. A small office would not be enough. We needed space. Space to bring people together. For demonstrations. For computers. A space where the future could become visible. That is how we arrived at the Glass Pyramid in Lummen in 1995. We rented about forty-three hundred square feet. To many people, it seemed completely insane. Some even thought we were dreamers. “What on earth are two people going to do with so much space?” I simply smiled. In my mind, that space was already completely filled. Not with furniture, but with ideas. We wanted to create a meeting place. A center where Italian, French, and Spanish manufacturers could present their collections. Where architects could discover new materials. Where importers could attend training sessions. Where computers would no longer be used only to write letters, but also to make complete projects visible before the first tile had even been laid.

Today, all of that seems perfectly normal. At the time, it sounded almost like science fiction. I still remember very clearly the day we installed the first furniture. Every desk was positioned carefully. Every computer was an investment in the future. We connected the telephones. Very

soon, the fax seemed to be receiving new messages almost without stopping. Slowly, the Pyramid came to life. It was also in the Pyramid that I began working with Cristina. Marco had known her since their student years. She had the same open spirit. The same willingness to work hard. And the same endless curiosity. From her first day, she never acted like a mere employee. She immediately became part of our dream. It showed in everything she did. When work still had to be finished in the evening, everyone stayed voluntarily to help. No one watched the clock. We looked only at what remained to be done.

There was an enthusiasm that is difficult to express in words. We truly believed we could build something that would change our industry. Perhaps we were naive. Perhaps we were simply a little ahead of our time. We were probably a little of both. That was precisely what made those years so special. We did far more than work. We laughed. We debated. We ate together. Some of our best ideas were born over lunch, on the corner of a paper tablecloth. A simple remark from a customer could become the starting point for an entirely new solution the very next day. Everyone contributed ideas. Everyone had something valuable to offer. Even today, when I close my eyes, I hear the sound of keyboards. The fax printing a new message from Italy. Marco entering enthusiastically with a new idea. Cristina welcoming visitors with her sincere smile.



The Glass Pyramid—a dream that became reality.

And me... Moving from one desk to another. Sometimes tired. Often worried. But above all, happy. Because I felt I was finally doing exactly what I had been working toward all my life. Not simply filling a building, but bringing people together around a shared dream. To us, the Glass Pyramid was never merely an office. It was a laboratory of ideas. A place where experience met youth. Where Italy and Belgium came together. Where the past and the future shook hands. When I think back on those years today, the glass is not the first thing I see. I see the people. They were the true light that made the Pyramid shine.

Between 1998 and 2003, a new and exceptionally intense period began. We relaunched Piramedia in an industrial building on the Beringen industrial estate. Thanks to a new injection of funds, a new investor, and an increase in

capital, we were able to approach the project on a much broader scale.

At its peak, around twenty-eight people worked with us: permanent employees, temporary staff, interns, web designers, and students with holiday jobs. Each person had a distinct role in bringing our overall concept to completion. Experience, young digital expertise, and practical creativity came together there.

Alongside software and presentation systems, we developed floating ceramic floors and ready-made wall, floor, and mosaic panels. They had to be lighter, stronger, modular, and easy to install, without always having to remove the existing floor first. The research from those years helped form the basis for the international patent application granted in 2009. Not everything reached the market as we had hoped, but the dedication of all those people helped Marco and me make our ideas tangible.

CHAPTER 26

Cristina - Quiet Strength Behind Our Dream

When I think back today on those early years in the Glass Pyramid, I see above all the two young people who gave our project its special energy. I see Marco. And I see Cristina. Both had only recently completed their studies. They were young. Eager to learn. Full of enthusiasm. And above all, they were not afraid to think big. That was precisely what gave our project its unique strength. I brought more than twenty years of experience in the worlds of coffee and ceramics. I knew the factories. I knew the importers. I knew the architects. I knew where the real problems lay. But Marco and Cristina possessed something that cannot be bought anywhere. A fresh perspective. To them, no limitation was self-evident. Whenever I said something would be difficult, they simply asked, “Why?” That one question often forced me to think again. Perhaps something seemed difficult only because we had always done it the same way.

Very soon, the Pyramid became much more than an office. During the day, we received customers from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Italian manufacturers came to present their latest collections. Architects wanted to discover new ways to present their projects. And in the evening... a second workday often began. After the last

visitors had left, we frequently continued working for hours. Marco sat behind his computer, searching for ways to make our ideas technically possible. Cristina prepared the documents, handled communication, and made sure everything was organized with care. And me? I filled page after page with sketches drawn from my practical experience. We exchanged ideas. We debated. Sometimes we disagreed. But we always shared the same goal. To build something that could truly make a difference. Our roles were different. That was precisely why we complemented one another so well. During that period, other people joined us, bringing the technical knowledge we lacked.

I still remember how important those first programmers were. We had ideas. Hundreds of ideas. But ideas alone are not enough to build software. We needed people capable of transforming our dream into lines of computer code. That was not always simple. I would explain a problem based on my experience in the ceramic world. Marco would then try to translate it into computer logic. Cristina made sure our ideas were clearly documented and communicated. Then the programmer had to understand exactly what we wanted to achieve and how it could be accomplished technically. That led to long conversations. And almost as often, a great deal of laughter. In reality, we were speaking three different languages. The language of practical experience. The language of entrepreneurship. And the language of software development. Little by little, we learned to understand one

another. That was precisely when something truly special began to take shape.

Not merely a new computer program. But a tool born from the real problems people encountered in their daily work. That always remained our starting point. We did not want to develop software because computers had suddenly become fashionable. We wanted to develop it because technology could genuinely help people. An architect had to be able to design a project more quickly. A dealer had to be able to prepare a quote more easily. A customer had to be able to see a floor or bathroom before the first tile had even been ordered. That was our dream. Today, all of this seems almost self-evident. But at the time, many people looked at us in amazement. Some thought our ideas were far too ambitious. Others simply did not believe the industry would ever work that way. But that did not discourage us. Quite the opposite. It made us even more determined. We did not believe in change merely for the sake of change. We believed in improvement.

And that was what made the difference. When I think back today on those evenings in the Pyramid, I see three people sitting around a table. Not a large company. Not an army of employees. Not endless financial resources. Simply a father. A son. And a young woman. Three people convinced that the future could be built differently. That image still touches me today. Not because everything ultimately unfolded exactly as we hoped. But because it was genuine. We were not working for glory. We were not

seeking recognition. We worked because we sincerely believed we could leave behind something that would help other people move forward. Perhaps that is the most beautiful memory I carried with me from those years. Not the computers. Not the software. But the enthusiasm. The enthusiasm with which each new day began. And with which, without even realizing it, we built together a dream that would prove far greater than anything we could imagine at the time.



Cristina during the Piramedia years—a dear friend of Marco and a quiet force behind our dream.

In every company, some people are noticed immediately. They are the ones who speak the most. Who stand at the forefront. Who constantly propose new ideas. But there are also people without whom a company could never truly grow. People who never seek the spotlight, but who, quietly, day after day, make sure that everything continues to function. For Piramedia, Cristina was one of those people. I still remember very clearly the first time I heard about her. I

was at home, laid low by severe back pain. Marco told me about one of his fellow students, with whom he had formed a strong friendship during their studies in business and communication. He spoke about her with great respect. Not only because she was particularly capable, but above all because she was dependable. That word remained in my mind. Dependable. Later, I had the opportunity to get to know her personally.

My first impression never changed. No grand words. No need to put herself forward. Simply a calm young woman who listened carefully before she spoke. That was a quality I especially appreciated. When Marco and I decided to create Piramedia in the Glass Pyramid in Lummen, we wanted to build far more than a company. We wanted to form a team. A group of people who complemented one another. From the very first day, Cristina naturally found her place within that team. Every company needs people who can dream. But it needs just as much the people who know how to transform those dreams into reality. While Marco and I often discussed dozens of ideas at once, Cristina remained remarkably calm. She listened. She took notes. She did not ask many questions. But they were almost always the right ones. And very often, those simple questions brought us straight back to reality. "Who is going to handle this?"

Cristina was a dear friend to Marco and a calm, dependable presence within Piramedia. She did not need to be in the foreground to matter. While ideas flew rapidly around the room, she remained attentive to people and to

what genuinely needed to be completed. That combination of gentleness and discipline made her presence invaluable.

After Marco's death, she did not disappear from my life. Our bond changed, but it did not break. Over the years, I came to regard her as a daughter of the heart. I do not write that as a polite compliment. Some bonds are not determined at birth; they arise because someone stays when life becomes difficult. Cristina is one of those people.

PART 3

MARCO - MY SON, MY FRIEND

*His life, his inner struggle, and the love that one day cannot
erase*

CHAPTER 27

My Son, My Business Partner, My Friend

Some parents know every detail of their children's lives while they are young. Then each person follows his own road. And that is how life should be. I too had always thought that Marco would one day choose his own path. Perhaps he would start his own company. Perhaps he would take an entirely different direction. But life offered us something else. Little by little, we became colleagues. Then business partners. And almost without noticing it, we also became each other's confidants. Friends. It was an extraordinary gift. We saw each other almost every day. Not because we had to, but because our minds were already filled with new ideas. But because we both wanted to. When I entered the Pyramid in the morning, I often already heard the tapping of a keyboard. Marco had almost always arrived before me. A cup of coffee beside him. Completely absorbed in his work. Sometimes I stood behind him for a moment.

He did not even notice my arrival. Only when I gently placed my hand on his shoulder did he turn around. "Good morning, Dad." No more words were needed. We simply began another day. There were days when we worked side by side for hours without speaking much. And yet those silences sometimes said more than a thousand words. Most of the time, we sensed what was happening within the other

person. When one of us was struggling with something, the other noticed almost immediately. It is difficult to explain. Perhaps only people who have worked so closely with someone for years can truly understand what I mean. Marco also possessed a special gift. He knew how to inspire people. When he truly believed in an idea, he could draw almost anyone into his vision. He spoke quickly. His hands moved constantly as he explained something. He sketched his ideas on a sheet of paper.

Stood up. Sat down again. And before you knew it, you too began to believe that his idea was possible. How many times did I watch him with a smile? "Slow down, Marco," I would tell him. "At least give the others a moment to catch up with you." He laughed. But five minutes later, he was speaking again with the same enthusiasm. That was who he was. And deep in my heart, I hoped he would never lose it. We also traveled to Italy together often. Those trips were far more than business journeys. We sat side by side in the car for hours. We spoke about the company. New ideas. But just as often, we spoke about life. Our family. About the future. And sometimes we said nothing at all. Not because we had nothing left to tell each other, but because silence between two people who truly understand one another is never uncomfortable.

Today I cherish those memories more than ever. I also remember how proud I was when I saw how attentively the Italian manufacturers listened to Marco. They no longer saw only my son. They saw a young entrepreneur. A man with

vision. That made me happy. Not because he bore my name, but because he had earned their respect through his own efforts. Through his talent. Through his dedication. Through his honesty. Those are values that never grow old. Of course, we did not always agree. It would have been strange if we had. Sometimes I thought he wanted to move too quickly. At other times, he thought I was too cautious. Then we would argue, sometimes passionately. But never to hurt each other. Always because we both wanted the best. And almost every disagreement ended with a smile. Or over a cup of coffee.



Marco, my son, my business partner, and my friend.

No discussion was ever more important than the bond that united us. When I look back today, I fully realize how exceptional those years were. How many fathers have the privilege not only of seeing their son become a grown man, but also of working beside him every day? How many fathers get to discover that their son is becoming not only a gifted entrepreneur, but above all a profoundly good human being? It was a privilege. A privilege for which I thank God

every day. Perhaps I did not tell Marco that often enough at the time. We were both so busy. We thought there would always be more time. And perhaps that is one of the greatest mistakes we make as human beings. We think tomorrow is guaranteed. Today, I know that every ordinary day may later become an irreplaceable memory.

What touches me most today is how natural your presence seemed back then. I did not need to make an appointment to see you; you were part of the rhythm of my day. Now the smell of coffee, the tapping of a keyboard, or an empty chair can suddenly open a door to that time. For one moment, I expect to hear your voice again. Grief does not live only in great commemorations. It also dwells in those small mistakes of the heart, when the heart briefly forgets what the mind has known for years.

That is why, when I look back, I do not think only about the great projects. Nor about our successes. My most beautiful memories are often the simplest. Drinking a cup of coffee together. A long drive to Italy. A late-night conversation in the silent Pyramid. A look that said everything without needing words. Those are the moments I will never forget. And if someone asked me today what Piramedia truly gave me... my answer would not be about software. Nor entrepreneurship. Nor even innovation. I would simply say, "Piramedia gave me the finest years I was privileged to share with my son." No company in the world is worth as much as memories like those. And that is precisely why, for as long as I live, Marco will never be only

my son. He will also remain my business partner. My friend.
And an irreplaceable part of the man I became.

CHAPTER 28

An Unexpected Encounter Along the Way

There are events in life that no one can foresee. Perhaps that is precisely why some of them remain with us forever. One such memory takes me back to December 1994. Together with Marco and my brother Carmine, I had traveled to Italy. We had an important meeting with the management of INCONTRO, a ceramic factory located near Castel del Monte. A great deal was at stake for us. After months of conversations and consultation, we finally had the opportunity to present our plans for the Benelux. We were not speaking only about ceramic tiles. We were speaking about the future. New ways to present collections. Marketing. Digital communication. A collaboration that would go far beyond the traditional relationship between a factory and its representative. The meeting went even better than we had dared to hope. At the end of our discussions, we received the trust for which we had worked so long.

We were appointed INCONTRO's representatives for the Benelux. We left the factory with hearts full of gratitude. Not only because we had reached an agreement, but above all because another person believed in us. As so often in Italy, we ended that special day with a meal at the foot of the impressive Castel del Monte. We continued speaking about everything we hoped to accomplish. Marco's mind

was full of ideas. I listened. And from time to time, I smiled. I recognized in him the same enthusiasm that had driven me when I took my first steps as an entrepreneur. After the meal, we began the long journey back to Belgium. None of us could imagine that the day still had one final surprise in store. During a stop at a highway rest area, we noticed that an unusually large group had gathered nearby.

As so often, our curiosity prevailed. We walked over to see what was happening. At the center of the crowd stood a young woman who immediately drew everyone's attention. Not only because of her beauty. But above all because many travelers seemed to recognize her. It was Jennie Garth, known around the world for her role as Kelly Taylor in the popular television series *Beverly Hills, 90210*. At first, I did not recognize her. Marco did. Because he spoke English well, he began a conversation with her and the people accompanying her. It began as a brief exchange between travelers who happened to be in the same place. A few questions. A few smiles. An exchange of contact information. There was nothing to suggest that this brief encounter would remain with us afterward. Back in Belgium, we resumed our usual work. But a few weeks later, material began arriving unexpectedly. Faxes.

Promotional material. Photographs. Messages from the United States. It was all connected to that chance meeting at the highway rest area. Above all, it gave Marco new energy and motivation. The world suddenly seemed smaller. And the possibilities much greater. It opened our eyes. Not

because we had met a famous actress, but because we understood once again how rapidly international communication was changing. Suddenly, we saw new possibilities. Not for television or entertainment, but for our own company. If information could cross the Atlantic Ocean so quickly, why could ceramic collections not be presented internationally in a comparable way? That brief encounter unleashed a new flood of ideas. We continued investing in computers. In fax systems. In mobile phones. And above all, in new ways to connect factories and customers faster than ever before. At first glance, this may seem no more than a pleasant anecdote.

To me, it always meant much more. That encounter once again confirmed what I have believed throughout my life. Sometimes a life is not changed by grand plans. Sometimes something begins with an unexpected meeting. With a conversation lasting only a few minutes. With someone who crosses your path in the most unexpected place. I do not know whether Jennie still remembers that brief encounter today. Probably not. But without knowing it, she became a small part of a much larger story for us. Not because she was famous. But because that meeting showed us again how quickly the world was changing. And that people who look toward the future with curiosity sometimes see possibilities where others see only coincidence. When I think back on that day today, I still smile. Not because of the celebrity we had met.

CHAPTER 29

A Mission Greater Than Our Own Dreams

Marco and I rarely spoke only about turnover. We talked about what technology could mean for architects, retailers, and ordinary families. Sometimes we called that our mission: to build something greater than our own dreams. Those words could sound lofty, but at our table they were very practical. A program had to save someone time. An image had to help a customer choose. A connection had to bring people closer to a solution.

In that respect, we were very much alike. We both saw possibilities quickly and sometimes trusted the good intentions of others for too long. I brought experience; Marco brought the speed of a new generation. He dared to look further ahead than I did, while I more often asked who would pay for the project and who would truly keep their word. Our discussions could be heated, but they rarely left distance between us. We did not want to defeat each other. We wanted to defeat the problem.

When people speak about entrepreneurs today, they often see only the result. They see a company that grows. Or a company that eventually disappears. But between those two extremes lies a long road. A road of hope. Doubt. Sleepless nights. And above all... people who, day after day, try to make possible what others consider impossible. Marco

was one of those people. He was not someone who lost courage at the first obstacle. Quite the opposite. It was precisely when others began to doubt that he often worked even harder. He was usually one of the first to arrive. And one of the last to leave. He always looked further ahead. Sometimes I asked him, “Marco... when was the last time you truly rested?” He would smile and reply, “Later, Dad.” That one word said everything. Later. Later, we would have time. Later, we would travel. Later, we would enjoy everything we had built together.

Later, we would slow down a little. Later... What a deceptive word. It sounds like a promise. But life taught me that later can never be taken for granted. And yet Marco continued to dream. He sketched new concepts. Developed new ideas. Spoke with potential partners. He searched for solutions where others saw only problems. That was what I admired so much in him. Sometimes I watched him in silence as he sat before his computer. He could immerse himself completely in what he was creating. As though time around him had ceased to exist. His coffee grew cold. The hours passed. But Marco continued searching until he understood how to improve things. When I watched him work that way, I felt not only like his father. I also felt like his colleague. His most candid sounding board. And his greatest supporter. Those memories are invaluable to me.



Marco with his first wife Tina, the mother of their daughters Chiara and Laura.

Not because everything went well during those years. It did not. But because I saw my son become a man of extraordinary vision and determination. Of course, we did not always agree. That is normal between two generations. Experience had made me more cautious. Marco looked above all at the possibilities that still lay before us. When I preferred to sleep on an important decision for another night, he often already had the next step in mind. Sometimes we debated passionately. But we never tried to prevail over one another. Together, we tried to find the best path. He respected my experience. I admired his vision. And we almost always found our way back to each other. That mutual respect was the strongest foundation of our collaboration. Many people considered Marco an especially talented entrepreneur. And he was. But he possessed another quality that perhaps touched me even more deeply.

His loyalty. He felt responsible for the people around him. When one of our colleagues had a problem, he did not remain indifferent. He kept thinking about it. When a project was in danger of becoming stuck, he did not first look for someone to blame. He looked for a solution. He had not learned that from a book. It was simply part of the man he was. He had a big heart. Perhaps, at times, even a heart that wanted to carry too much. People who empathize deeply with others easily forget their own limits. They often place themselves last. It is a beautiful quality. But it can also make someone vulnerable. I sometimes wonder how many worries Marco kept to himself. How many nights he lay awake without anyone knowing. How many times he smiled while silently wondering how he could hold everything together. I will never receive a complete answer to those questions. Nor do I want to pretend that I knew everything happening within him. No father knows every hidden sorrow of his child.

CHAPTER 30

Marco Against Marco - Behind the Smile

There are people who show their sorrow. And there are those who hide it. Marco undoubtedly belonged to the second group. Anyone who met him without truly knowing him saw a young entrepreneur full of enthusiasm and conviction, with a contagious smile. When he entered a room, he immediately brought energy with him. He spoke passionately about his latest ideas. He listened to others with sincere interest. And he made people feel that anything was possible. But few people saw what was hidden behind that smile. I sometimes did. Not because he spoke about it, but because a father knows his son. I noticed that he became quieter. That sometimes he stood looking out the window for a long time without saying anything. That in the middle of a conversation, his thoughts suddenly seemed to carry him far away. When I asked whether everything was all right, I almost always received the same answer.

“Don’t worry, Dad.” But those words never entirely reassured me. I knew Marco was trying to protect me. He did not want to add more worries to everything I was already carrying. He knew my past. He knew how many times in my life I had been forced to begin again. And perhaps he thought he could spare me another disappointment. That was who he was. Even when he

himself was under enormous pressure, he thought of others first. I still remember the evenings when we left the Pyramid together. We walked in silence to the parking lot. On some days, we had spent hours in meetings, held countless telephone conversations, and made many decisions. After days like those, neither of us spoke about our fatigue. We looked at each other for a moment. A small smile. A hand on the other's shoulder.

Nothing more was needed. Between a father and son, there are words that never need to be spoken. Yet I sensed that the load Marco carried on his back became a little heavier each day. He carried not only the weight of the company. He also carried the responsibility he imposed on himself. He wanted everyone to be happy. He wanted our colleagues to feel secure. He wanted every project to succeed. He wanted our partners to continue believing in us. And perhaps, more than anything else, he never wanted to disappoint me. That caused me great pain. I never expected him to be perfect. I only wanted him to remain himself. I told him so more than once. "Marco, even if we were to lose everything tomorrow... you will always be my son." He smiled. But I do not know whether he could ever truly believe those words.

The people who demand the most of themselves are often those who find it hardest to show themselves kindness. I understand that. Perhaps because, for years, I too had made exactly the same mistake. I too had long thought that I had to solve every problem. That I always had to be strong. That

I could not disappoint anyone. Only much later did I learn that no human being can carry everything alone. For me, that lesson still came in time. For Marco, sadly, it came too late. I do not write these words to evoke pity. Quite the opposite. I want the reader to understand how difficult it can sometimes be to recognize the sorrow hidden behind another person's smile. I had the privilege of truly knowing Marco. I knew how much love, loyalty, and courage were hidden behind his silence. His final struggle does not define who he was to me.

The hardest thing is the understanding that comes only afterwards. Sentences that reassured me then later take on a different sound. Silences I thought meant rest may have carried weariness or despair. Sometimes I search through my memories like a father trying to light one more lamp in a dark house. Not to find someone to blame, but to come closer to what you could not say then. Each time, I must accept again that loving someone is not the same as being able to know everything. I stood beside you, Marco, and yet there was a part of your pain I could not reach.

What remains is the courage with which he moved forward for so many years. A courage far greater than most people ever understood. When I think about him today, I see his smile first. Only then do I remember his worries. Perhaps that is how love works. It does not preserve the pain first. It preserves the light. And that light... will never go out for me.



Marco as a teenager with his mother Dorina.

When I think back today on the final years during which Marco tried with all his strength to breathe new life into our shared dream, I do not see a man who gave up. I see a man who never stopped fighting. Perhaps he even fought for too long. After every setback, he continued believing there had to be another solution somewhere. He had always been that way. When others said something was impossible, that was

precisely when Marco began to think. There had to be another road. There had to be someone who would understand the project. Another opportunity had to arise. I recognized myself in him. Perhaps that was our greatest similarity. But perhaps it was also, at the same time, our greatest vulnerability. Both of us believed that honesty, hard work, and perseverance could overcome almost every obstacle. Life later taught me that, sadly, this is not always enough.

No company is built alone. We depend on people. Partners. Circumstances. And decisions over which we ourselves have no control. During those years, Marco began carrying an ever-heavier burden. He felt responsible for everything. Our colleagues. Our suppliers. Our projects. Our investors. Me. And perhaps he felt responsible to no one more than to himself. When something did not unfold as he had hoped, he never first looked for someone else to blame. He turned toward himself. “What could I have done differently?” “What did I overlook?” Those questions would not leave him alone. More than once, I tried to make him understand that we do not control everything in life. That sometimes we can do everything right... and still lose. Not through lack of commitment or honesty, but because circumstances are sometimes stronger than our will. For someone with such a profound sense of responsibility, that is particularly difficult to accept. Such a person continues searching for answers.

Like so many people who naturally care for everyone around them, he often forgot to care for himself. Today, I hope every father, every mother, and every entrepreneur will remember at least one lesson from this chapter. Carrying responsibility is a strength. But someone who feels responsible for everything and everyone also risks placing all the blame on himself. And responsibility is not guilt. We must never lose sight of that distinction. Do not ask only how the company is doing. Ask how the human being is doing. Behind every company is a person. And that person is more important than any project, figure, or result. A company can be rebuilt. A human being is irreplaceable. When I think about Marco today, I do not ask which projects succeeded and which failed. What I remember is that disappointment never hardened his heart.

That he continued giving. Searching. Hoping. Even when his own strength slowly began to diminish. That is the legacy he left. Not a company. Not a result. But the example of a man who wanted to do right by everyone and who, because of that, often placed himself last. A man who did not want to disappoint anyone. And that is precisely why he deserves more than our memory alone. He deserves our deepest respect.

CHAPTER 31

Alongside Someone with Bipolar Disorder

For a long time, I tried to understand Marco's suffering through the language I knew best: identify a problem, look for its cause, and work toward a solution. But mental suffering is not a machine that can be repaired if only you search for the fault long enough. As a father, I wanted to find a key. Sometimes I thought that rest, a new project, or the closeness of family might be that key. Looking back, I know how little we then understood about what bipolar disorder can do to a person's inner world. That realization is painful. It does not make my love smaller, but it does make it humbler.

I am not a doctor, and this book cannot provide a diagnosis or treatment. I write as a father who wanted, after the fact, to understand better what his son was going through. Bipolar disorder is also not the same as ordinary mood swings. It can involve periods of depression alternating with periods of mania or hypomania, during which energy, sleep, thoughts, speech, and decisions, among other things, may change significantly. Not everyone shows the same signs, and only a qualified professional can assess what is happening.

For family and friends, helping often begins with paying attention to change. Is the person sleeping much less than

usual, speaking unusually fast, making impulsive plans, or instead seeming hopeless, exhausted, and withdrawn? One sign proves nothing. A pattern that changes everyday functioning does, however, warrant a calm conversation and professional assessment. Do not judge the person's character; describe what you can actually observe.

Listening is different from offering solutions straight away. A sentence such as "I can see you are having a difficult time, and I want to understand what is happening" opens more doors than "You just need to think positively." Feelings do not have to seem logical to be real. Stay calm, ask simple questions, and make it clear that seeking help is not a failure. Do not promise secrecy when someone's safety may be at risk.

During a stable period, a personal warning-sign or crisis plan can be made together with the person concerned and their healthcare professional. What early signs signal that a difficult phase is approaching? What events increase the strain? Who can be called? What treatment and daily habits help? Such a plan does not take the illness away, but it prevents everyone from having to work out what to do only once a crisis is under way.

Loved ones can stay close without taking on the role of doctor or therapist. Love sometimes requires boundaries as well: dangerous behaviour, financial recklessness, or hurtful outbursts do not have to be accepted in silence. It is possible to support someone while also seeking outside help.

The partner, parent, brother, sister, or friend also needs rest, information, and sometimes support of their own.

When someone says that life has become too heavy, talks about death, or seems to be saying goodbye, those words deserve calm and sincere attention. The simple question “Are you thinking about suicide?” does not plant the idea; it can create space to talk. Listen without judgement. If there is immediate danger, stay with the person and seek help at once.

Where to find help

You do not have to carry this alone. A doctor or helpline can be a first step.

In an immediate or life-threatening emergency: 112.

For the doctor on call in Belgium: 1733.

In Dutch, helpline 1813 is free, anonymous and available by phone 24 hours a day — www.zelfmoord1813.be.

In French, 0800 32 123 is free, anonymous and available 24/7.

Information verified in September 2026.

As I write this now, I wish I could sit beside him one more time without immediately looking for a solution. Just say, “You do not need to protect me. Tell me what this day is doing to you.” No sentence offers certainty, but closeness begins where judgement ends. Anyone living alongside someone in mental distress must know that love is no substitute for treatment - and that it nevertheless remains vitally important.

CHAPTER 32

The Final Months of a Fighter

The first severe mood problems became visible after Piramedia had gone through a difficult period between 1995 and 1998. We saw overload, disappointment, and exhaustion. What we still too often tried to understand as a reaction to business pressure proved to be part of much deeper mental suffering. Bipolar disorder did not change who Marco was, but it did affect how he experienced hope, guilt, energy, and despair.

After our return from Egypt, he started again in the Glass Pyramid in Lummen. Computers were switched on, plans were resumed, and people began coming through the doors again. From the outside, it looked like a rebirth. As a father, I wanted to believe that new work would give him something to hold on to again. At the same time, the financial pressure and the fragile relationships around him remained. His energy could be impressive, but it was not the same as recovery.

During that period, there was also a painful confrontation with Nadia in which the police became involved. I mention this carefully, because everyone involved experienced that event through their own fear and grief. This book is not a courtroom. What I saw as a father was the distance around Marco growing at the very moment

when he needed connection. He felt responsible, ashamed, and increasingly alone.

But deep inside me, a worry was growing too. It was as though Marco no longer allowed himself a single moment of rest. He worked day and night. He wanted to prove it was still possible. That our ideas still had a future. That all the work completed over the years had not been in vain. I admired his courage. But as his father, I began to worry more and more. Not because I doubted his abilities. Quite the opposite. I knew exactly what he was capable of. What worried me was the price he was paying. I saw fatigue in his eyes more and more often. He continued smiling. He continued making plans. But the exhaustion became increasingly difficult to hide. And yet he barely spoke about it. That was who he was. He wanted to solve every problem himself. He did not want to be a burden to anyone.

Not even to me. More than once, I tried to make him understand that he did not have to carry everything alone. That every human being has the right to admit when life becomes too heavy. But his answer was almost always the same. "Dad... let me keep trying a little longer." Today, it is that one word - longer - that breaks my heart most of all. Longer. Because he truly did continue trying. He felt responsible not only for the success of our projects. He felt responsible for the people who worked beside him. The investments. The expectations. The promises he had made. And perhaps more than anything else... the dreams he

himself had created. Looking back, I better understand how heavily that responsibility weighed on him.

Around 20 August 2009, Marco and I found each other again in a conversation. Not everything was resolved. Some words remained cautious, as though we were both afraid of placing too much weight on a fragile bridge. But beneath those words lay what had always been stronger than our differences: the bond between father and son. I loved him, and he knew it. He loved me, and I knew it. Since then, that certainty has been both my comfort and my wound. Our final connection was one of love; yet that love could not free him from the room in which his despair had locked him.

When I think back on those final months, I do not see defeat. I see how long he tried to keep going, often for everyone except himself. I wish I could have stopped him one more time, taken his face in my hands, and said, “Marco, you do not have to save anything today. No business, no dream, no one. Let us carry you.” That sentence came too late for his ears. That is why I write it now.

CHAPTER 33

27 August 2009 - When Time Stood Still

On 27 August 2009, Marco took his own life. I write that sentence without evasion, but also without reducing him to that one act. He did not die because he loved us too little or because we loved him too little. In his deepest despair, he could no longer see a way out. Bipolar disorder and depression had narrowed his reality to a place where our love could no longer reach him sufficiently.

When the news came, ordinary time ceased to exist. I no longer remember all the words spoken that day. I do remember the silence between them, Dorina's gaze, and how my body remained standing while everything inside me collapsed. People moved about, telephones rang, and practical questions were asked. I heard them as though I were under water. A father can grow old in a single moment. Dorina took me in her arms and did not let go for a long time. That single gesture held both our lives: her loss, my loss, and the helplessness of parents who could no longer protect their child.

Even in the days of mourning, decisions had to be made. A painful disagreement arose over the funeral: some wanted a cremation, while I wanted Marco to be buried. For two days, there were discussions and negotiations. I did not want a fight, but at that moment I could do nothing other

than stand up for that final resting place. In the end, I paid the funeral expenses. Money meant nothing then; only dignity mattered.

We dressed Marco in his wedding suit. In the glass coffin, I could look at him and at the same time barely comprehend that he was truly lying there. A father should not have to bury his son. The entire natural order had been reversed. Even so, I wanted to surround him with care one more time, just as we had when he was born, when I cried with joy because he had entered the world safely.

At the graveside, I knew that no ceremony could bring our bond to an end. The earth closed over his body, not over his life. He remained present in Chiara and Laura, in Michael, in Dorina, in our conversations, and in the thousands of ordinary moments no one could take from us. From that day on, the emptiness became permanent, but so did the love.

The heaviest silence did not come at the cemetery, but when the doors at home closed again. There was nothing left to arrange, yet part of me still expected the sound of his key, his voice, or a message on my phone. Grief did not come as a single wave that passed. It returned in ordinary moments: over a cup of coffee, at an empty place at the table, on a road we had travelled together. Each time, my heart had to learn again what my mind already knew.



Marco—his smile that always stays with us.

Since then, I have measured time differently. There is a life before 27 August 2009 and a life after. But I refuse to let the date Marco died become more important than 10 October 1972, the day he was born, or than all the days when he laughed, was a father, worked, dreamed, and sat beside me in the car. Anyone who wants to know him must see his whole life.

But Marco always turned first toward himself. He wondered what he could have done better. What he had missed. What else he could have tried. As though one human being could carry the weight of the entire world alone. Of course, that was impossible. No one can. And yet he continued to fight. Until the end. That is why I hope no one will ever remember Marco only for the way his life ended. That would be profoundly unfair to him. One day can never tell the story of an entire life. Anyone who truly wants to know who Marco was must look at the thousands

of days that preceded that final day. The curious little boy who wanted to understand everything. The student with a great passion for computers and technology. The young father whose face lit up when he spoke about his daughters.

The entrepreneur who smiled in the Glass Pyramid when a new idea finally worked. The son sitting beside me in the car during our journeys to Italy. The man who knew how to enjoy a good espresso. The friend who was always ready to extend a helping hand. That was Marco. And that is how I hope he will always be remembered. I also want to address a few words to everyone who has experienced a similar loss. Never judge too quickly. A human life is always greater than the moment when everything became too heavy. Behind a tragic end, there is often a struggle that most people never saw. Show compassion. Listen. Be present. A sincere conversation cannot solve every problem. But it can make someone feel that he is not alone. When I close my eyes today, I do not see Marco on his final day.

I see all those other moments. Those are the images I want to keep close to me. Not because they erase the pain. But because they are stronger than the pain. Marco... If, in some way, you can still hear these words... there is only one thing I want to say to you. Thank you for everything we were fortunate enough to share. Thank you for your trust. For your friendship. For your love. I am infinitely proud that I was allowed to be your father. And if life gave me the chance to choose again... without a moment's hesitation, I would walk exactly the same road with you again. Because

you were there. A father can wish for nothing more. Rest in peace, my son. Not in oblivion, but in the hearts of everyone who knew you.

And as long as I live... as long as your mother lives... as long as Michael speaks about his brother... as long as Chiara and Laura say your name and later tell their own children who their father was... you will never truly disappear. Love does not die. It continues to live in the people who carry someone in their heart. And that is why your story does not end here. It continues. In us. In the generations who will come after us. Forever.

CHAPTER 34

What Marco Left Me

There is a great difference between saying farewell and learning to live with someone's absence. A farewell lasts only one day. The absence remains every day. After Marco's death, everything changed. Not only within our family, but also deep within me. The world simply continued moving forward. People went to work. They made plans. They laughed. Celebrated birthdays. And looked toward the future. For me, however, time seemed to have stopped. At every family gathering, one chair remained empty. At every birthday, one voice was missing. And in every joyful moment came that brief, silent realization: Marco should have been here. Slowly, I began to understand that grief is not only pain. Grief is also a form of love. A love that no longer has a place to express itself. At first, I thought I would mainly have to learn to live with that emptiness.

But over the years, I discovered that Marco had not left me only an empty chair. He had given me so much more. Some people leave behind a great fortune. Others, magnificent buildings. Still others write books or make inventions that outlive them. Marco left me something else. He taught me to look at life differently. That may sound strange. Normally, the father teaches his children. And yet, over the years, I understood that my son had also become one of my greatest teachers. He taught me to look toward

the future without fear. At a time when many people still saw computers as little more than complicated machines, he already saw endless possibilities. Where I saw a screen, he saw a window open onto a new world. Where others saw limits, he saw opportunities.

He was curious. Always. When he did not understand something, he wanted to examine it until he had fully uncovered its secrets. When he believed in an idea, he devoted himself to it completely. That was a quality I admired enormously in him. He was never satisfied with a superficial answer. He wanted to know why. And above all... how it could be done better. That way of thinking kept me young too. Thanks to Marco, I remained open to change. I learned to listen to younger generations. I discovered that age must never be a limitation as long as curiosity remains alive. We spent countless hours speaking about technology. The Internet. Three-dimensional visualization. Software. Possibilities that most people still regarded as science fiction at the time. Sometimes I did not immediately understand everything he tried to explain to me. But I always understood his enthusiasm.

And enthusiasm is contagious. That is why I was never afraid of innovation. Quite the opposite. I always tried to welcome new developments with sincere interest. And I owe him so much for that. But Marco taught me something else, something far more important. He taught me that love is not always expressed through grand words. We did not tell each other every day how much we loved one another.

That simply was not who we were. Our love lived in the simplest things. In our journeys together. In a single look that said everything. In a hand resting for a moment on a shoulder. In searching together for the solution to a problem. In an espresso drunk side by side in silence. Today, I understand that those simple moments were precisely the most precious of all, because they were genuine. They needed no applause. No audience. Only two people who understood one another deeply.



An image I like to look at when we remember Marco.

From those memories, something slowly grew that, during the first years of my grief, I would scarcely have believed possible. Gratitude. Gratitude that I was able to have Marco in my life for nearly thirty-seven years. Because he was my son. And because he will remain so forever. Gratitude because we were not only father and son. We were also friends. Traveling companions. Colleagues. How many fathers can say they were fortunate enough to experience that? Not many. I can. And I will remain grateful

for it until the end of my life. Today, Marco's chair is still empty. But in my heart, he is completely present. Not only as the memory of what I lost. But as a living force that reminds me every day how precious love truly is. The pain of his absence has not disappeared. But the way I carried that pain slowly changed.

Even now, the old impulse sometimes rises in me: I must tell Marco about this. At the sight of a new technology, a family event, or an unexpected idea, for a fraction of a second he still seems simply within reach. Only afterwards does the realization come. That brief moment hurts, but I cherish it too. It proves that our relationship has not been reduced to 27 August 2009. He remains present in the way I look at things, ask questions, and dare to begin something again. I imagine his reaction, his rapid words, and that smile which already revealed that, in his mind, he was three steps ahead.

You live on, Marco. In Chiara and Laura. In Michael and Dorina. In the people whose lives you touched. And in me as well: every time I remain curious, want to understand something new, or refuse to believe something is impossible. Perhaps that is the greatest legacy a person can leave: not possessions, not a building, not a business, but a way of looking at the world that lives on in others. For that, my dear son, I will be grateful to you until my last day.

CHAPTER 35

Kevin Umé - The Dream That Continued to Live

Some dreams do not disappear when a project stops. They continue to exist somewhere. They continue to exist in drawings, computer files, memories, and above all in the people who believed in them. During Piramedia's relaunch in Beringen, between 1998 and 2003, new people joined us. One of the young talents who began working with Marco was Kevin Umé. He had only just completed his studies, was quiet and modest, but extraordinarily gifted.

Together with Marco and several other software developers, Kevin worked on two-dimensional and three-dimensional programs for the construction industry, and more specifically for the world of ceramic tiles. The objective was ambitious. Projects that many people found difficult to imagine had to become visible and understandable in advance on a computer screen. What until then had mainly been presented through drawings, samples, and extensive explanations could be shown in a new way thanks to the software. My role lay mainly in the world of tiles. I knew the manufacturers. The dealers. The customers. The international market. Marco saw how technology could transform that world. And Kevin possessed the talent needed to turn ideas, step by step, into functioning programs. Each of us contributed a different

part of the dream. That was precisely our strength. Marco and Kevin understood each other well. They spoke the language of computers and new technology.

A language whose every technical detail I may not have understood, but whose possibilities I could certainly see. I saw their enthusiasm. Their concentration. Their desire to create something that did not yet exist. And I believed in them. But as in so many innovative projects, a good idea alone was not enough to secure its future. Around 2006, further development of the software stopped. Our collaboration ended. Each person continued on his own path. But the program never left my thoughts. To Marco, it remained a dream that had not yet been fully completed. To me, it remained a page that had not been completely turned. When Marco died in 2009, that unfinished dream suddenly took on an entirely different meaning. It was no longer only a commercial or technological project. It was part of what he had left behind. So many of his ideas... so many hours of work... so much hope... were still there in that program.

At that time, I could hardly accept that all of it might simply be lost. That is why I contacted Kevin again. I asked whether he would be willing, together with a few friends, to try to complete Marco's program after all. Kevin accepted the challenge. To me, that represented far more than simple technical assistance. I felt it was a mark of respect for Marco. And an attempt to bring to completion something on which he had worked so intensely. Kevin and his friends resumed work on the program. They examined what still

had to be completed. They searched for solutions to the unresolved technical problems. And ultimately, they succeeded in completing the program technically. I want to state this very clearly. Kevin did what I had asked him to do. The project did not stop because he had failed. Quite the opposite. He proved that Marco's idea was technically feasible.



Marco and Tina, Michael and Pascale, together with little Helena—a cherished family memory.

But at that time, I myself was no longer the man I had once been. After decades in the world of tiles... after all the setbacks... after the endless struggle to keep beginning again... and above all, after losing Marco... my strength was

exhausted. I felt completely drained by the industry in which I had worked for so long. To truly bring the program to market, I would have had to rebuild an entire network. Convince people again. Seek new investment. Begin once more from the start. I no longer had the strength for that. So in the end, I decided to stop the project permanently and retire. The program was technically complete. But commercially, there was no new beginning. Kevin was not responsible for that. It was my decision. A decision born from everything I had lived through during those years.

For a long time, I thought a dream had meaning only when it became a thriving company or a product used everywhere. Today, I no longer believe that. Not every dream reaches the destination we imagined for it. But that does not mean all the effort was in vain. Kevin ensured that Marco's program did not remain an unfinished attempt. He helped transform an idea into a technically operational result. Even though I later decided not to continue, that work retained its value. When I think about Kevin today, I first see the calm, modest young man who came to work with us in 2003. A young man who, at the time, probably could not yet imagine the place he would hold in our story. But I also see the colleague to whom I was able to turn again after Marco's death.

Someone willing to return to an unfinished program and give it one final chance. Kevin could not replace Marco. No one ever could. But he helped me carry part of Marco's dream a little further. That is why Kevin deserves a place in

this book. Not as a footnote. Not only as a talented programmer. But as someone who first worked beside Marco and who later stood beside me in our attempt to complete an unfinished dream after all. Some dreams continue to live in the form of a company. Others as an invention. And still others live in the people who were willing to continue believing in them. Marco's dream did not have the future we had hoped for. But thanks to Kevin, neither was it simply lost. He gave it one final chance. And I will always remain grateful to him for that.

PART 4

WHAT REMAINS

*Michael, my grandchildren, friendship, forgiveness, and
what I want to pass on*

CHAPTER 36

Michael Chose His Own Path

No two children are ever the same. Nor do they need to be. Every child has a character of his own. His own dreams. His own way of looking at life. When people speak to me about my children, the conversation often begins with Marco. That is understandable. His life and death left an indelible mark on my heart and on this book. But that must never give the impression that Michael holds a less important place in my life. He too is my son. His place in my heart is also unique. And his story also deserves to be told with the same love and sincerity. Michael always chose his own path. His character was different from his brother's. While Marco constantly sought new challenges and dreamed of building companies and projects himself, Michael chose a life that offered him more structure and stability.

That choice required no less courage. Quite the opposite. It takes courage to follow your own path without allowing yourself to be guided by the expectations of others. As his father, I always admired that quality in him. I never wanted to shape my children in my own image. I did not want them to repeat my life. I wanted only for them to become honest people. People capable of carrying responsibility. Who would move through life with respect. And who would feel free to make their own choices. After studying at the hotel

school in Hasselt, Michael chose a career in aviation. He became a flight attendant with Sabena. I quickly sensed that he had found a world that suited him. He came into contact with people from different countries and cultures. He traveled to places that, for many others, were only names on a map.

Every journey broadened his horizons. Every encounter taught him something new. The world became his field of work. But more importantly... he had chosen that path himself. I watched him with pride. Not because he wore an impressive uniform or traveled to distant places. But because I saw that he was trying to find his own place. I felt that pride again when Michael himself became a father. With Helena and Andreas, two precious new lives came to enrich our family. Michael then learned for himself what every parent discovers sooner or later. That a child transforms your life completely. That from that moment onward, love and responsibility can no longer be separated. And that as a parent, you can guide, protect, and advise...

Michael found his place in aviation. As a flight attendant with Sabena, he learned to travel, take responsibility, and deal with many different kinds of people. He built a family with Pascale. Helena was born on 6 October 2000; exactly five years later, on 6 October 2005, Andreas arrived. Two children with the same birthday, each with a character entirely their own.



Michael and Tina, together in a new chapter of our family.

When Sabena disappeared, Michael also lost a source of security he had built upon. He continued in cargo aviation in Liège. Later, a marital crisis and a long separation brought new strain. I did not always see up close what he was carrying. Marco's problems took up so much space in those years that my attention as a father became unbalanced. That is not an excuse, but it is a truth I want to face.

There were periods of distance between Michael and me. Sometimes we spoke too little; sometimes we both thought the other knew what remained unsaid. I regret that. A child quietly seeking their own way needs no less attention than a child visibly in crisis. I should have asked more often how he was really doing.

Over the years, we found our way back to each other. Not by pretending the distance had never existed, but by speaking more honestly and trying less to change each other. When I see Michael with Helena and Andreas today, I recognize his own form of faithfulness. He never had to be like Marco. My sons were different, and my love for them therefore does not need to be compared.



My son Michael with his children Andreas and Helena.

It is difficult for me to write this so openly, because a father likes to believe his children instinctively know how much he loves them. But love that is not expressed can be misunderstood. If I could live certain years again, I would sit beside Michael more often without immediately beginning to talk about work, worries, or solutions. I would ask not only how his family was doing, but how he was doing. I cannot rewrite the past; I can stop hiding behind good

intentions. That is why this truth has a place in my book. Not to burden Michael with my regret, but to take responsibility as his father. Our bond does not have to be perfect to be real. Precisely because we have known distance, difference, and silence, I know how precious it is that today we can once again see each other as we truly are.

Neither of my sons had to be like the other. Each has his own place in my life. When I think of Michael today, I see the man who made his own choices, the father of Helena and Andreas, and my son, who continued to follow his own path. That was his path. And that is precisely why I am proud of him.

CHAPTER 37

Chiara, Laura, Helena, and Andreas

A moment comes in life when we understand that time passes far more quickly than we ever imagined. For me, that moment came when I held Chiara in my arms for the first time. She made me a grandfather. Suddenly, I was no longer only the father of my children. A new generation had been born. A little girl who carried part of all of us within her and who, at the same time, stood at the beginning of her own unique story. With the arrival of Laura, Helena, and Andreas, that circle of love expanded further. Four grandchildren. Four different personalities. Four young people, each with their own dreams, talents, and future. Becoming a grandfather is a feeling that is difficult to describe. You no longer have to decide everything. You no longer carry the same daily responsibility you had when your own children were young. Above all, you can be present.

Listen. Enjoy. Create memories. A smile. A visit. An embrace. A conversation that lasts longer than expected. It is precisely those simple moments that, as the years pass, become our most precious memories. Chiara and Laura are Marco's daughters. When I look at them, I sometimes recognize something of their father. In a smile. A gesture. Their way of looking at the world. Sometimes it is only for a brief moment. A glance. A certain expression on their face.

But to me, that is enough to suddenly feel Marco very close again. Watching them grow is therefore also a way to feel that his love continues to live. Not only in memories or in the pages of this book, but in two young women, each carrying part of him within her in her own way. That does not mean they must continue their father's life.



Michael, surrounded by my grandchildren Helena, Laura, Andreas and Chiara.

They do not have to carry his dreams. They have the right to seek their own path and write their own story. But I hope they will always know how deeply their father loved them. And how much joy they gave him. Helena and Andreas are Michael's children. They too each hold a unique and irreplaceable place within our family. Through their joy of

life, spontaneity, and curiosity, they remind me that life always looks toward the future again. That after every difficult period, new hope can be born. That every generation receives something from those who came before it, but then gives it a meaning of its own. When I look at my four grandchildren, I never want to compare them with one another. Nor did I ever want to do that with my own children. No two human beings are ever identical. And that is precisely where a family's richness lies.



Together with my grandchildren Helena, Laura, Andreas and Chiara.

Chiara does not have to resemble Laura. Helena does not have to follow the same path as Andreas. Each of them can become who they truly are. But whatever paths they follow,

they remain connected to one another by a story that began much earlier. A story reaching back to their great-grandparents. To Italy. To the mines of Belgium. To the sacrifices of people who left their familiar world to give their children a better future. When we gather for birthdays and holidays, we speak openly about Marco. His name is not silenced. We tell anecdotes. We recall memories. We laugh about things he said and did. And sometimes, we once again feel the sadness of his absence. But above all, those stories ensure that he continues to be part of our family. In such moments, the past, present, and future come together.



Marco with Helena, whose godfather he was.

I hope my grandchildren will thus understand that remembering does not have to be only sad. Remembering can also bring warmth. A smile. A connection. And gratitude that someone was allowed to be part of our life. Perhaps one day they will open this book. Perhaps they will want to

know who their great-grandparents were. How their family came from Italy to Belgium. Who their grandfather was before he became older and grayer. Perhaps Chiara and Laura will discover even more about their father in these pages. And perhaps Helena and Andreas will better understand who their uncle Marco was and the place he held within our family. But above all, I hope they will feel all the love that preceded their own story. Not so they will continue living in the past. Not so they must repeat the dreams of earlier generations. But so they will know where their roots lie.



With Helena, Andreas and Chiara.

Roots are not chains. They do not hold you back. They give you the strength to remain standing while you choose for yourself the direction in which you want to grow. Chiara. Laura. Helena. Andreas. You are not only the grandchildren I speak about in this book. You are the future of our family. You do not have to become who we were. You do not have to follow our roads. Follow your own dreams. Make your own choices. Write your own story. But always know that you come from people who loved. Who worked. Who made sacrifices. Who fell and rose again. And who, above all, continued believing in their family. The most beautiful legacy I can leave you is neither money nor material possessions. It is made of memories. Values. Love. And the certainty that each one of you holds a unique and irreplaceable place in my heart.

As long as you continue telling our family's stories, no one who came before you will ever truly be forgotten. And as long as you continue supporting one another, the love that carried our family through so many years of joy and sorrow will continue living within you.



Marco with Pascale at Michael's wedding celebration.



Dear Chiara, Laura, Helena and Andreas, you are my pride, my joy and the most beautiful future of our family. Follow your own path and know that Grandpa will carry each of you in his heart forever.—Grandpa Renato

CHAPTER 38

Reconciliation and Gratitude for What Remains

When I look back on my life today, I realize how easy it is to dwell only on what we lost. Loss speaks loudly. It draws our attention to the empty places. The voices we no longer hear. Everything that will never return. What remains often speaks much more softly. I too could have chosen to live only in my sorrow. After Marco's death, there were days when I could see almost nothing but his absence. It was not a choice. It was grief. Anyone who loses a child carries that pain for the rest of life. It does not disappear. It only changes form. But slowly, I began to discover that sorrow and gratitude can coexist. Being grateful does not mean feeling the absence less. It does not mean forgetting.

And it certainly does not mean the wound has healed. It means that beside everything taken from us, we dare once again to look at what life still gives us. I remained Marco's father. Death changed nothing about that. I am grateful for the thirty-seven years during which I was able to call him my son. For our conversations. Our journeys. Our dreams. Our collaboration. And for the friendship that had grown between us. But I am also Michael's father. And over the past years, Michael and I have built a bond that became emotionally deeper than I would ever have dared to hope. Perhaps even as strong as the bond I once had with Marco.

Not the same. No bond between two people is ever entirely identical. And one son can never replace the other.

Love does not compare. Love simply creates another place in the heart. This closeness between Michael and me grew from a situation I initially found very difficult to accept. The relationship that developed between Michael and Tina, Marco's first wife, initially stirred many conflicting feelings within me. I remembered the pain Marco had known during and after their separation. As his father, I wanted to continue protecting him even after his death. That is why part of me resisted this new reality. But once again, life taught me that we do not always choose the road by which reconciliation and happiness return to us. What I first regarded as a threat to our memories slowly became something that brought our family closer together. Birthdays and holidays again became times of warmth and unity. Marco's name was not silenced.

Quite the opposite. We speak openly about him. We tell anecdotes. We recall memories. We laugh about things he said and did. Sometimes, a tear falls. But most often, above all, we feel how much love he left behind. In this way, Marco does not remain connected only to the sorrow of his final years. He continues to be part of our daily family life. And I am grateful for that. I am grateful for my four grandchildren. Chiara. Laura. Helena. And Andreas. Four young people, each with a character of their own, their own dreams, and their own place in my heart. Chiara and Laura are Marco's daughters. When I look at them, I sometimes

recognize something of their father. A smile. A gesture. A certain way of looking. In those moments, it feels as though a small part of him comes very close again. Helena and Andreas are Michael's children.



Every year on 27 August, our family gathers at the Basilica of Scherpenheuvel to honour Marco.

They too bring their own joy, spontaneity, and expectations for the future to our family. Together, they do not form separate parts. They are my four grandchildren. Four lives of equal value, each enriching our family in their own way. I am grateful to have watched them grow. To still be part of their lives as a father and grandfather. To listen to them. Laugh with them. And watch them gradually seek their own path. Dorina too has stood beside me for almost an entire lifetime. Together, we have known joy that filled our hearts. But also sorrow we once thought impossible to carry. And yet we continued moving forward. Not because

we were always strong, but because loving sometimes means one person remains standing when the other temporarily cannot take another step.

I sometimes wonder what my parents would think if they could see our family today. I believe they would be proud. Not because we led a perfect life. No one does. But because, despite everything that happened, we never entirely stopped believing in the strength of family. Perhaps they would also recognize something of themselves in their great-grandchildren. A look. A gesture. A form of determination. Without always realizing it, all of us carry something within us from those who came before. Perhaps that is also why I wrote this book. I do not want my children and grandchildren later to know only our names. I want them to know our stories. To know where we came from. What we lived through. What we dreamed about. Which mistakes we made.

And how deeply we loved one another. A family does not continue living only in photographs, birth certificates, or documents. It lives in the stories told around the table. In the values passed from one generation to the next. In a smile that suddenly recalls someone from long ago. And in the love that continues to connect people even when someone is no longer physically present. When I look at my life today, I therefore do not want only to count what was taken from me. I want to continue seeing what I was given as well. Dorina. Marco. Michael. My four grandchildren. My family. My friends. And all the memories no one will ever be

able to take from me. That is not little. It is my greatest wealth. The pain remains. But so does the love. And as long as that love continues to live, loss is never the only thing that remains. Gratitude remains. Gratitude for those who were there. For those who are still here. And for everything that will continue to connect us forever.

CHAPTER 39

The People Who Brought Colour Back

After Marco's death, my world stopped. Some events do not merely make a person sad. They transform him. After such a loss, one never becomes quite the person one was before. That is what happened to me too. The days had become quieter. The future seemed to have lost much of its meaning. Things that once excited me suddenly appeared unimportant. The colors of life seemed slowly to fade. And yet something special happened. Not suddenly. Not through a great miracle. But slowly, almost imperceptibly. New people entered my life. They did not come to fill the emptiness. That would have been impossible. No one can ever take a child's place. No one could replace Marco. I did not expect that. Nor did I want it. But those people reminded me that, despite everything, life continues.

Some crossed my path almost by chance. During a walk. In a café. Around a table. Through a telephone call. Or through a simple question that unexpectedly led to a long and sincere conversation. Other encounters became genuine friendships. People listened to me without judging. They did not always feel a need to give me advice. They did not try to make my sorrow disappear with their words. They did not say I had to be strong. They simply remained seated. Sometimes we spoke. Sometimes we kept silent. But their

presence was enough. That taught me how precious it can be when someone does not try to solve our pain, but is willing to carry it with us for a while. A grieving person does not always need answers. Sometimes he needs only someone who is not afraid of his silence. Slowly, I rediscovered how much goodness still lives in human hearts.



With Louis Ouwerkerk, who helped me get back on my feet.

I had never entirely lost that trust. But now that goodness once again had a face. A voice. A hand on my shoulder. A friend who called for no particular reason. Someone who asked, “How are you, really?” And who was then willing to listen to the answer. None of those people could take away my sorrow. But each of them brought back a little color. Not

to erase the dark colors. They will always be part of my life. But to place other colors beside them. The warmth of friendship. The calm of a sincere conversation. The joy of an unexpected meeting. And sometimes even laughter again. I began to understand that being able to smile again does not mean we miss the person we lost any less. Continuing to live is not a form of betrayal. It is not a denial of the love that existed.

Quite the opposite. It is a way of continuing to carry that love with us as we move forward. Perhaps it was precisely the grief I had known that taught me to listen more deeply to others. I sensed more easily when someone was suffering. When another reality was hidden behind a smile. When someone felt alone. Or when someone did not need good advice, but only a person who was truly present. In the past, I was accustomed to solving problems. It was part of my life as an entrepreneur. When a difficulty arose, I looked for a solution. When one door closed, I tried to open another. But grief does not work that way. Not every problem can be solved. Not every wound can be healed. And not every question has an answer. Sometimes all we can do is remain beside someone.



A sunny and carefree moment by the sea—a small reminder of the joy of life.

Not to take away their pain. But to make sure they do not have to carry it entirely alone. Without my immediately realizing it, a new chapter of my life began in that way. No longer only as an entrepreneur, but above all as a human being. A human being who wanted to share his experiences with others. Not because I had all the answers. Quite the

opposite. The older I became, the better I understood how many questions exist for which no one can give a perfect answer. But I knew how important it is to have someone standing near when life becomes dark. I knew how precious a single sincere conversation can be. How much a simple gesture can mean. And how even a small sign of attention can change someone's day. Perhaps the people who helped me then never fully understood what their presence meant to me.

Often, we do not know what a difference we make in another person's life. A brief conversation that we later forget may become, for the other person, a memory that accompanies them for years. A telephone call can make someone feel they have not been forgotten. A listening ear can give a person the courage to take one more step. That is why today, more than ever, I believe no sincere act of humanity is truly small. The people who entered my life after Marco's death did not take away my sorrow. They did not have to. But they helped me see again that beside sorrow, friendship still exists. That beside absence, there is still connection. That beside loss, there is still love. They did not bring back the old life. No one could. But they helped me accept a new life. A life in which Marco would always remain present.



With José, Kosta, Claudio and Corinto: coffee, conversation and our daily walk.

And in which, at the same time, room could once again arise for other people, new encounters, and new memories. I will always remain grateful to them. Sometimes light does not return in one great beam. Sometimes it returns in hundreds of small points of light. In people who come to walk beside us. Who stay for a while. And who, often without knowing it themselves, slowly bring the colors back into our life.

CHAPTER 40

Returning to My Roots

As the years pass, many people feel an increasingly strong need to return to their origins. Not necessarily to live there again. Nor because the past was better than the present. But because we want to understand where our story truly began. I felt that too. To me, Loreto Aprutino was never merely a village. It is the place where I was born, on June 5, 1948. The place where my family's roots reach deep into the earth. My parents lived there before Belgium became part of our story. My grandparents worked there. Generations of our family were born there, long before anyone could imagine that some of their descendants would one day build a new life in Belgium. I was still only a baby when I left Italy. My memories of Loreto Aprutino therefore do not come from a long childhood spent there.

They came to me through my parents' stories. Through the Italian language. Through our family. Through the customs they brought with them to Belgium. And through the visits I later made to the region of my birth. Italy was far away. But it was always present in our family. In my father and mother's words. In the dishes served at the table. In the stories about family members. In memories of the life they had left behind. And sometimes also in a homesickness they did not always express in words. Every time I return to Abruzzo, I feel something difficult to express. I walk through

the streets of Loreto Aprutino. I look at the hills. I see the olive trees. I breathe the air my parents and grandparents once breathed. And I become aware that there, I am part of a story far older than I am.



In Loreto Aprutino, together with my cousins Fernando, Lorenzo and Massimo.



In Loreto Aprutino, with Rocco, Enrico and my cousin Fernando Rossi.

Some houses have changed. People have disappeared. New generations have taken their place. But something remains recognizable. A silence. An aroma. The way light falls on the hills. And the feeling that the ground beneath my feet preserves something of my origin. When I walk through those streets, I often think about my parents. Their simple life. Their sacrifices. Their dignity. My father did not leave his native country because he did not love Italy. He left because he loved his family. He went to work deep underground in the Belgian coal mines because he wanted to give his children a future he himself had never known. My mother too eventually left behind her familiar surroundings, her family, and her language. She began again in a country she did not know. With few possessions. But with immense inner strength. As a child, I did not fully understand what that demanded of them.



Loreto Aprutino, 2003: the warm welcome for Remo and Maurizio after their 1,745-kilometre bicycle journey from Liège.

Today, I understand it better. Emigration does not mean only arriving somewhere. It also means leaving something behind. A home. A family. A familiar language. A landscape. And sometimes even part of oneself. My parents carried Italy with them every day as they tried to build a new life in Belgium. I too have always continued to carry those two worlds within me. I am proud of my Italian origins. And I am equally proud of the life I was fortunate enough to build in Belgium. I never felt I had to choose between the two countries. Why should a person be able to love only one place? Italy gave me my origins. Belgium gave me the opportunity to grow, work, start a family, and pursue my

dreams. The man I became was born from the meeting of those two worlds.



Michael at Abruzzo Airport during his visit to Loreto Aprutino in 2026.

Even my languages tell that story. Italian remained the language of my family, my origins, and my childhood memories. Dutch became the language of my daily life in Flanders. And thanks to Dorina and our family life, French came to hold an important place in our home. Three languages. Not as walls between separate worlds. But as doors through which I was able to know people from different worlds. Perhaps that very combination taught me that identity cannot always be summed up in a single word. I am Italian. I became Belgian. I am the child of immigrants. I grew up among mining families. I built my life in Flanders. And all those parts belong to me. None must exclude

another. Our roots do not hold us back. Nor do they dictate where we must remain for the rest of our life.



Michael in the Abruzzo landscape, with the Gran Sasso in the background.

Roots give us a point of support. They remind us of those who came before. The sacrifices that were made. And all the roads that had to be traveled before we could stand where we are today. A tree does not grow by forgetting its roots. It

grows precisely because those roots nourish it while its branches reach ever farther toward the light. That is how I see my own life too. One of the most beautiful symbols of that bond came into being in 2003. My brothers Remo and Maurizio bicycled the 1,745 kilometers from Liège to Loreto Aprutino. When they arrived, the entire family was waiting for them. It was far more than an athletic achievement. Our parents had left Italy for Belgium to build a future. Their sons retraced that road in the opposite direction, through their own strength, toward the place where our family's roots lie. That day, the distance between our two countries seemed to disappear completely.



With my son Michael in Loreto Aprutino in 2026.

My roots lie in Loreto Aprutino. But my life continued to grow in Belgium. That is where I went to school. Where I learned to work. Where I met Dorina. Where my children were born. Where I built my companies. Where I knew my greatest joy. And where I also faced my deepest sorrow. Both countries therefore carry part of my story. I hope my children and grandchildren will continue to feel that bond

too. Not because they must live in the past. Nor because they must make the same choices as those who came before. They have a right to their own life. Their own dreams. Their own future. But I hope they will know where their story began. That they will know the names of those who came before them. That they will understand how much courage it took to leave Italy and begin again in Belgium.



With all my brothers and my cousin Massimo in Loreto Aprutino in 2026.



With my brothers, Fabrizio and Massimo, at our renovated family home.

And that they will feel that part of the strength with which their great-grandparents built their future continues to live within them. Those who know their origins do not have to let those origins hold them back. They can draw strength from them to move forward. Memory need not be a burden. It can become a light that helps us find our own path. Every time I leave Abruzzo to return to Belgium, I do not truly leave Italy behind. I take it with me. In my name. My language. My memories. My character. And in my love for the people from whom I come. When I then arrive back in Belgium, that too feels like coming home. Because that is where the life I built myself is found. My family. My friends. My memories. And almost everything that shaped me into the man I am today.



Through Loreto Aprutino in my cousin Massimo's Fiat 500.

Emigration is not only a gift. It cost my parents too much for that. But it gave me something special. The ability to have more than one home. Two countries. Several cultures. Three languages. But one heart. A heart that does not need to choose between Italy and Belgium... because it is large enough to love both with the same sincerity.



Making homemade sausage together: a warm Italian family ritual.

CHAPTER 41

The Later Years and the Beginning of This Book

The later years of my life are different from those that came before. Not necessarily calmer, but more conscious. In the past, I was almost constantly busy building. Working. Creating. Developing new projects. There was always another appointment. A new customer. A problem for which a solution had to be found. Or an idea that would not release me even at night. I often lived with my eyes fixed on tomorrow. What still had to be done? What could we improve? What new possibility lay behind the next door? That drive has never entirely left me. Even today, I remain curious. I follow developments in technology and artificial intelligence with interest. I try to understand new things. I communicate with people. I write my memories.

And sometimes a new idea still arises that makes me think, “We should do something with that.” At such moments, I once again feel something of the entrepreneur I have always been. And often, I then think of Marco. Of the enthusiasm he would have felt for the possibilities that exist today. Of the conversations we would have had about them. He would probably already have thought much further ahead than I had. That thought makes me sad. But it also makes me smile. My later years are therefore not years in which everything stopped. Quite the opposite. My interest in

people, new ideas, and the future has remained. But the hurry has diminished. I no longer feel the same need to realize everything immediately. Not every idea must become a company. Not every thought must turn into a project. Some ideas may simply exist.

Some conversations do not have to lead anywhere. And some days do not have to produce anything great in order still to have value. Perhaps that is one of the most important changes growing older brought me. In the past, I often thought value arose from what we did. Today, I know it sometimes arises simply from being truly present. During a meaningful conversation. Over a cup of coffee with friends. During a family visit. On a walk. Or when a memory suddenly returns. Happiness is not found only in the great events of our life. Not only in a birth. A wedding. A professional success. Or a dream becoming reality. Very often, it is hidden in the simplicity of an ordinary day. In something we would scarcely have noticed in the past. An unexpected telephone call. The voice of someone we love to hear.

A sunset. The aroma of freshly prepared coffee. The silence of a church. A sincere conversation that lasts longer than expected. Or a moment when no one needs to say anything because simply being together is already enough. In the past, moments like those sometimes escaped me. Not because I did not appreciate them, but because my thoughts were already turned toward the next task. Today, I try to look at them with greater attention. Not merely to see. But

truly to observe. Not merely to hear. But to listen. Not merely to be present with my body. But also with my heart. Of course, I still often think about those who came before me. My father. My mother. My brother Mario. My little sister Lidiola. And above all, Marco. Some memories bring warmth. Others still hurt. Growing older does not mean sorrow disappears. Sometimes the absence even becomes clearer, because there are more and more moments we would still have wanted to share with someone.

But I try not to look only at the people who are no longer here. I also look at those who are still part of my life today. Dorina. Michael. My grandchildren. My brothers. My family and friends. The people with whom I can still speak, laugh, and share memories. That is where I find my strength. That is where I find my hope. Anyone who looks only at the empty places risks losing sight of the people who still stand beside them. Being grateful for those who are still here does not mean forgetting those we lost. It means that we also continue using the love they gave us to keep the living close to our heart. Every new day is a gift to me. Not because every day is easy or special.

Some days are ordinary. Others are heavy. And there are still days when sorrow returns unexpectedly. But no day can be taken for granted. When we are young, we think the time before us belongs to us. Only later do we understand that time is merely entrusted to us. We do not know how many days remain. But we can try to live consciously the day given to us today. That does not mean I think constantly

about the end. Quite the opposite. It is precisely the awareness that time is precious that helps me appreciate life more intensely. I am less likely to postpone certain things. A kind word. A telephone call. A visit. The words, "I'm thinking of you." Or, "I'm glad you are here." Words like these must never wait until it is too late. Over the years, I also learned that inner peace does not mean sorrow no longer exists.

Peace does not mean every question has been answered. Nor that every wound has healed. To me, inner peace means I no longer have to fight against the past every day. That I can accept what I can no longer change. That I can preserve my memories without being entirely imprisoned by them. And that beside my sorrow, I dare to allow joy in again. Perhaps that is what growing older truly means. Not that we live less, but that we live with greater attention. That we learn to see the extraordinary in the simplest things. That we concern ourselves less with the impression we make on others. And more with what we can truly mean to one another. I no longer feel the need to prove anything. That does not mean I no longer have dreams. But my dreams no longer have to show everyone who I am.

It is enough to be there. For my family. My friends. Anyone who needs a kind word, a listening ear, or a smile. If someone asked today what my greatest wealth is, I would not speak about the companies I founded. Nor the projects I completed. I would speak about the people I love. The memories I can cherish. The thousands of conversations

that enriched my life. And the inner peace I slowly but surely learned to find deep within myself. A happy life is not a life without sorrow. Such a life does not exist. A happy life is one in which, despite our wounds, we can still feel love. One in which, after a loss, we dare to let a smile enter again. In which we continue believing in people.

And in which we remain grateful for every new day we are given. Today, I know that an ordinary day is never truly ordinary. Every day when we can love someone... listen to someone... or simply be together... is a day that had meaning.

At one point, a heart attack forced me to reconsider the assumption that tomorrow was guaranteed. My body, which for years I had treated as though it would obey every command, suddenly set a limit. The man who always sought a solution had to learn to receive: care, patience, and time. I did not become less curious, but I began to feel more sharply what could no longer be postponed.

From that also grew the need to write down my memories. Not because I saw myself as a writer. I had stories, scattered dates, photographs, and names, but no straight line through them. Artificial intelligence became a tool that helped me ask questions, organize memories, and compare different versions. The facts, the choices, and the feelings remained mine. Technology did not give me a life; it helped me find words for the life I had already lived.

That is fitting for the Renato I have always been. As a boy, I wanted to know why a device worked. At FAEMA, I searched for the right grind. In ceramics, I designed systems that did not yet exist. Later in life, I looked at new digital tools with the same openness. Age need not bring curiosity to an end. It can instead make curiosity gentler: less concerned with proving you are right, more concerned with understanding what may still be possible.

CHAPTER 42

The Long Road Toward Forgiveness

When I was young, I thought forgiving meant forgetting. I thought I would awaken one day and the pain would simply have disappeared. Life taught me otherwise. There are wounds that never heal completely. They become part of who we are. But we can choose to carry them throughout life as a burden. Or we can slowly transform them into a source of wisdom. I did not learn that lesson from books. I learned it by living. I met people who helped me without ever expecting anything in return. But I also knew people who turned their backs on me precisely when I needed them most. I lost friends. I lost business partners. I lost money. I lost dreams. But no loss could compare with the day I lost my beloved son.

When I was younger, I knew moments of great anger. Not only because life was difficult. But especially because I could not understand how some people could so easily forget what you had done for them. For years, I wondered whether honesty still had any true value. That question occupied me for a long time. Then something happened that I did not expect. The older I became, the less I felt the need to be right. What would it still change? Even if someone were to admit years later that they had acted wrongly... what would that give back to me? Would Marco return? Would my parents return? Would the lost years be restored to me? Of

course not. Slowly, I began to understand that forgiveness is not only a gift we give another person. It is also a gift we give ourselves.

Not because the other person was right. Not because what happened suddenly becomes good. But because we refuse to remain prisoners of the past until the end of our life. Forgiving does not mean I approve of everything. Quite the opposite. There are events I will never fully understand. Words I will never forget. Decisions that left deep wounds. Forgiveness does not erase those things. It does not change the past. But it prevents the past from continuing to determine the final years of my life as well. My parents taught me to work honestly. Marco taught me to continue dreaming. Life taught me to let go. Those three lessons alone summarize almost my entire life. When I think today about the people who hurt me, I no longer feel hatred. Sometimes I feel only a profound sadness. Because I believe they too may have made decisions they regret today.

I will never know their whole story. Just as they never fully knew mine. That awareness excuses nothing. But it helps me let go. Perhaps we should therefore judge a little less quickly. We see only a small part of another person's life. We do not know their fears. Their disappointments. Their memories. Their struggle. That is why today, I try to understand first. And only afterward, if it is truly necessary, to judge. But most often, I discover it is no longer necessary to judge. When I soon write the final page of this book, I do not want to leave any unfinished accounts. Not with my

friends. Not with former business partners. Not with life itself. Not every broken bond can be repaired. Not every conflict can still be resolved. But I can choose not to continue carrying bitterness in my heart.

I want to be grateful for everything I was given. For love. Opportunities. The people who believed in me. And I want to try to find meaning in what was taken from me. That does not mean I am grateful for the loss itself. No father can be grateful that he had to let his son go. But even from the deepest pain, compassion, understanding, and wisdom can be born. I can be grateful for that. Without the trials encountered along my path, I would not have become the man I am today. Perhaps that is the most surprising truth I discovered after seventy-eight years of life, at the time I am writing these words. Sometimes it is not our victories that shape us most profoundly. It is our losses.

And if I could offer one wish to the people reading these pages, it would be this: Do not wait until it is too late to forgive someone. Not because the other person always deserves that forgiveness. But because you too deserve to continue your journey through life in peace.

Sometimes I can forgive someone without allowing them close again. Sometimes I can only decide not to allow any further harm. Forgiveness without boundaries becomes self-denial; boundaries without humanity can become a new prison.

Perhaps the hardest person for me to forgive is myself. The questions about what I might have seen sooner or done differently keep returning. I try not to push them away, but I also want to acknowledge that I acted with the love and knowledge I had at the time.

For me, then, forgiveness is not one great final destination. It is the choice, made again and again, not to let pain decide who I am today.

CHAPTER 43

The invisible thread through my life

When I look back on my life, I do not see a straight line that I could have drawn in advance. I see people who appeared at unexpected moments, doors that closed and later opened another road, and words that revealed their full meaning only years afterwards. Between all those events I sense a connection that I have come to call the invisible thread through my life.

To me, that thread is not proof of a hidden theory, nor is it an answer to every mystery. It is made up of the bond with my parents, Dorina's loyalty, the love for my children and grandchildren, the friends who helped me stand up again and the memory of Marco that remains present in our family. What is invisible can still have a real effect on the way we live and care for one another.

Some experiences I have never been able to explain fully. In this book, I do not want to turn them into certainties. I preserve above all what brings people closer together: an encounter that came at the right moment, an intuition that made me more attentive, a conversation that helped someone out of their silence, or the realisation that love does not end when a life ends.

Every reader may give it their own words. Faith, coincidence, connection or simply the power of human attention—to me, the name matters less than the effect. If

that thought makes us more grateful, gentler and more responsible, then the invisible thread has earned its place in my story.

What life has taught me is inseparable from the events in this book. I did not learn dignity from a saying, but by watching my father leave for the mine before sunrise. I did not learn care from a theory, but by watching my mother cook and wash for people who had no one else. I learned freedom at a factory gate, when I turned around without knowing where I would go.

Coffee taught me that one small, incorrect adjustment can spoil an entire experience, and that attention often solves more than grand words do. Customers taught me that honest advice may sometimes cost a sale, but it builds trust. Medardo and Alberto taught me that one person's trust can awaken possibility in another. The crisis of 1981 taught me that responsibility begins where explanations end.

My businesses also taught me something less pleasant: a good idea does not automatically make a good company. Timing, money, control, and the right people are not enemies of a dream; they determine whether the dream can keep breathing. I sometimes trusted too easily, held on to plans for too long, and thought that harder work could make up for every shortcoming. Those were not signs of wickedness, but they were mistakes whose consequences I had to bear.

Dorina taught me that love does not mean two people have the same needs. One seeks movement, the other security. A marriage does not become strong because that difference disappears, but because two people continue to see each other despite it. My brothers taught me that a family does not always have to agree in order to remain connected.

Marco taught me the hardest truth: love cannot overcome every illness. That does not make love useless. It determines how we are present, how we listen, and how, after someone's death, we continue to see them as a whole person. His life warns me about the word "later." Later is not an appointment. Anyone who wants to say something essential should not wait until circumstances are perfect.

Michael taught me that silence also needs attention. A child who chooses their own path should not become invisible because another child needs more care. My grandchildren teach me that love is not possession. We give the next generation roots, but they must decide for themselves in which direction to grow.

I have learned that tears are not the opposite of strength and that asking for help is not defeat. A person can be independent and still need others. Acknowledging your limits does not prevent every fall, but it increases the chance that someone can catch you when you do fall.

Above all, I have learned that a life is made up of ordinary moments: coffee at the table, a drive to Italy, a

child coming home, a walk with friends, a hand on a shoulder. We often recognize their value only after they have passed. My simplest advice is therefore this: be present, truly listen, and do not postpone love.

CHAPTER 44

The Legacy No Notary Can Divide

When people speak about an inheritance, most immediately think of a house. Money. Land. Objects passed from one generation to the next. I too worked throughout my life. I founded companies. Developed projects. Built homes I later had to leave. I saw ideas become reality. And I saw other dreams disappear almost as quickly as they were born. There were years of success. And there were years when I had to begin again from the start. Today, I understand that almost nothing we possess is made to last forever. Buildings change or disappear. Companies are sold, take another name, or cease to exist. Money comes and goes. Even objects to which we are emotionally attached one day pass into other hands. A notary can determine who receives what.

He can divide a house. A bank account. A collection. But the most important legacy of a human being can never be fully described in any legal document. There is a wealth no notary can divide. The way we lived. The love we gave. The honesty with which we treated others. The courage we passed on to someone. The confidence we awakened in another. And the hope we left in that person's heart. When I think about that, I first think of my father. He did not leave me a great fortune. He owned no castles. No stocks. No collection of precious objects. He was a simple miner. On

every workday, he descended deep underground to bring up coal. Not because that was his dream. But because he wanted to give his children a better future than the one he had known.

From him, I inherited the conviction that honest work gives a person dignity. That we must not wait for someone else to solve our problems. That after a setback, we must try to rise again. And that a father's value is determined not by what he gathers for himself, but by what he is willing to carry for his family. My mother too left me an invaluable legacy. She taught me that love is not expressed through words alone. Love becomes visible in what we do for another person. In all the times we set aside our own comfort. In the care with which we surround someone. In the meal that is ready. In the hand that holds us. And in the presence that remains even when life becomes difficult. How many times did she think first of her children and only afterward of herself? When I was young, it seemed self-evident to me.

Only much later did I understand how much strength and courage that required. And Marco too left me a legacy. Normally, we think a father leaves something to his son. But a son can also pass something to his father that remains forever. Marco gave me his curiosity. His interest in technology. His conviction that behind every problem, a solution might still be hidden. Where others said, "It cannot be done," he would instead begin to wonder why it could not be done. That way of looking kept me young too. Even

today, when I discover or try to understand something new, I often think of him. Then part of his curiosity continues to live within me. I myself thus became proof that the greatest legacy does not always pass from the older to the younger. Sometimes parents receive something from their children.



My beloved wife Dorina, still by my side after all these years.

Sometimes a son forever transforms the way his father looks at the world. When I reflect on what I myself want to

leave behind, I therefore do not think first about my material possessions. Of course, throughout my life, I tried to care for my family. I worked. Took risks. Founded companies. I wanted to build security for the people I loved. But money and possessions were never the true goal. I worked because I wanted to give my family a better future. Just as my father had tried to do before me. If Michael, my grandchildren, and those who come after me think about me one day, I do not hope they will remember mainly how many hours I worked. I hope they will understand why I worked. I hope they will remember that I always began again.

That even after my trust was betrayed, I nevertheless continued believing in people. That I made mistakes, but tried to learn from them. And that despite everything life took from me, I never stopped loving my family. I do not want to be remembered only for my good decisions. My mistakes too are part of my story. Perhaps those who come after me can even learn more from them than from my successes. My life does not prove that hard work always leads to success. Sometimes we can give everything and still lose. Nor does it prove that trust is never betrayed. That certainly happened. But I hope my path through life shows that a defeat need not mean the end of a human being. That we can begin again after a fall. That we must not allow bitterness to have the final word.

And that even when we cannot repair everything, we can always choose again how we continue along our road. My

children and grandchildren do not have to follow the same path as I did. Quite the opposite. I hope they will find their own way. That they will dare to follow their own dreams. That they will not live according to other people's expectations. And that they will feel free to make different choices from mine. A legacy must not become a burden. It must not be a mission to repeat the lives of earlier generations. It should be a compass. Something that can indicate a direction when the road becomes uncertain, without prescribing the destination someone must choose. Perhaps one of my grandchildren will open this book one day. Perhaps out of curiosity. Perhaps because he or she wants to know who the people visible in old photographs were. But perhaps a page will be read at a moment of doubt.



My brother Mario, who left us far too soon.

At a moment when something has failed. When someone risks losing confidence in themselves. Or when life feels heavier than expected. If somewhere in this book there is one thought that gives someone courage again... one memory that makes it clear no one has to carry everything alone... or one sentence that helps someone not to give up... then this book has achieved its deepest purpose. To me, that would be the most beautiful legacy of all. Not a monument bearing my name. Not a company expected to last forever. Not a possession proving what I once accomplished. But words that reach a heart at the right moment. Memories

that continue connecting a family. Values that take another form in new lives. And love that continues its journey even when the person who once gave it is no longer here.

Perhaps one of my grandchildren will then feel me very close again for a moment. Not as an entrepreneur. Not as someone who founded companies or developed projects. Not even first as a writer. But simply... as their grandfather. A grandfather who was not perfect. Who dreamed a great deal. Who sometimes fell. But who always tried to rise again. And who, above all, wanted to pass on to them that they are loved. Truly, I cannot imagine a more beautiful legacy. In the end, we do not continue living through what we accumulated. We continue living through what we passed on.

People to whom I remain grateful



Together with my brothers—a cherished memory that belongs to our family.



Together with my brothers—a bond that has endured through the years.



With Claudio and Peppino Smarelli, childhood friends from De Lindeman.



Together with my brothers at Fabrizio's wedding celebration in Germany.



My dear friend Umberto, with whom I shared a close friendship for many years.



Germaine, who was like a second mother to us and prayed for Marco every day.



My cousin Orazio—a true family man with a zest for life, who left us far too soon.



With my dearest cousin Massimo, who holds a very special place in my heart.



With my dear cousin Stefano.



With my cousin Vinicio and his family during a warm gathering in Loreto Aprutino.



With Arturo, Giuseppina and their children Luciano and Nicola.



With our hundred-year-old family friend Peppino and his wife—a special encounter filled with warmth and respect.



Peppino Smarelli and my cousin Arturo at De Lindeman in 1968.



With Claudio, Tommaso and my cousin Fernando in Loreto Aprutino.

AFTERWORD

To All My Loved Ones

When I began this book, I thought I was simply going to tell my own story. Today, I understand that it was never mine alone. No life is written by one person. We are shaped by those who love us, help us, place their trust in us, and sometimes put us to the test.

That is why I want to dedicate these final pages to all the people who, each in their own way, wrote a page of my life. First of all, I think of my parents. My father Antonio left the country of his birth and went down into the Belgian mines to give his children a future. Through her gentleness, simplicity, and devotion, my mother Guglielmina taught me what unconditional love means. Everything they gave me continues to live on within me.

I think of my brothers Remo, Mario, Carmine, and Maurizio. Together we laughed, suffered, and knew differences, but we also built memories no one can take from us. Mario, who left us too soon, remains one of the warmest and kindest people I have ever known. And I think of my little sister Lidiola. Her life was brief, but her name and her place have always remained within our family.

My deepest gratitude goes to Dorina. Together, we have traveled through almost an entire lifetime. We built a family. We built a family, knew beautiful years, and carried together what was almost impossible to carry. We did not

always experience grief in the same way, nor did we always find the same words. Even so, we remain connected by a history no one can take from us. Thank you, Dorina, for our two sons and for everything we have built and carried together.

Marco, there are no words that can fully describe what you have meant to me. You were my son, my friend, my colleague, my travelling companion, and my confidant. We worked, dreamed, travelled, argued, and laughed. I want people to know not only how your life ended, but above all who you were: a curious boy, a proud father, and a man who kept believing in new possibilities. Death ended your life, but not my love for you.

Michael, you too have a unique and irreplaceable place in my heart. You never had to be like your brother or follow my path. You chose your own life, found your place in aviation, and became the father of Helena and Andreas. In recent years, our bond has grown deeper and more sincere. Thank you for our conversations, for your closeness, and for the new memories we are making together. I am proud of the man and father you have become.

To Tina, the mother of Chiara and Laura, and to everyone who helped bring warmth and connection back into our family after difficult years: you, too, belong to this story. Life does not always follow the path we ourselves would have chosen. Sometimes reconciliation arises only when we learn to look without denying the past.

My love goes out to my four grandchildren: Chiara, Laura, Helena, and Andreas. Each of you has a place of your own in my heart. You do not have to relive the dreams of a previous generation. Make your own choices, mistakes, and dreams. I only hope that, between these words, you will feel how much love and how many sacrifices came before your own story.

When we come together as a family, Marco's name does not have to be left unspoken. We may tell stories, laugh about him, and miss him. In this way, remembering is not only sorrow. It also becomes warmth, connection, and a quiet way of keeping someone with us.

A special thank-you goes to Cristina. You were a dear friend to Marco and later became a daughter of the heart to me. Even after he had left us, you remained present and continued to cherish his memory with love. For that, I will always be grateful to you.

A special word of thanks to Stefano Regnini

A very special and sincere word of thanks goes to Stefano Regnini. With his honest eye, his commitment and his valuable advice, he helped me shape the long version into a more balanced, clearer and more powerful book.

Stefano had the courage to tell me respectfully where the story had become too long, where repetition weakened its force and where its heart deserved more room. Thanks to his advice, the foreword, Marco's story and the attention given to depression, bipolar disorder and suicide prevention could be developed in an even stronger and more humane way.

Without his advice, this version would not have become what it is today. I therefore thank him not only as an attentive reader, but also as someone who, through his sincere involvement, helped give this book its present, balanced form. Grazie di cuore, Stefano.

A MOTHER TO EVERYONE



Rosina Rizzuti (1938–2026)—like a second mamma to me.

A special word of thanks to the Braile family

Shortly before this edition was completed, we had to say goodbye to Rosina Rizzuti, who died at the age of 88. Rosina was like a second mamma to me. Her warmth, care and presence left a deep mark on my life.

To her children Concetta, Franco, Luigi, Santo, Giovanna, Eleonora, Catia and Roberto: I consider you brothers and sisters of the heart. Your sorrow touches me too. I share your sense of loss and, together with you, will carry Rosina in my heart forever.

Thanks to François and my everyday friends

My sincere thanks also go to François Didden. His friendship, attention and support have meant a great deal to me. Although his photograph could not be included in this edition, his name fully deserves its place here, with warmth and affection.

I would also like to give special thanks to my everyday friends: Claudio from Naples, Kosta from Greece, José from Spain and Corinto. Our coffee, conversations and walks bring colour to my days. Different countries and life stories brought us together; true friendship knows no borders.

I think of my Aunt Ida, Medardo Maseroli, Jules and Alphonsine, Kevin Umé, Louis Ouwerkerk, and Alberto Pastorelli. At a decisive moment, each of them gave me trust, friendship, or an opportunity. I also think of Davide,

Lutgart, Agostino, Gilbert, Maria, Jimmy, Vittorina, Giulia, Massimo, Ludo, and Tony. Behind every name lives a story I keep in my heart.

And there are so many others: relatives, friends, colleagues, employees, customers, suppliers, neighbours, people from the De Lindeman mining community, and people I met on my travels. Some stayed for years; others were part of my life for only a short time. Even a brief encounter, however, can leave a mark. If I have not mentioned someone by name, it never means that person was less important.

Over the course of a long life, every human being makes mistakes. So have I. Perhaps I did not always listen enough, worked too much, trusted too easily, or said too little about how much someone meant to me. If I hurt anyone, knowingly or unknowingly, I sincerely ask for forgiveness. Not because I have ever been perfect, but because I have always tried to live honestly.

I also want to thank you, the reader. You have followed me along roads stretching back almost eighty years. Perhaps some pages made you think of your own father or mother, a child, a friend, or someone you miss. If my memories touched yours for a moment, this book has achieved something greater than my story alone.

A life does not become special because of what a person owns or how much they achieve. It becomes special because of the people with whom one has been privileged to share it.

Without all these people, my story would have been different. Without my parents, there would have been no beginning. Without Dorina, no family. Without Marco and Michael, not the same love or the same lessons. Without my grandchildren, not the same hope. Without my brothers, family, and friends, not the same roots or the same memories.

That is why, in the end, this book could have only one title: MY LIFE - IN THE NAME OF ALL MY LOVED ONES. It bears my name, but it also belongs a little to everyone who shared part of their life with mine. That is why I place this final page in your hands, with humility, gratitude, and above all with love. In the name of all my loved ones.

MY LIFE
IN THE NAME OF ALL MY LOVED ONES



Renato Rossi

Renato Rossi was born on 5 June 1948 in Loreto Aprutino and came to the De Lindeman mining estate in Heusden-Zolder with his family as a baby. He grew up in a mining family and built a life in which family, coffee, ceramics, entrepreneurship, innovation and the search for meaning were continually intertwined.

In this edition, he tells in forty-four chapters about his roots, Dorina, his sons Marco and Michael, his grandchildren, the people who shaped him, the dreams he realised and the loss that changed everything.

This book bears his name, but it belongs to all those who wrote a page of his life - to all my loved ones.

“Everything you do for someone else, you do for yourself.”

A GESTURE OF HOPE

FOR MARCO AND FOR EVERYONE WHO NEEDS HOPE

Stay connected with My Life

This book was written in loving memory of my son Marco (1972-2009). Scan the QR code and follow the Telegram channel. There you will find the books and videos in four languages and can stay up to date.



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