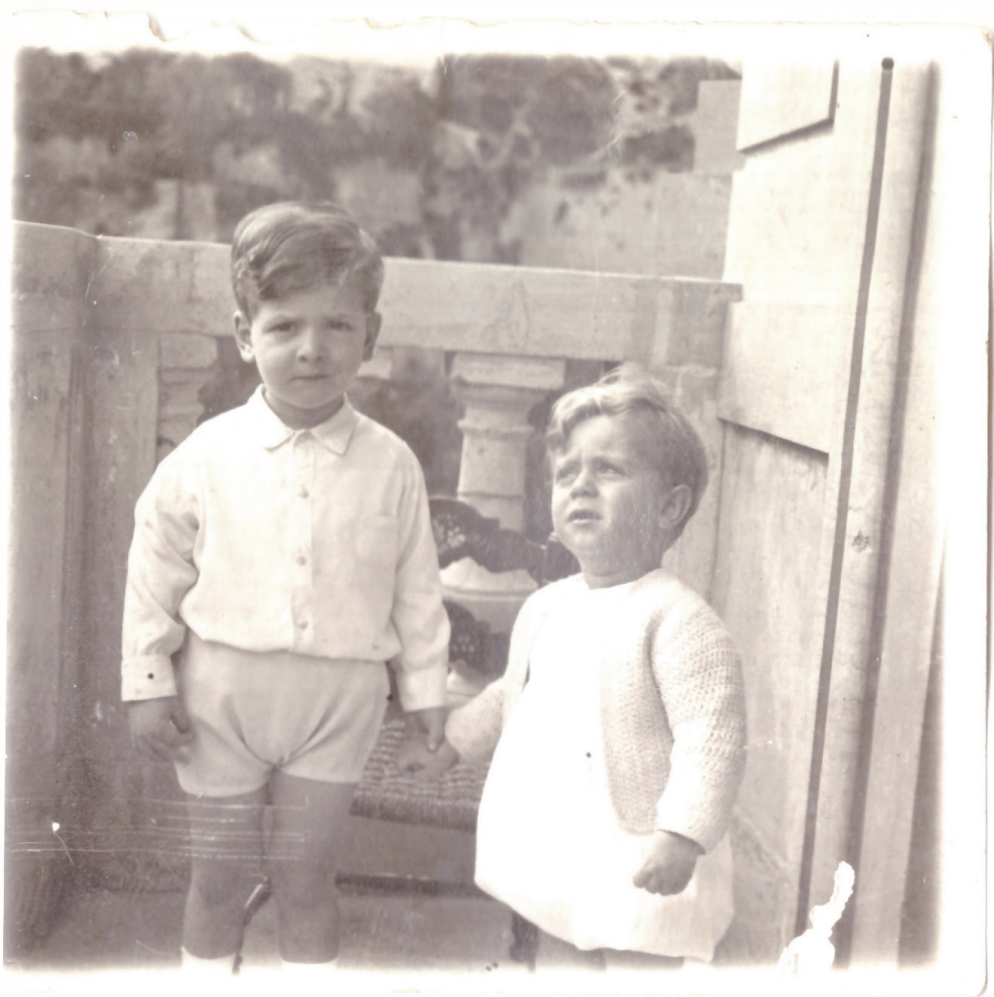


THE BOY WHO COULDN'T GO TO SCHOOL

The story of my childhood under Italy's Racial Laws



Ugo Foà

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To Sandro, Marina, and Fiorenza

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Forward

Zio Ugo, my uncle Ugo, is one of five brothers. Of these five my father Mario, and Zio Dario both wrote and published their memoirs. Each wrote from a different point of view, having lived varied lives in different countries. But all five were raised in Italy during the times of Fascism and the Racial Laws.

As many countries, America included, move closer-and-closer to extremism, to fascism, I am reminded of the old story *How do you boil a frog?* If you put it in boiling water it will immediately jump out. But if you put it in room temperature water and slowly, slowly turn the heat up . . .

By fomenting anger and fear, mostly in the form of racism and scapegoating, the reaction for many is that law-and-order is the only solution. With law-and-order comes control. And so with Mussolini in Italy his control of the country seemed a good solution. Until it didn't.

My father and my uncles all felt this as children, but were too young to fully understand the implications, except on a personal level. And as both my Zio Dario and my father wrote in their memoirs, they were fortunate to have been living in Naples a tight-knit community of (mostly) people who saw each other as human beings. Furthermore, the Neapolitans hate being controlled, disregard regulations and live a life full of vigor and spontaneity. And soon after the occupation of Naples by the Nazis, the Allied forces came up through Sicily and the south. As Zio Ugo writes, when the Nazis departed Naples, the citizens threw everything from bottles to toilets, boiling water to vases on the departing occupiers.

I felt it not only necessary, but urgent, that Zio Ugo's book be translated and distributed as widely as possible to the young people, and the not-so-young people in America at this time in history. History is no longer taught in the schools; critical thinking is no longer taught in America. But sometimes, hopefully, a real-life example of the rise of fascism (or any totalitarian regime) will awaken those who don't yet see the parallels in history.

I pray there is a wake-up call, for the sake of my son and his family, and for all of America, which I love and adore.

I thank Zio Ugo for the beautiful work he has done in writing and retelling these accounts.

I also thank Agnese Manni for her kind and generous self for helping us obtain permission to translate and publish Zio Ugo's story, and mostly for publishing the original, in Italian, and giving the

world a chance to hear and understand what happened during the period in Italy in the time of the Racial Laws.

I thank Professor Richard Keatley for a marvelous translation and Susannah Ortego for her precise editing and Jonathan Warren for the detailed layout.

Dahlan Roberto Foah

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I would like to thank, firstly, Piero Manni, the professor I never had the pleasure of meeting. His words by phone, and the messages he sent me a few days before his death, inspired me to write this book: “You must tell and write down what happened, because young people need to know.” I am deeply grateful to him because, without his gently severe push I would probably never have written down these notes.

I thank his daughter Agnese and the staff of the publisher, without whose help and professionalism I would probably not have been able to put my experience in proper order.

I thank also the teachers throughout Italy who invited me to tell my story in their schools.

A warm thanks, finally, to the thousands of students I have met over the past twenty years, who have listened with great attention and who affectionately encouraged me to continue this path of remembrance.

U.F.

Introduction

My name is Ugo, Ugo Foà, a surname that is easily identifiable as Jewish. I have always been proud of this, except during a particular period of my life when my name could not appear on the class rolls at school.

I was born in Naples, Italy on June 20, 1928, the third of five brothers. The oldest, Mario, was born in 1921, followed by Remo in 1926; Dario followed me in 1931 and our youngest brother Tullio was born in 1933.

Our family was well-off. We lived in a beautiful, elegant home with a terrace overlooking the Gulf of Naples. We even had a nanny and an automobile, which in those days was certainly not very common. From June to September, my mother, brothers, our nanny, and I would go to Lucrino beach every day, accompanied by my mother's sister Aunt Emilia; her two children, Antonio and Maria; and a wicker basket with a macaroni frittata or potato gâteau. We are still close to our cousins, and now that we are older, we consider ourselves brother-cousins, or *fratecucine*, as we say in Naples.

The winter was for studying, and I attended the first four years of elementary school before passing grades four and five in one year, as was common among the upper middle class, so I could go to middle school a year early. I enjoyed school and did pretty well, receiving an A+ average — an achievement that helped our family because it exempted me from paying tuition.

Each year, my parents would sign a certificate of exemption from religious training, though I would often stay in class during that period. When class started and the others stood up, I minded my manners and stood up with them, but refrained from making the sign of the cross. If the others asked me why I did not participate actively in the religious practice, I answered, “I am Jewish,” and the question seemed to end there.

Once, a classmate did reply, “Oh, like the ones that killed Jesus,” but I did not feel any sense of discrimination. There seemed to be no difference between me, my brothers, and the other school kids. We all did the same things and played together, except that they went to mass on Sunday and we went to synagogue on Saturday.

We enjoyed synagogue, because our maternal grandfather was the rabbi, and in a small Jewish community of less than four

hundred members, like the one in Naples, we felt privileged to be able to hear our own grandfather officiating over the liturgy and to receive the blessing, or *Berahà*, from him.

My mother's father was named Lazzaro Laide-Tedesco and was originally from Livorno. He had served as vice-rabbi in Turin, and then rabbi in Senigallia and Reggio Emilia before being offered the rabbinical seat of Naples, where he moved in 1907 with a wife and six children: two for each of the cities he had lived in. My mother, Ida, born in 1900, was the youngest.

In keeping with the Jewish tradition, Nonno Lazzaro was proud to have so many grandsons, and we adored him. Our mother, when she wanted to reward us, would say, "If you behave, we'll go see Nonno and Nonna," a real treat, because at their house we could eat the confetti that Nonno received after presiding over weddings.

Bar-Mitzvah

When Jewish children reach maturity (age twelve for girls and thirteen for boys) they celebrate the Bar-Mitzvah (“son of the commandment”) and Bat-Mitzvah (“daughter of the commandment”). This is the point at which the initiates become morally responsible for their actions and are called upon to follow the commandments.

It is common practice to celebrate the Bar-Mitzvah with a big party. The most important part of the ceremony occurs in the synagogue, of course, where the young man recites a blessing, reads from scrolls of the Torah, and sings a passage from the Book of the Prophets. Since the Torah is written without vowels or musical notes, learning to read and sing is quite the task for the young initiates, who begin to prepare months in advance.

During the ceremony the rabbi usually makes a speech to the young man, inciting him to reflect on a passage from the Torah and emphasizing the importance of this rite of passage.

Nonno was an important symbol of authority and point of reference for us kids. He died before my Bar-Mitzvah, and I was very sad he could not be there to celebrate it; for years after his death, we continued to refer to the day he died as the day of the “misfortune”.

Our paternal grandfather, Amilcare, worked for the regional railroad service. In the early 1900s he had worked in Sardinia, an area ridden with malaria. This disease, spread by a certain type of mosquito, was very widespread in Italy at the time, and the government passed laws to fight its spread and distributed quinine at reduced prices. It was said that my grandfather had taken too much quinine, causing him to go deaf in both ears.

When my parents married, my mother was nineteen and my father ten years older; the Foà grandparents moved in with them. Nonna died in 1926, but Nonno stayed with us until 1938. We conversed with our own makeshift alphabet, which was not exactly the sign language used by the deaf and mute, but a system that we all understood completely. We used to tell him how school went, what we were having for lunch, and the latest news from the neighborhood.

We were very close to both our grandfathers because our own father had gone to work in Africa in 1936, making them important male figures for us boys.

My father, Virginio, was born in 1890. He had been an administrator at the Italian Savings Bank, and later become a stockbroker. With the crisis of 1929, however, this job had disappeared and the family hit hard times, so our father decided to work in Africa, where Mussolini's strategy of expansion had created many opportunities for Italians. In May 1936, after winning the war in Ethiopia, Mussolini proclaimed the birth of Italian East Africa covering the territories of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia.

During his first year there, our father made a decent living, sending money home for us to live on, but later the situation deteriorated there as well. Returning to Italy after the passage of the Racial Laws in 1938 would have been worse, however, so he stayed in Africa.

The Crisis of 1929

After the end of the First World War a prevailing sense of optimism led people to believe that economic growth would continue forever. The great demand for consumer goods, however, eventually led to a glut of products, especially for durable goods such as automobiles, refrigerators, or radios, that the market was unable to absorb, causing a crisis that lasted for several years. This led to a gradual drop, first in prices and later in the level of industrial production, beginning in 1920.

But the United States continued to consider its economy (which had also weakened due to the fact that most of their exports were manufactured goods and not raw materials) to be invincible, and this optimism led to frenetic activity and pure speculation on Wall Street: people bought stocks and sold them at prices that were no longer linked to their true value.

On October 24, 1929, the race to dump these stocks began, but at that point their value sank and many fortunes went up in flames. On “Black Thursday,” in New York alone, eleven stock brokers and investors committed suicide.

Capitalism collapsed, leading to an extremely violent economic crisis. Unemployment reached stratospheric levels in the United States, where between 1929 and 1932 the number of people that lost their jobs rose to fourteen million (a figure equivalent to the number of people that were residing in the entire city of Tokyo in 2020).

The effects of the American crisis were felt throughout the world because of the various economies’ interconnectedness, but rather than accept its responsibility as a world leader, the United States tried to defend itself through protectionism, limiting the importation of foreign goods.

The crisis of 1929 was felt in Italy because of the collapse of Italian exports, especially food products.

Throughout this period, we were all Fascists. Of course, there were dissidents who promoted subversive propaganda and opposition to the regime; but among the average population and especially among the kids who were born and grew up in that environment and knew no other — being a Fascist was as natural as being Italian or German, Catholic, or Jewish.

We boys were all trained in the groups of Fascist Youth and I became a Son of the She-wolf. We were enrolled in the party automatically when we went to school and at a certain point people were even enrolled in the public registry at birth. When I turned eight, I became a member of *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (Balilla National Project), also called the ONB, and my brother Mario, who had turned fourteen, was a member of the Fascist Youth Avant-garde.

We all wore uniforms, performed the Fascist salute, and were trained in a gymnastics class that resembled military exercises more than athletic training. But this was our world and we knew no other.

On Saturday afternoons, we all went to Assembly, meeting in the school courtyard and attending classes of Fascist indoctrination. There we did gymnastics exercises, learned to handle a musket, or toy rifle, and did somersaults; we were having fun, in effect. All of this was nonetheless mandatory: no one was allowed to play hooky from Fascist Saturday.

Fascist Youth Organizations

After the March on Rome, which signaled Mussolini's ascension to power on October 28, 1922, the fledgling regime began to confront the problem of how to Fascistize society, beginning with its youngest members.

The early organization and indoctrination of the new generations was a central aspect of Fascism: a long-term investment that would ensure the survival of the system, since public school could not by itself guarantee the transmission of political ideology.

To this end the Balilla National Project (ONB) was founded with the mission of assisting the physical and moral education of Italian youth. In this way, even the free time of children and youth was regulated.

The name Balilla recalls the figure of the young Giovanni Battista Perasso, called Balilla who, in 1746, launched a stone that signaled the beginning of the revolt against the Austrian troops occupying Genoa. Balilla had become a popular example of the heroic struggle against foreign domination during the Risorgimento: an image of revolt that was dear to the Fascist regime.

After a period of experimentation, the ONB was permanently divided into groups by age and sex, each having its own distinctive uniform and insignia:

Male Corps:

- Sons of the She-wolf: ages six to eight
- Balilla: ages eight to fourteen
- Members of the Avant-garde: ages fourteen to eighteen

Female Corps:

- Daughters of the She-wolf: ages six to eight
- Little Italians: ages eight to thirteen
- Young Italian Women: ages thirteen to eighteen

Beyond the ONB there were movements for adults as well:

- Young Fascist Combatants: ages eighteen to twenty-one
- Fascist Student Groups (Guf) for university students

Enrollment was mandatory and an ONB ID card was required in order to enroll in Elementary, Middle, and High School. "In the name of God and Italy, I swear to follow the orders of the Duce and

to serve with all my forces and if necessary to shed my blood for the cause of the Fascist Revolution” was the oath that every child made when enrolling in school.

The ONB taught the fundamental skills of a Fascist spiritual, cultural, and religious education, and also provided technical and professional military instruction. The Minister for Education Pietro Fedele had written in an educational circular, “The instruction of the Balilla and Avant-garde seeks to promote not only the physical fitness and athletic training of Italian Youth, but also provides a healthy and vigorous moral education, instilling a sense of discipline and responsibility.” The Balilla and Avant-garde were the “future citizens of Italy,” and constituted in effect the only method for entering the party. In this way the regime was able to establish not only an educational program, but also a system for the selection and training of the youth that would become the country’s future leaders.

The ONB focused specifically on athletic training, both inside and outside of school, incorporating various paramilitary elements, such as musket training, where youths learned to hold a toy gun. The youths would periodically display their skills in public parades and shows.

This attention to physical education was new for the Italian school system, which often had no appropriate gyms or equipment. But all that was required was a “a street, or a simple piece of land,” wrote one circular of the ONB. The ONB took on a role of political assistance in the arenas of public health and preventive medicine.

Another mission of the ONB was cultural education: “A book and a gun make the perfect Fascist.”

As kids, however, we had a pretty carefree existence, even if our father was far from home and we were not exactly swimming in gold. We each had our additional responsibilities and I spent most of my time with Remo, who was only a year and half older than me. We were inseparable.

In the summer of 1938, we had to make our way to the beach using the Cumana train line, since we had been forced to sell our automobile. Luckily for us, our grandfather was a former railroad official and had an ID card that allowed his entire family to ride the trains for free.

If we had a little extra money, we would rent bicycles, even for half an hour and ride, flying like birds through the neighborhood. Or we

would improvise a game of soccer in the street, for half an hour or so, or volleyball, passing hours of fun with a beat-up old ball.

We traded cards with other kids, such as the collection of the generals that had conquered Africa (Badoglio, Graziani, Del Bono) or the “bad guys” who opposed them (the Ras and the Negus).

It was around this time that the American board game Monopoly arrived. While it was too expensive for us, my friend Mario had it, but because it came from the United States, the Fascist regime Italianized the name Monopoly by replacing the *y* with an *i*.

The summer of 1938 went by more or less as usual, with trips to the beach and games of hide-and-seek or steal-the-flag. That summer I also began my prep for middle school, where my high grade point average would save my family from having to pay tuition.

Although things were about to drastically change, it’s hard for me to say if, in fact, we Jews were treated any differently at this time. I did not sense that anything was amiss, but perhaps my grandfather the rabbi had a better feel for things. However, on the front page of the *Il Giornale d’Italia*, the so-called “Manifesto on Race”, was published explaining how Fascist scientists, professors, and intellectuals, along with the Ministry of Popular Culture (The MinCulPop) had clarified the Fascist position regarding race. There were ten points, the first of which was that “human races exist.” The second point was that the majority of the Italian population was of “Aryan origin.” It was clearly time for Italians to declare themselves “openly racist” as, point nine of the Declaration went on to specify that “Jews do not belong to the Italian race.”

Race? Aryans? Racists? These words meant nothing to me, I was just a kid. I knew I had a different religion than most of my classmates, but we still played the same games and did the same homework.

The first of the Racial Laws published on September fifth, impacted me directly, since the Royal Decree 1390 announced the “Defense of the Italian Race in the Fascist School System” and stipulated that, effective immediately, the students and teachers “of the Jewish Race” defined as “those born of two Jewish parents, even if they practiced a different religion” were officially excluded from the Italian School System.

Yes, I was directly affected.

The Racial Laws

The origin of the racist politics of Fascism can be dated to the conquest of Ethiopia (1936). Mussolini believed that empires had to be conquered with arms, but that they were maintained by reputation. He also believed he needed a “clear and severe racial awareness” that established “not only differences, but a clear superiority.”

The promulgation of the Racial Laws was preceded by publications and doctrinal statements in the journals of the regime whose purpose was to establish a “scientific” foundation for the question. The first issue of the biweekly journal *La Difesa Della Razza* (The Defense of the Race) appeared on August 5, 1938. Published by the Tumminelli Press in Rome under the direction of the known anti-Semite Telesio Interlandi the journal was distributed, mainly to paid subscribers, until June 20, 1943. The journal used graphic terms to describe the biological danger presented by the Jews, who it claimed were racially unassimilable and “anti-Italian” “a race foreign to Italy” and a symbol of anti-Fascism.

Jews were no longer considered as such on the basis of their religion or individual identity, but arbitrarily as members of a separate “race.” Caricatures, paintings, and photographs were used to illustrate their inferiority by establishing once and for all the “typically Jewish” facial traits. Accusations were launched, even during the months before the promulgation of the law, that drew from a centuries-old anti-Semitic tradition that characterized Jews as decidal, sexually corrupt, Bolshevik revolutionaries, amoral capitalists or questionable pacifists or, at the same time, warmongers and traitors to their country who plotted, moreover, to take over the entire world.

All of this propaganda went far beyond the simple denunciation of the presumed Jewish threat. Italians were to actively persecute Jews and eventually accept their removal. A campaign of derision contributed fodder to this effort, not only in ferociously anti-Semitic journals such as *La Difesa Della Razza*, Oberdan Cotone’s *Il Giornalissimo*, and Roberto Farinacci’s *Il Regime Fascista* (The Fascist Regime), but also in systematic propaganda published in all the national newspapers.

A fundamental step and instrument towards persecution was the counting of all Jews: on the single day of August 22, 1938, 47,000 Jews were counted during official visits by government inspectors. Prefects, mayoral secretaries, Carabinieri, and party officials were

called back from vacation to conduct a thorough investigation that sought out and identified Jews on vacation and checked the racial status of Italians with unusual last names. Private citizens stepped up to inform on their neighbors with mostly anonymous tips. Jews that had not received a visit were ordered to register themselves and to curtail their own civil rights or be subject to arrest and fines.

In October of the same year, the High Fascist Counsel approved a declaration on race establishing, among other things, the prohibition of marriage between Italians and “elements belonging to the Hamite, Semite and other non-Aryan races.”

On September 5, 1938, the Provisions for the Defense of the Italian Race in the Fascist School System approved the expulsion of students and teachers “of the Jewish Race” from public schools. The same order was made for university professors, career military personnel, dependents of every government civil or military office, and employees of public or semipublic offices including local governments, banks, insurance agencies, and newspapers. Citizens of the “Jewish Race” were also prohibited from belonging to the Fascist Party and current members were stricken from the rolls; they also could not be owners or officeholders in companies with more than one hundred employees or own more than fifty hectares (124 acres) of land or serve in the military. Professionals’ licenses were revoked and Jews were prohibited from selling objects of artistic value, religious objects, baby clothes and toys, paper and pens, alcohol, or used objects. Jews were also prohibited from collecting garbage, used military uniforms, or wool for mattresses. They could not export hemp, fruits, or vegetables or manage dance or fashion schools, film rental or tourist agencies. They could not operate public transportation, publish advertisements or obituaries, or have their names in the phone book. They were prohibited from cultural and athletic associations, from serving as doormen in buildings inhabited by Aryans, and from working as itinerant merchants. They would not be issued permits to search for minerals or for importation, could not fly aircraft of any type, nor raise passenger pigeons; they could not own hunting preserves or hire Aryan servants, and were prohibited from public libraries. They could not act as mediators, peddlers, or commissioners and could not carry arms. They could not act as tour guides, interpreters, photographers, private tutors, room-letters, or typesetters. Other formal provisions for the “defense of the Italian race,” outside of those specifically targeting schools, prohibited mixed marriages and established the biological criteria for identification of members of the “Jewish Race.”

The Italian people received the Racial Laws without enthusiasm, but without protesting either. Public opinion was on the whole indifferent and condescending. Many people were happy to replace their displaced Jewish colleagues at work or in the universities.

Shortly after the Provisions for the Defense of the Italian Race in the Fascist School System were announced, with its restrictions set to become effective in early September, our mother called us into the kitchen to tell us that we would not be going to school that year: no high school or middle school for Remo and me and no school for any of my brothers.

I was flabbergasted and unable to understand: I imagined I had done something wrong and that this was my punishment.

I was supposed to go to school with my big brothers that year. We would walk to school together and I would meet them in the halls and at the end of the day when classes let out. In middle school I would no longer be required to wear the black school apron used to hide ink spots of the primary school kids. I was all grown up, in effect.

Now, all these dreams suddenly evaporated, and I could not see why this important moment was being taken away from me. Was I supposed to remain ignorant my whole life? How could you just stop going to school at such a young age when there was so much in the world to learn? Would I ever see my friends again? And what was I supposed to do all day long?

Humiliated, I broke down crying at the injustice of what was happening to me. Surely my strong mother would find a solution.

School was not the only issue, however. That month held other bad surprises for us.

A few days later was Saturday Fascist Saturday and as mamma was a disciplined, rational woman she assumed that we could, or rather that we were still required to, attend the weekly rally.

Remo and I were somewhat perplexed as to why our mother thought the restrictions on Jews that were put in place in the new Racial Laws wouldn't apply to attendance at rallies, but we went anyway. However, on that day, after the Commandant of the Volunteer Militia made his usual speech exalting Fascism, he added the observation that "You have to be worthy of being Fascists, and Jews are not worthy."

Remo and I exchanged glances of encouragement with each other and went to speak with the Commandant at the end of the rally. With some embarrassment, we not only told him that we were Jews but also asked, "Are we still supposed to come to the rallies?" Even he seemed embarrassed by our question. Maybe he thought Jews represented some abstract concept, and had not imagined them being actual flesh and blood beings like the two kids in shorts and the Fascist fez he saw standing right in front of him. In any case, he went to consult another officer and returned with the verdict: "Go home and don't come back."

We were in a state of confusion for the following month, especially as to what to do for my younger brothers who were supposed to attend elementary school, which was still mandatory for everyone. The government's solution was to create separate Jewish classes of at least ten students and combining grade levels if necessary. The problem was that in Naples' small Jewish community there were only nine students of elementary age, so the joint class could not be held.

Mother went to speak with the school administrator charged with forming the special class where my brother Dario was supposed to attend second grade. "Do you have another child you can enroll?" he asked her. She answered in the negative, adding "I have three older sons, and then Tullio, who was born in 1933 and has a year before he starts school." "Are you sure, madame," the administrator inquired carefully, "that Tullio wasn't born in 1932, which would allow him to attend first grade?" "No, no," my mother insisted. "I am telling you he was born in November 1933." "Dear lady," the administrator then said, quietly but very firmly, "Tullio was born in 1932, and he will be the tenth student in the joint class." That's how my young brother ended up starting school a year early.

For us older brothers the question was more complicated, because there was no proposed solution for our education.

Mamma worked hard, probably using her father's connections with the Jewish community, to find the other students scheduled to start middle school with me and some Jewish teachers who could no longer teach in the public schools.

So, I started in an unofficial school, which was better than nothing.

But I still wondered how I was going to be promoted, since I would have no official report card.

School in the Fascist Era

Between 1925 and 1931, publishing houses issued textbooks that satisfied the directives of the Fascist regime, transforming schoolbooks into effective instruments of Fascist propaganda.

During the 1930-31 school year, the Minister of Education introduced a new State textbook for elementary school: Fascism's final step in its total takeover of the Italian public school system.

In a speech of September 5, 1935, Benito Mussolini affirmed:

“Now, since all Italians pass through our schools, it is necessary that in all grades, we teach the spiritual, military and economic needs of our regime. We need our schools, not only in form, but in spirit, the universal motor of humanity, to be profoundly Fascist in everything they do.”

The publication of this universal textbook controlled teaching by limiting teachers' discretion and freedom of choice in the materials taught. Much of the text, including the cover and as much as seventy percent of each page, was dedicated to direct or indirect propaganda celebrating Fascism: Mussolini and his cult of personality, history, public holidays, public works, and the heroic actions of Italian soldiers. The protagonists of stories and word problems often used the names of the children of the Duce.

Homework assignments typically referred to Fascist themes, as illustrated in the following essay questions and topics:

- Why am I a Balilla (or Young Italian Woman)?
- What are the achievements of Fascism you most admire?
- From Vittorio Veneto to the March on Rome
- A martyr or hero of the war in Ethiopia

Math problems maintained the theme as well:

- Eighteen Balilla members go on a school trip: if everyone had paid their own way, they would each pay 17.50 Lire. Since only fifteen members paid, how much would each one pay?

-The battleship *Vittorio Veneto* is armed with a large cannon. Twelve are medium caliber; twelve small caliber and twenty machine guns. How many total weapons are there on this powerful ship?

-A school in Rome knitted 5.4 quintals (1 quintal equals 100 kilo) of wool for our soldiers in the World War. If it takes eight hours to knit a hectogram of wool, how many hours of work did the teachers and students dedicate to the Fatherland?

There were also numerous books distributed by the National Fascist Party. In particular were *The First Fascist Book* (first published in 1938), dedicated to Mussolini, the Fascist Revolution, and to the organizations of the Regime, and *The Second Fascist Book* (published in 1939), which spoke of the themes of racism.

In secondary school, there was not a single textbook, but all texts were scrutinized and aligned with the needs of the Regime.

In addition to desks, billboards, chalkboards and maps, all Italian schools were required to display the same things: a crucifix, portraits of the King and Duce, the Italian flag, a bronze plaque honoring the Unknown Soldier, and the dispatch announcing the Victory of the First World War. During the African War there was a map with pins showing the advances of the Italian Army.

Almost every school had a radio connected to a loudspeaker for the transmission of Mussolini's speeches. Classrooms were crowded: in 1926-27, the average class size was thirty-nine, in 1931-32, it was forty-eight; and in 1940-41, there were forty-six students per class.

Students' desks were made of wood with two or three seats and a hole for an inkwell on the upper righthand side, which the janitor filled each day using government-issued powders.

Students went to school carrying their books in leather or cloth bags or tied together with an elastic band. There were two notebooks: the good copy with a sober cover and good paper, and the ugly notebook with an illustrated cover and lower-quality paper. The subjects of the illustrations varied from Roman soldiers or legionaries to the actions in Ethiopia, and other patriotic themes or images celebrating the Italian Navy or Air Corps.

There were three different calendars for students to follow: the one beginning January first and the school calendar beginning in October. Then there was the Fascist calendar using Roman numerals to mark the official Year of the Fascist Era that began with the March on Rome on October 28, 1922. The third grade textbook listed dates that teachers could use for a lesson or assign as homework essays: October 28, March on Rome (National Holiday); October 31, Savings Day; November 1-2, Day of the Dead (Holiday); November 4, Victory Day commemorating the end of the First World War (Holiday); November 9, Death of Victor Emmanuel II; November 11, King's Birthday (Holiday); December 5, Anniversary of the Balilla Revolt against the Austrians in Genoa; December 2, Day of Mothers and Children; January 6, Fascist Befana (Holiday); January 8, Queen Elena's Birthday (Holiday); February 11, Signing of the Lateran Treaty; March 23, Founding of Fascist Combatants (Holiday); April 19, Day against Tuberculosis; April 21, Birth of Rome and Labor Day (Holiday); April 25, Birthday of Guglielmo Marconi; May 5, Italy's entrance into Addis Ababa; May 7, Empire Day (Holiday); May 24, Commemoration of Italy's entry into World War I (Holiday); and June 9, Birth of the Kingdom of Italy. Other holidays included were New Year's Day, Father's Day (March 19), Feast of the Ascension, Corpus Domini, Saints Peter and Paul, The Immaculate Conception (December 8), Christmas, and every Sunday.

There were three students in my class, and we were all named Ugo: me, Ugo Sacerdoti, and Ugo Hasson, who was of Greek origin. He and his family had dual Greek and Italian citizenship, but the Racial Laws revoked citizenship from Jews with dual citizenship, expelling them from the country. After just a few lessons, Ugo Hasson and his family had to return to Greece. From there, he and his sister managed to go to the United States, but the rest of the family parents and brothers were all deported to Auschwitz and never returned.

Sacerdoti and I kept in touch up until his death a few years ago, but I saw Hasson only once, when he returned to Naples for a conference on the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Racial Laws. He could not remember a single word of Italian and told me his story in English. He was speaking sternly, the air was filled with tension and emotion. At the end a journalist asked if he had forgiven and forgotten after so many years had gone by. After a chilling pause, his response, "I have not forgiven, I have not forgiven," was greeted with a liberating applause.

Ugo and I went to our teachers' homes. We had one teacher for humanistic subjects and another for math. And then, there was a young English teacher who came to our house. We went for two hours in the morning, alternating between Professor Ida Del Val and Professor Angelo Susani, who was replaced two years later by Arrigo Cantoni. Del Val tried to encourage us, saying everything would soon be over and that we needed to be strong. Years later I discovered that she had been active in the struggle against Fascism and that when the doorbell rang and she told us class was dismissed, it was probably so she could run off to some secret meeting.

Cantoni, on the other hand, had a large map on the wall, where he showed us the advancing German Army saying "See, the Nazis are conquering the whole world."

In addition to these discouraging signs and the terror incited by the events of the war, our school was no doubt condensed, but in those two hours it was impossible to let your mind wander with all we had to cover. It was like being tested every day and it was certainly impossible for our teacher not to notice us!

During the summer of 1939, at the end of our first year of non-school, Ugo and I took our General Education Exam in the very school where I had imagined attending class with Remo. I was happy and moved to sit in those desks and to find myself with the other kids. When I entered the class and went to sign my name, I saw the words "Of Jewish Race" marked in red. I sat down in the first row and began to write the Italian essay, the first part of the exam. But after a few minutes the president of the commission asked, "Where's Foà?" "Here," I answered. "What are you doing there? You are not allowed to be with the others; leave the first row and sit in the back, away from the others." It took me a few seconds to process what was happening, and why I was consigned to the last row, but I drew up my courage and managed not to cry, taking my pen and paper to my seat, or, rather, the seat they had assigned me. The other children looked at me as if to ask what horrible contagion I must have had. But while I was doing my assignment, I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up to see Professor Del Val who said, "You can do it, Foà." I have never forgotten those words of encouragement.

The private lessons and constant attention of Del Val, Susani, and Cantoni to us two students paid off at the end of the year: Ugo and I got A's in all subjects. It's true that the students taking the General Education Exam were usually either from poor families, kids who worked, or kids who had failed and had not studied as

much as we had. Years later, after the war had ended, I learned from a teacher on the examination board that the others had received very low grades, causing the principal to exclaim: "This is a massacre!" Our grades stood out and it was hardly acceptable for the top grades to go to two Jewish kids! The president of the commission answered back, "We gave the grades they deserved, but you can do as you like."

When the grades were posted, the A's beside our names stuck out, but so did the red letters "Of Jewish Race."

It was as if they were slowly stealing everything from us, our very lives.

Beginning in 1938, and increasingly in 1940, after Italy entered the war, a series of laws progressively excluded Jews from work, and placed further restrictions on how they could conduct their private and daily life. Trying to keep up with and adhere to the new restrictions that came out each day was like walking through a minefield. Even while walking on tiptoe, sooner or later you would end up stepping on a bomb.

One time, Remo and I decided to check out a tennis club to ask for information. We imagined it would probably be too expensive for us, but we really liked tennis and thought that we could possibly play for half an hour. We walked in mesmerized. At the reception they gave us information on the hours and prices and explained that certificates of birth, health, and date of baptism were required. "We're not baptized," we explained. "We're Jewish." "Then you cannot enroll" was the abrupt response.

While passing laws to exclude Jews from our country's civic life, the Fascist government also promulgated a massive anti-Semitic propaganda campaign, accusing Jews of killing Christ and describing us as unscrupulous capitalists in league with the Russian Bolsheviks and traitors to the nation—actions which, if true, justified excluding Jews from schools and tennis clubs, some people thought.

There was nothing we could do when we were denied access to the tennis club. However, when two brothers told Remo and me that they could not play with us because we were Jewish, we could no longer contain ourselves, and we slapped them across the face before running away.

Persecution of the Jews in Germany

Jews were a small part of the population of 1930s Germany: around 500,000 in a total population of more than sixty million. Concentrated in the big cities, they were integrated into society, generally occupying the upper middle classes as merchants, intellectuals, professionals, and artists. In the early thirties after Adolph Hitler became chancellor of Germany, Nazi propaganda began to foment resentment; citing stereotypes of Jews' ethnic and religious differences and supposed economic privilege was common, especially among the working classes of Eastern Europe. This discrimination was made official in 1935 with the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, which abolished the equal rights of Jews and outlawed mixed marriages.

In November 1938, the Nazis used the killing of a German diplomat, at the hands of a Jew, to order a massive pogrom (organized destruction and devastation) of Jewish businesses, schools, synagogues and homes throughout Germany. The outbreak of violence and vandalization that subsequently took place on November ninth and tenth is now known as Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass), because of the widespread breaking of Jewish shop windows by many of the protesters. During Kristallnacht scores of Jews were killed and after that thousands of Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. This marked the beginning of a more systematic persecution despoiling Jews of their possessions and livelihoods and systematically removing them from German social life.

In 1941, after war had broken out, Hitler announced his "final solution": the mass exportation of and extermination of the Jewish people. This plan was part of a larger defense of the race that called for the forced sterilization of carriers of hereditary diseases and the suppression of the mentally ill in order to preserve the "integrity of the Aryan Race." In all Nazi-occupied countries (especially in Eastern Europe where the Jewish population was larger) Jews were confined to ghettos and were made physically identifiable by the requirement to wear a yellow star of David. They were then exported to prison camps, known as *lagers*, where they were worked to the point of exhaustion, used as subjects of scientific experiments, or eliminated in the gas chambers and their bodies incinerated.

Approximately six million Jews (more than the entire population of Rome in 2020) were exterminated before Germany was defeated in the Second World War. Another five million people in other persecuted categories also died in the *lagers*.

In 1938-39, as the restrictions placed on Jewish professionals increased and many more Jewish activities were banned in Italy, our father decided to stay in Eritrea, even though things were not going so smoothly there either. And if things were not going well for him there that meant that in Naples mamma and the five brothers were not doing any better.

Indeed, everything fell apart within the next year. Our mother began to sell all our possessions: furniture, decorations, paintings, rugs, our nice clothes, and even our gold and silverware. We left our nice house and Nonno Amilcare went to live with his daughter in Cuneo as we moved into a three-room apartment. I still remember the date—May 4, 1939. In Naples this was moving day because all the rental contracts expired on that date. We collected the few things we still had and moved into a ground-floor apartment in the same neighborhood in the Vomero.

In December, my oldest brother Mario left for America. After graduating from high school, he had wanted to continue his studies at the university, but was banned from enrolling because he was Jewish. A brother of my mother lived in Chicago, where he had moved before the First World War. Although the number of immigrants coming to the United States was controlled by national quotas and sponsored affidavits were required for entry, my uncle and his wife had no children and were happy to guarantee Mario's food and lodging.

His departure was dramatic for us. Not just because he was leaving, but because we had no idea if we would ever see each other again. It was certainly not easy to travel, and at that time it was not even easy to imagine what the future might bring. I remember his departure from the port of Naples, the ship's horn and waving handkerchiefs and my sense that something ominous was occurring. That might have been the last ship leaving for America, because soon thereafter international tensions blocked everything.

We exchanged letters every week. Mario told us how he spent his days, and it all seemed very exciting. Mamma would write our response, giving him her own updates on the family activities and leaving the letter on the kitchen table so we could add something.

When Italy entered the war in June 1940, it became difficult to write. Correspondence was censored and any reference to anything vaguely political could block a letter and cause serious problems for its sender and recipient.

Then, when Italy and Germany declared war on the United States at the end of 1941, communication with Mario became impossible. We had no news of each other from then until the end of 1943. On our end, we were not that worried, because we knew there were no bombings or persecution of the Jews in the United States and we knew there was no shortage of food either. Mario, on the other hand, heard horror stories about the casualties from the bombing of Naples, and was worrying that the entire country was being completely destroyed.

In fact, when, after a long silence, Mario recognized our mother's handwriting on the first letter he received in 1944, he said he was afraid it might contain bad news and left it unopened on his table for some time.

He had lived well, but in a state of anxiety caused by not knowing how we were, while we had suffered immense hardships but kept our morale high knowing we were all still alive.

After Italy entered the war, Remo and I continued to study in private because we still weren't allowed to attend the public school. So, we had plenty of free time. We helped our mother, especially after Mario left, making Remo and me the "men of the house." We all had our specific duties: I did the shopping, which, since Italy entered the war meant standing in line at 6 a.m. with our rationing card to collect whatever meager products were available. When the water was cut off, the four of us brothers would go to the well and fill as many bottles and pots as we could carry back to the house. I would also walk my younger brothers to elementary school: while they were obliged to attend the school, they had to enter fifteen minutes before and leave fifteen minutes after the others and had to enter through the side door to prevent any contact between the "Aryan" classes and Jewish children. The classes were even divided during gym class.

I liked accompanying Dario and Tullio, however, because I wanted to protect them and I missed going to a real school so much that I would sometimes pick up my friend Vittorio at the school as well. I liked to watch the kids pushing each other, making noise and playing, sharing their disappointment when they got a bad grade, or their fear of the teacher and worries over the homework assignment. I longed to be with them, but couldn't. It was like seeing a cream pastry in a window when you can't afford to buy it: I had to settle for looking through the window.

Vittorio moved to Rome when his father was transferred and I lost contact with him, putting an end to our games of Monopoly and high school story-telling.

But the rent was too high, so mamma decided to sublet one of the rooms. We also managed to register the contract under the name of a generous friend, Marcello Magrì, since the danger in the air made it better to avoid having such obviously Jewish names on any kind of contract or even the utility bills. While the doorman at our new home did know our name was Foà, our name also could not appear on the label on our front door. Neither could we display the mezuzah to the right of the door at the entrance to our apartment, as it was customary to do at Jewish homes. In fact, in these circumstances, that never crossed our minds, though we did keep our mezuzah just inside the entryway to our apartment.

Mezuzah

The mezuzah is made of a small sheet of parchment containing the first two verses of the Shema affirming the unity of God, the need to study, teach the Torah, and display the mezuzah.

The parchment is rolled up and held in a decorative case to the right, as you enter the entrance to Jewish homes and to the left as you leave.

The first tenant to whom we sublet one of our rooms was a gentleman that worked as a teacher. He was followed by an office worker, and then by a twenty-five-year-old that was more than six and a half feet tall. Mom had to build an extension so he could use the bed. His name was Franco Calamandrei. He worked at the State Archives of Naples, and was a very nice man. He made it quite apparent he did not like Mussolini as we listened to BBC Radio from London on a radio we had hidden, in violation of the prohibition against Jews owning one. In the evenings when we listened, one of us would stand guard on the stairs to watch for the police.

Radio London

The Italian channel of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was founded in 1938, even as Fascism was placing an increasing number of restrictions on foreign radio stations. But, especially after war broke out, the number of transmissions directed at Continental Europe, called Radio London, increased and were secretly followed throughout the conflict and especially after the signing of the Armistice between the Italian king and the Allies on September 8, 1943. For a few hours a day the transmissions were in Italian, increasing to four hours and fifteen minutes in 1943.

The BBC Italian programs' opening theme was the first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, chosen by Winston Churchill because of their meaning, in Morse Code, of the letter V, for Victory: opening notes consisting of four muted percussive beats — short, short, short, long; in Morse Code, dot, dot, dot, dash.

People wanted to know what was really happening with the war and the Italian EIAR (*Ente Italiano Audizioni Radiofoniche*) was heavily controlled and censored by the Italian regime. The BBC was especially important to the Resistance Movement.

The military began using the radio to send coded messages to the Partisans, with instructions for sabotage actions and Allied drop points for supplies. "The cow is not giving milk" or "My shoes are too tight" might announce an attack or an arms drop.

We had no idea that the tall kid listening to the BBC with us in our house was an active anti-Fascist involved in the secret Resistance Movement. Before the end of his first year with us, Franco left unexpectedly, probably because he was being tailed by the Fascist secret police, but also because he did not want to expose us, as Jews, to any additional risk.

Many years later, around 1980, I saw him walking by at a business meeting of the Italian Communist Party headquarters in Via Botteghe Scure in Rome. He was a senator by then and an important leader in the Communist Party, but I recognized him immediately because of his height. "You probably don't recognize me, but I am Foà from Naples." He looked at me stunned and answered, "Don't tell me you're one of the little tykes from the Vomero!" In tears, we hugged each other.

Franco Calamandrei

Franco Calamandrei (Florence, 1917 Rome, 1982), son of Piero Calamandrei, was given an anti-Fascist education. After completing his classical high school diploma, he studied at the Aia School of International Law and passed the bar in Florence in 1939. But his real passion was for literature and he began to contribute to various literary reviews such *Campo di Marte* and he eventually decided to move to Rome to study literature. He was hired as an archivist at the State Archives of Naples and was later transferred to Venice.

After the signing of the Italian Armistice on September 8, 1943, Calamandrei returned to Rome, where he worked in the Partisan groups formed by the Italian Communist Party known as the GAP (*Gruppi di Azione Patriottica*). Consisting of four or five people, these groups conducted acts of sabotage and attacks mainly in the city, with the objective of eliminating the Nazis and their collaborating torturers. Going by the code name “Cola”, Calamandrei conducted several attacks, the most famous on SS headquarters in via Rasella on March 23, 1944. As a reprisal, the Nazis executed 335 soldiers, civilians, Jews, political prisoners, and other detainees: ten for each German killed, plus a few extra as a ‘rounding error’.

Calamandrei was captured after being betrayed by a member of the GAP and made a daring escape from Pensione Jaccarino, which had been transformed into a prison by the Nazi torturers of the Koch. He hid out in the Pontifical Roman Seminary with other fighters. He was later awarded the Silver Medal for Military Valor for his activities in the Resistance Movement.

His wife, Maria Teresa Regard, was a Partisan who went by the code name “Piera” and who was imprisoned and tortured in the prison in Via Tasso.

After the Liberation of Italy, Calamandrei became editor of Elio Vittorini’s review *Il Politecnico* and later worked as a correspondent in London, China, and Vietnam for *l’Unità*, the newspaper founded by Antonio Gramsci. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Italian Communist Party and responsible for publishing and propaganda. He was elected Senator as a member of the Italian Communist Party, a post he held until his death.

Piero Calamandrei

Franco's father, Piero Calamandrei (1889-1956) was an important jurist. As a professor at the University of Florence in 1925, he had signed Benedetto Croce's *Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti* (Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals) and was one of the few faculty members to never enroll in the National Fascist Party throughout the twenty years of Fascist rule. Professor Calamandrei worked with the clandestine anti-Fascist group "Don't Give Up," and while he was forced to swear fidelity to the Fascist regime in 1931 in order to keep his job at the university, he considered this his "combat post," and later recounted how torn he was and how he had paid by being forced to participate in Mussolini's reform of the Civil Code.

He became one of the founding members of the Action Party in 1942 and was accused of defeatism by the Italian Social Republic, which issued a warrant for his capture. After the war he was named a member of the Constituent Assembly.

During a student meeting on the Constitution in Milan in 1955, Calamandrei made a famous speech that ended with the following words:

"This is not a cold piece of paper, but a testament to a hundred thousand people who were killed. If you want to make a pilgrimage, to the place where our Constitution was born, go to the mountains where the Partisans fell and the prisons where they were held captive and camps where they were hanged. Wherever an Italian died in the defense of liberty and dignity, go there, young people, with heavy hearts, because that is where our Constitution was born."

In 1947, Albert Kesselring, Commandant of the German occupying forces, was tried for war crimes for the Fosse Ardeatine and Marzabotto massacres, among others. He was condemned to death, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, allowing his release in 1952 because of his very severe state of health. When he returned home Bavarian Neo-Nazis groups gave him a hero's welcome.

A few days after his release, Kesselring shamelessly declared that he had done nothing wrong and boasted that the Italians should be grateful to him for how he had managed the country for eighteen months and erect a monument to him.

Piero Calamandrei reacted to Kesselring's call for Italians' "gratitude" with a famous epigraph, "A Monument to Ignominy." Dated December 4, 1952, the anniversary of the killing of the Partisan lawyer Duccio Galimberti at the hands the Nazis, Calamandrei's verse expresses undying outrage at the unjustified freeing of the Nazi war criminal and appear at the entrance to City Hall in Cuneo as well as in other places throughout Italy:

*You will receive
comrade Kesselring,
that monument you expect from us Italians,
but the choice of the rock with which we'll build it will be ours alone.*

*Not with the smoking stones
of the villages ravaged by your extermination
not with the soil where our young companions rest in peace
not with the unblemished snows of our mountains
where for two winters they defied you and
not with the springs of these valleys
that saw you flee.*

*But only with the silence of the tortured victims
harder than any stone
only with the rock of the pact sworn by free men
who came together voluntarily
out of dignity and not out of hate determined to redeem
the shame and terror of the world.*

*If you wish to return to these streets
you'll find us exactly as you left us
dead or alive but with the same resolve,
a people joined around the monument
we call now and forever*

RESISTENCE

During the time when Franco Calamandrei was staying with us and we were taking care not to be caught listening to Radio London, police inspections of Jewish homes and other premises were not uncommon. After all, in Naples and elsewhere in Italy, after 1938, we were all being watched. During the summer of 1938, we had been required to register with the office of vital statistics as belonging to the “Jewish Race,” or pay a fine of 3,000 Lire, the equivalent of 3,000 of today’s Euros, and be sentenced to one month in prison.

When I got married in 1955, I discovered that those lists had never been destroyed and that my birth certificate was still marked “Of Jewish Race,” as was that of my grandfather, who was born in Livorno in 1855, in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, before Italy as a nation even existed. I found his birth certificate years later and imagined how humiliating it must have been for him to have to hobble with his cane into the registry office and denounce himself for belonging to the “Jewish Race.”

The Star of David

In Hebrew Magen David literally means “the shield of David,” but it is more commonly referred to as the Star of David. A six-pointed star formed from two triangles, it is generally considered one of the symbols of the Jewish faith. It is often used as a pendant and Israel chose to use it on their national flag.

The Nazis used it to identify Jewish citizens, using the color yellow, which in Western societies indicates danger.

At our new home in the Vomero we had a cleaning lady, so to speak, named Giulia, who came in for half a day to help our mother with the household chores. But since Jews were not allowed to have Aryan servants, my mother was careful to instruct her that if anyone came by, she needed to tell them she was a friend of the family and was just visiting. If they caught her with her apron, in the act, as it were, she was supposed to say she was just helping out my mother who always had her hands full with all those boys to look after.

My mother repeated these instructions every morning because the police came by frequently to check if we were in violation of any of the Racial Laws. In fact, one day, the Marshal of Public Safety, Salvatore Pace, came to our home and Giulia opened the door. When Pace asked in Neapolitan dialect using the “voi” form, she was caught off guard and quickly responded “I’m the maid.”

Pace called for my mom and asked, “Ma’am, what can we do about this?” My mother tried to make excuses and explained that Giulia was a maid, but that she didn’t work for us, that she was there to visit and having found my mother occupied in the kitchen had decided to lend a hand.

Pace raised his eyes and said, “OK Ma’am, I’m going to leave now and come back later.” He did not register his visit and when he did come back, Giulia had left. He advised us to be careful, even though he was supposed to report us, which could have resulted in our mother’s arrest.

From that day on, Pace would always warn us before coming by for an inspection, catching us kids, for example, when we were playing in the street, to tell us he would be by in an hour or so.

Pace worked at the police station, but he was not a Fascist. After the war was over, I would see him at the stadium where we went to watch the soccer game. We never broached that subject, but one time he did comment, “Lord, what you guys went through...”

This to say, there were moments of solidarity even in those tough times: from the parents of a friend who invited me to lunch because they knew how hard it was for us to put food on the table twice a day, to the teacher who, during the final exams of the final year of middle school said: “Good job, Foà, and congratulations to the people who taught you.” It was a political message, and in fact, many years later I learned that that teacher – like our former tenant Franco Calamandrei – was an anti-Fascist working in the Resistance Movement.

The Resistance Movement

The Italian Resistance Movement began in the summer of 1943, after the fall of the Fascist regime and signing of the Armistice with the Americans.

Before 1943, the opposition to Fascism was limited to a small group of people, mostly intellectuals, who were unable to gather their forces into a unified movement. These groups played an important role, however, keeping the idea of an Italy that had not bowed to Fascism during the lengthy period of dictatorship alive. They provided a precedent for the requisite organization for the birth of the armed Resistance Movement in 1943.

These anti-Fascist political forces (Communists, Socialists, Demo-Christians, Actionists, Liberals, Monarchists) gave birth to the Committee for National Liberation on September 9, 1943, forming a force that would guide the political and military struggle for liberation over the following twenty months of armed struggle.

On September eighth, the Germans occupied most of our national territory. In the days after the signing of the Armistice they disarmed and captured some 800,000 soldiers who had been left more or less without any instructions from King Victor Emmanuel III, the government of Marshal Badoglio or the leaders of the Armed Forces who had fled to the protection of the English and Americans in Brindisi. Some military units made attempts at resistance that ended in tragedy. Most of the deportees in the lagers participated in the imprisoned military's "Unarmed Resistance."

The Resistance Movement was formed from heterogeneous forces with differing political and ideological backgrounds that were brought together by the common goal of fighting Nazi-Fascism and freeing the country of its foreign and internal enemies. People of every age, sex, religion, geographic, and political origin participated. The Resistance was guided by anti-Fascist leaders who had fought and suffered imprisonment, confinement, and exile during the twenty-year dictatorship.

Military personnel with direct experience of the regime's disastrous wars and young men who refused to enroll in the ranks of the Army of the Nazi puppet government, Republic of Salò, fought together to fight the Germans.

The movement brought together people with extremely diverse political backgrounds. Tactical and political conflicts were set aside in order to define common goals and develop appropriate, effective, and incisive coordination.

The movement's development was complex and fragmented, growing out of homespun plans executed in secret under difficult and uncertain conditions. A lack of resources combined with the harsh attacks of the Nazi-Fascists tested the patriotic call to duty of everyone involved.

From the outset, the Nazi-Fascists would bust down doors, capture, and torture members and leaders of the movement, conducting sweeps and attacking the first Partisan bands in the mountains. Despite these difficulties, the Resistance Movement continued to grow and spread, rooting itself in the landscape and gaining the support and approval of most of the population. They resisted the trials of arrests, torture, deprivation, deportation to the lagers, firing squads, and reprisals taken out on the civilian population.

Region by region, zone by zone, the formation of the Partisan groups in the valleys and mountains grew stronger with the passing months, the early bands becoming organized brigades that carried the names of Garibaldi, Justice, Matteotti, Mazzini, Autonomous, and so forth, while Patriotic Action Teams (SAP) and Patriotic Action Groups (GAP) worked on recruitment, propaganda, sabotage, and urban warfare in the cities. The struggle was sustained by important political groups such as the Groups for the Defense of Women (GDD) and the Youth Front (FdG).

Following different timetables, the Resistance grew in every region of the country. Growing from personal choices regarding the collective good, a multifaceted war played out. The armed political movement, whether organized from political groups or arising spontaneously out of the collective frustration, also found support in the form of "passive" resistance, such as that provided by military prisoners who refused to pledge fealty to the Italian Social Republic and the Third Reich. A formal military resistance came from Italian troops being reorganized in the South, into the First Motorized Unit, the Italian Liberation Force, and other combat units.

On September 8 there were already clashes between the Nazi-Fascists and the general population. These were spontaneous movements destined for failure given the disproportionate nature of the respective forces and weaponry. They nonetheless expressed a

state of mind and desire that began to spread everywhere. In this first phase of resistance, we can count the insurrection of Matera, the defense of Bari, and Naples' Four Days. From that point on, the Resistance Movement unfolded inexorably, despite the ferocious and determined fighting of the Germans.

The Nazi-Fascists fought against the Resistance's military actions, guerrilla warfare, and acts of sabotage by attacking the civilian population, which made for an easier target, conducting reprisals and mass executions throughout the peninsula. The SS and Wehrmacht did not act alone, but were helped by the Fascists of the Italian Social Republic, who often conducted persecutions and reprisals of their own accord. The founding of the Fascist Republic in the north gave way to a ferocious civil war, which became the center of the Italian Resistance Movement's activities.

The movement continued to grow despite suffering damaging losses and many setbacks. In March 1944, the Committee for Italian National Liberation, operating in the northern regions occupied by the Germans, approved the powers of an "emergency government" from their headquarters in Milan, laying the first foundations for the representative governance of Northern Italy.

In the summer of 1944, after the advancement of the Anglo-American force into central Italy, large sections of Northern Italy were wrested from German and Fascist control: these Free Zones gave birth to the so-called Partisan Republics of Montefiorino (in the Apennines around Modena), Val Trebbia (Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy), Val Ceno (Emilia Romagna and the Ligurian Apennines), and Val Taro (Province of Parma).

That autumn Piedmont was freed, giving birth to the Republic of Ossola and other free zones of the Langhe and Carnia. These democratic governments did not last long, since the Germans launched heavy counteroffensives that forced the Partisans to flee the towns and valleys and hide in the mountains, where they were continually attacked, especially in the Winter of 1944-45, when the Allies advanced to the so-called Gothic Line. After a very difficult period due mainly to a lack of Allied support, the Partisans regained strength and returned after being equipped by Allied arms drops, and began to take the offensive. In the Spring of 1945, the Gothic Line gave way and Partisan activity continued to intensify. On April 25, 1945, the National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy (CLNAI) ordered a general insurrection, during which the Partisans flowed into the cities, joining forces with local combatants to liberate northern Italy.

The period from the end of 1942, to September of 1943, was the worst time for Naples.

First there were the bombings, which had begun shortly after Italy entered the war in 1941. The English and French targeted military objectives: the port, railways, and oil refineries. The Vomero on its hill was relatively distant from these attacks.

On one occasion, after the bombings on July 20 and 21 in 1941, we found the streets covered with flyers: “Neapolitans! We English, who have never before been at war with you, send you the following message. Tonight, we bombed Naples. We did not intend to bomb the citizens of Naples, because we have no battle with you. We want only peace with you. But we were forced to bomb your city because you allow the Germans to use your port.”

But in December of 1942, the United States began to bomb civilian targets as well, with a violence never before seen. The Americans claimed the bombings were meant to incite the population to rise up and conduct acts of protest and sabotage against the Germans. They might have been right, but these bombings killed 6,100 people in 1943.

At the sound of the alarm, we would all run into the tunnel of the funicular and remain underground for hours at a time, sitting on the ground, crammed together and unable to do anything other than listen to the rumbling planes and screaming bombs. A mass of humanity, all stuffed in, afraid, and if you had to take a pee well, that was a problem. In other harder hit areas of the city, there were families whose houses had been destroyed and who had moved into the bomb shelters permanently, living as far as 130 feet (40 meters) underground.

Sometimes we would return home in the middle of the night, fall exhausted onto our beds, only to be called by another alarm, which forced us to throw our clothes back on and rush back to the shelter.

After the bombings the streets would be covered with debris from the anti-air artillery and we waited for them to cool off so we could collect and sell them: the lead had a certain value and we were hungry. Hunger: I say, that is a feeling that is difficult to describe today, and has nothing to do with having an appetite or wanting something to eat like we do today. This was real HUNGER.

On September 12, 1943, the Germans occupied Naples and set up their general headquarters in the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele. They began to raid stores and residences, collecting residents and forcing them to watch firing squads and the burning of their own homes. We were terrorized, and avoided leaving our homes or playing in the streets.

Most stores were closed, not only because of the Germans, but because provisions were scarce. After September 8, we knew war would break out in Naples and we hoped that the Americans would arrive soon, but we knew very well there would be many hard days to come and the word of the day was building up a stock of supplies. I was still charged with the grocery shopping and I went out looking for anything that might be useful and that we were still able to buy: some potatoes, canned peas, sugar, or soap... but there were five of us, and the cupboards were always bare.

On the morning of September 27, I went out to look for something to eat, and since bread was nowhere to be found, I had set my sights on finding some fruit. It was a Monday and I hoped the new week might bring new possibilities. Arriving in Piazza Vanvitelli, the main square in the Vomero, I heard a tremendous roar of shots and screams, but could not tell where they were coming from. The din seemed to be everywhere. Doors of buildings were closed shut as trucks and SS scooters invaded the square, but when the Germans went by, they were greeted by lamps, flower vases, small pieces of furniture, even bidets and sinks being thrown at them: it was total chaos.

Scared, I ran to take refuge in a nearby building, where a gentleman took me by the hand in the courtyard. He and his wife sat me down and said: "It's too dangerous out there now. Stay here until things calm down."

I stayed there for a few hours worrying about my brothers and thinking that maybe Remo had gone out, and I knew my mother would be worried about me. So, when the shooting stopped, I cautiously made my way home.

My mother hugged me and harshly added, "No one is leaving this house." It was not easy, because we were almost completely out of food. But in the days that followed we heard shots, rumbling airplanes, and whistling bombs overhead.

On the morning of October first, we awoke to complete silence, followed by cheers coming from the streets. That was when,

with some hesitation, we came out and learned that the Americans had arrived.

My brothers and I saw them when we arrived in Piazza Vanvitelli. The Neapolitans were celebrating, blowing kisses and trying to shake their hands. The Americans were waving flags and throwing candy, chocolate, and chewing gum into the crowds. I managed to catch one and held it in my mouth for hours!

We went to see our Nonna Gemma, who lived with one of her sons, our uncle Remo, in another part of the city, because we had not heard from them for days. We made our way through a city in ruins, of crumbled houses, piles of furniture and clothing, and smoldering flames. But our grandmother and uncle were safe, and we could return home because everything would soon be alright.

The Four Days of Naples

Liberated Naples was a city in ruins: a city completely destroyed by the war. As a major port for sending troops and materials to the African fronts, Naples had been bombed dozens of times between 1940 and 1943, reducing many of its neighborhoods to piles of rubble and chasing the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods into makeshift shelters.

While the city's liberation is known in the history books as "The Four Days of Naples," various forms of resistance had in truth been brewing in the city throughout the preceding month of September 1943. After an initial period of independent military actions during the first half of the month, we entered a period of collective civil resistance that began to focus on helping the people that the Germans were trying to deport. This included people who had not responded to the Nazi calls for recruitment, rebelling in a way that needs to be understood within the context of the overall resistance in Southern Italy during that period.

On September fourth, the Nazis had gathered people together to make them watch the execution of a twenty-four-year-old sailor named Andrea Mansi on the steps of the university.

In the 1962 film by Nanni Loy, *The Four Days of Naples*, in the scene showing Mansi's death, the interpreter translates the commands of the Nazi captain and asks his fellow citizens to kneel and applaud. When no one budes the interpreter adds, in Neapolitan dialect, "Clap, clap, I tell you for your own good, otherwise, these guys will take it out on you."

The choice of place was symbolic, since on the first of September the university president had proclaimed: "Students, in this bitter moment, the University opens its arms to you, you teachers are from the generation of the Carso and the Piave and they understand your impatience." Many university students and professors had in fact been actively involved in the Resistance Movement.

On September 12, 1943, the German Colonel Walter Scholl declared Naples in a state of siege and his soldiers began to ransack the city, attacking and setting fire to the university.

During this attack the Germans systematically destroyed all of Naples' industrial zones, especially the steel factories in Bagnoli.

In a state of desperation, and lacking food and water, Neapolitans gathered edible plants from the fields and attempted to desalinate seawater in the port. Many people's homes had been destroyed and on September 23, Scholl ordered residents to move 300 meters (984 feet) from the coastline by 8 p.m. that day in order to create a "Military Security Zone," a move that forced some 240,000 citizens to abandon their homes within a few hours. Not long after that, the city prefect called on all able-bodied men between eighteen and thirty-three years of age to report for work, an order that was, in truth, the first step for the planned deportation for the work camps in Germany.

In the entire city of Naples, with an eligible work force of 30,000, a total of 150 people showed up. The Nazis responded by ordering military round-ups and summary executions of all those who were caught not responding to calls to service.

On September 27, the manhunt began: the streets were blocked and all men, regardless of age, were loaded onto trucks bound for the work camps in Germany. At this point, Neapolitans had no choice: it was fight or face deportation to the labor camps. During the nights of September 27 and 28, the population began to run back and forth between the barracks and the residential areas of the city. The women hunted for food and clothes while the men collected arms and ammunition. At dawn on September 28, open revolt exploded in the Vomero and in the Chiaia district in Piazza Nazionale. There was no coordination between the neighborhoods, but the insurrection broke out in ten different places at the same time. Subsequently the bands began to organize, identifying military targets even as they continued to fight in the streets. They erected barricades in Piazza Nazionale and formed arms depots, adopting the strategy of trying to prevent the Germans from going north through the city. They tried to gain control over the center of the Vomero through a coordinated series of attacks.

The German roundups that began on September 26 sparked a massive rebellion; a revolt that adopted the techniques of urban guerrilla warfare and involved women and men, civilians and soldiers, children and adults from every social class and neighborhood from the city center to the suburbs. The barricades were manned by soldiers and women from the street, middle-class professionals, students, street urchins (*scugnizzi*), intellectuals and factory workers and, of course, the anti-Fascists who were well aware of the political

importance of the moment. The insurrection was nonetheless a spontaneous movement, devoid of any unifying principal or political intention.

September 29 marked the end, and with an increasing mass of *scugnizzi* filling the ranks of the rebels, Partisan command centers were formed in every neighborhood. In the Vomero, the head of the people was Antonino Tarsia, a retired teacher who established his headquarters in Sannazaro High School.

A conclusive episode happened on that very day in the Vomero: the commander of the principal Nazi headquarters asked to negotiate a surrender. Scholl was forced to free forty-seven hostages held in the athletic fields of Littorio in exchange for allowing the Nazis to leave Naples. This was the first time in Europe that the Germans had been forced to negotiate with an insurgent force.

On September 30, the Nazis continued to make vicious reprisals on the local population even though they had been chased from most of the city. They continued to open fire and bomb the city from the Capodimonte woods up until noon on October first, just an hour prior to the arrival of the American and English tanks. In San Paolo Belsito in Nola, the Nazis burned the State Archives of Naples, the most important collection of documents on the history of Southern Italy from the Middle Ages until modern times.

The toll of the fighting was heavy: 152 fighters, 140 civilians, and 19 unidentified people were killed, 162 people were wounded, and the losses continued even after the liberation of the city. During the afternoon of October seventh, a German bomb destroyed the Central Post Office, which had just been reopened, killing a large number of people.

The Four Days of Naples had shown that a citizen's insurrection was possible, and when the Allies arrived on October 1, 1943, they found a city that had already been liberated.

Naples' Four Day Revolt was the first popular uprising in an Italian city and Naples became the first city in Europe to liberate itself from the Nazis before the Americans arrived. The city's residents, university students, schoolteachers, laborers, and soldiers, women, and *scugnizzi* had fought with whatever makeshift arms they could scrape up, and had chased the Germans from their city. If the Four Days had not occurred, roundups and deportations, including of Jews, would certainly have begun.

In a telegram to his superior in Berlin dated October sixth, the German Major Kappler stated that Captain Dannecker, a specialist in the capture and deportation of Jews who had been sent into Italy, had not been able to do his job in Naples “because of the city’s attitude and because of the uncertain operating conditions.” Dannecker and his special team did, however, manage to clean out the Roman ghetto on October 16.

If the Four Days had not occurred, my family would have certainly been taken and marked as Jews and I imagine that my orderly mother, if asked to “please come to the German command for an interview,” would probably have done as she was told and would have brought us four kids along too. How could we possibly understand the horror that would have awaited us?

The Jewish community in Naples had no victims, or rather, the fourteen identifiable Jewish Neapolitan victims were people that had fled to places they thought were safer, since Naples was the most bombed city in Italy.

The Procaccia family – parents, children, and grandchildren (the last of which were six and eleven months old) – were among those lost. They had taken refuge in a house in Cerasomma, in the province of Lucca, and we all thought they were lucky to have escaped from Naples. In Tuscany, however, the daughter Ivonne had gone grocery shopping, only to return to an empty house: all eight of her family members had been arrested and were killed in the extermination camps. A few days later, Ivonne’s husband was also arrested and sent off to a lager, where he died.

In October the school year was supposed to start. It was our main concern and we went to see about enrolling in the public school for the first time in five years. But the city was in ruins, and many of the schools were unable to open. So, for the first few months, a few families – this time not only Jews – organized private lessons for groups of students so we would not fall behind.

In November, I finally entered the Sannazaro High School building. I felt out of place and could not remember what it was like to be in a classroom. Even the maps on the walls seemed frightening to me.

Sitting in a school desk and not having to go to the last row was a very strong emotion for me. When the teacher took roll I held

my breath for a moment, half expecting him to add “Of Jewish Race” after my name. But that did not occur. And in those few seconds I realized I had regained my freedom and, especially, my dignity, a dignity that was mine by right and that no one had been able to destroy.

It was my first year of classical high school, in a new year, but I recognized many of my companions from elementary school, since we were still in the Vomero. However, they had continued attending class together through middle school. No one had come to see me, and when I returned no one asked why I had disappeared for five whole years.

The only one who made any reference to this was the professor of Greek and Latin: as usual during the first days of class it is common to ask what school students came from and what type of studies that had done up to that point. When he came to me, he said: “Foà, I don’t need to ask you anything. We know the whole story.”

Maybe he could have asked me more, to explain to my companions what I had been through. But in any case, I took his words as a gesture of empathy and friendship.

And as for my friends’ silence, I tend to rationalize people’s behavior and the truth is that we were living under a dictatorship and it was very difficult to find courage and people were afraid to even think.

From that point on my life went on pretty normally, in the joy of being free, of being able to study in school. But economically, times were still pretty tough. My father had been imprisoned by the English when they took Eritrea in 1941, and throughout that period we communicated with him through the Italian Red Cross who passed our respective messages of no more than thirty words.

At the beginning of 1944, the first repatriations from the former African colonies began to arrive. Father did not come home, however. We knew he was alright, but he stayed until 1947, and when he finally did return, he was like a stranger to us. We had not seen him for ten years and I remember having to force myself to even call him Dad. Imagine how hard it must have been for my younger brothers.

The first letter we wrote after Italy’s liberation was to Mario in America. In those years, private communications between Italy and the United States, who were on opposite sides in the war, had been interrupted. Among the first things we did when the Americans

arrived in Naples was to stop and ask for help. They took our letter and sent it by military airmail. Mario did the same thing through a soldier in America so that we were finally able to write each other on a regular basis. Mario even began to send us some money, because he worked a few part-time jobs while he was studying at the university, so we received money from him and from the uncle with whom he had gone to live.

I also found a part-time job to help out, working a few hours in the afternoon in a publishing house call "The Owl." It had been founded by my uncle Mario Fiorentino, who was a doctor by trade but had a passion for books. They published some important books that contributed to the political debate, such as Arturo Labriola's *After Fascism What's Next?*, which came out after the war in a low-cost edition, using cheap paper supplied by the Americans, since there was a shortage of everything, including paper.

I prepared boxes for transport to the bookstores and took the galleys from the printshop to their authors or a lady who did the proofreading. I even learned how to issue a bill and do some accounting. That was a very important experience, because I learned what it meant to work. And Uncle Mario and his wife Emilia were important role models for me.



Grandfather and Rabbi Lazzaro

[Modello 17.]

No. 109

No. di 29 Ottobre 1855

Si è presentato in questa Cancelleria *Enrico Laido Tedesco* che ha dichiarato di esser nato un Individuo di sesso *Mascolino* al quale si sono imposti i nomi di *Giuseppe Lazzaro Laido Tedesco* e le indicazioni datemi sul medesimo, sono le seguenti:

ORA, GIORNO, MESE ed ANNO della Nascita *ad. 1. per il 26 Ottobre 1855*

COGNOME e NOME del PADRE *Laido Tedesco Enrico*

MESTIERE o CONDIZIONE del medesimo *Chiniaghieri*

NOME dell'Avo, ossia del NONNO del nato *fu Lazzaro Laido Tedesco*

COGNOME e NOME della MADRE *Marraci Maranna*

MESTIERE o CONDIZIONE della medesima *nessuna*

NOME del PADRE della Madre *fu Francesco Marraci*

Luogo della nascita *Livorno*

COMUNITÀ alla quale appartiene il Nato *Livorno*

Indicazione se il Padre è vivente *è presente*

è morto in *Napoli*
il No. *7941*
(atto di morte del Comune di *Napoli* e: *1941*)
parte *I* serie *1. 97*
11. 8. 941 L'Ufficiale di Stato Civile

Cancelleria nella quale è stata fatta la dichiarazione *Livorno*

Razza Ebraica

COGNOME e NOME del Testimone intervenuto nella dichiarazione *Dott. Scirolo Giuseppe*

COGNOME e NOME del Testimone intervenuto nella dichiarazione *Vicente Alessandro*

Cullo professato dai genitori del Nato *ebraico*

Sottoscrizione del Cancelliere *Mazzini*

Sottoscrizione del Dichiarante *Enrico Laido Tedesco*

Birth certificate of grandfather Lazzaro with the stamp identifying him as belonging to the Jewish Race



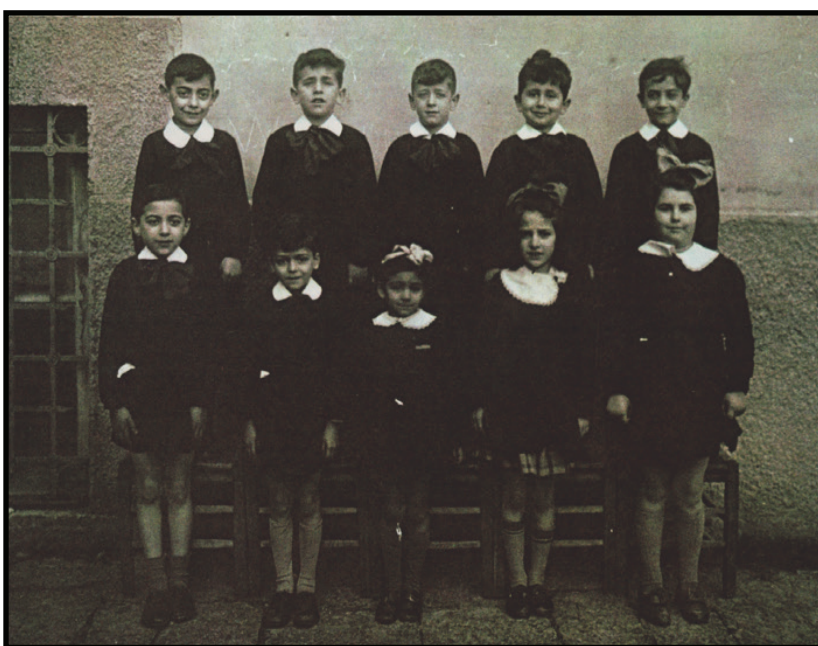
Mamma Ida at the beach



Mamma Ida with Dario and Tullio




*Top photo: Elementary Class III in 1937.
Ugo is the second on the left in the bottom row.*



*Bottom photo: The joint class after the passage of the Racial Laws.
On the top row, from the left, Dario is the second, Tullio third.*

Anno Scolastico 1944-1945 R. Liceo Umberto II in Napoli

Numero di matricola	ALUNNI	ESAME DI AMMISSIONE ALLA 1. ^a LICEALE						Risultato	ANNOTAZIONI	
		MATERIE	VOTI CONSEGUITI NELLE SESSIONI							
			ESITIVA		AUTORISALE		ANNUALE			
			Prove scritte	Prove orali	scritte	orali	scritte			orali
 LICEO CLASSICO STATALE « Jacopo Stanzano » Via Puccio 12 - 80127 NAPOLI Tel. 5.98.93.52										
48	<i>Foa</i>	Italiano			otto					Power di diploma nel 1942
	<i>Ugo</i>	Latino (italino-italiano)			sette					Ufficio di
	<i>Ugo</i>	Latino (italiano-latino)			sette					Boll. N.
	<i>Ugo</i>	Greco			otto					Add. 192
	<i>Ugo</i>	Lingua straniera inglese			sette					
	<i>Ugo</i>	Matematica			sei					
	<i>Ugo</i>	Storia e Geografia			sei					
	<i>Ugo</i>	Educazione fisica			otto					
	<i>Ugo</i>	Letteratura e cultura			sette					

Ugo's certificate of admission to the first year of high school in 1942-43. Ugo studied privately. Note "di razza Ebraica" above his name "Of the Jewish Race"



The Foa brothers reunited after Mario's return in 1947. From the left: Mario, Remo, Ugo, Dario, and Tullio.



The Foà family in 1947



Ugo during his visit to Auschwitz in 2005

As Italy continued to be liberated, we were gradually able to recontact family members and friends outside of Naples. We soon heard that Jews in Rome and further north had been arrested, but we assumed this was only anti-Fascist propaganda.

Then, with the liberation of Rome in June 1944, we received confirmation that thousands of Jews had been deported. For a long time, we continued to speak of the “deportation” of Jews, and not their extermination, since we still knew nothing of the concentration camps.

Concentration Camps in Italy

During the Second World War, Italy had thirty-five different camps of concentration and transport.

The most important of these are worth remembering:

- The Fossil Concentration Camp (Carpi)

Set up by the Italian government in 1942, it became the principal concentration camp of the SS in Italian territory and was used for the deportation of Jews and political prisoners to Germany.

- The Ricefields of San Sabba, Trieste

This was the only extermination camp in Italy: first used only as a detention camp for prisoners destined for Germany and Poland, as well as for the collection of confiscated goods, it soon also became a place for the killing of prisoners that included Jews, Partisans, and political prisoners.

- Concentration Camp of Bolzano

Concentration camp for prisoners in transit that operated between May 1944 and May 1945, it held between 9,000 and 9,500 prisoners headed for the extermination camps.

- Concentration Camps in Bagno a Ripoli, Florence

One of the main concentration camps for the transfer of prisoners, it had been founded by the Fascist regime for the internment of civilians, but was soon given to the Nazis for holding Jews before their deportation.

- Concentration Camp of Borgo San Dalmazzo (CN)

In operation from September 1943 to February 1944.

The prison at Fenestrelle in Piedmont and the concentration camp in Afragola in Campania are also worth remembering.

Except for San Sabba, these camps were all used to hold and transport Jews, Gypsies, political dissidents and Jehovah's Witnesses. Prisoners who were considered dangerous, were, of course, summarily executed in the camps.

In Italy, a total of around 7,000 Jews were arrested and deported between 1943 and 1945.

We tried to find news of our family members in Milan and Tuscany and could find nothing regarding our cousin in Livorno. We found out later that he had been deported to Auschwitz. Our uncle from Cuneo had also been arrested and deported, and we later learned that he had died, from pneumonia, before being loaded onto the train. Our grandfather, who had lived with us in 1938, before moving to Cuneo, had died in 1942.

We learned that my teacher Miss Del Val had left Naples for her home in Florence and was deported from there to the German lagers. Her optimism had not saved her.

There were many other family and friends we never heard from again.

I finished high school in 1946, and took my first trip in the summer of '47, going to the campground of Misurina, which had been set up by the Jewish community. That was when I first met many people my age whose parents had been deported, and that was the first time I heard about the extermination camps. The confirmation of deaths was difficult, and many people kept hoping for an unexpected return, thinking that maybe their loved ones had gotten lost or gone mad. Gradually, however, the term “deported” was replaced with “killed in the extermination camps.” It may seem strange that I did not learn about the extermination camps until 1947, but after the war it took a long while to learn the truth of this tragedy. Besides, the mail, the telephones, the trains all had to be restored.

The few who did return home from the camps were in poor health, malnourished, beaten down, and in no mood to talk about their experiences. In truth, we were not anxious to ask many questions either.

It wasn't until later, during the 1980s, that we began to learn more from survivors, many of whom had begun to recount their experiences. This sharing occurred mainly in the schools and it was at this point that the question began to be treated differently from an institutional standpoint.

In 1995, a friend of mine who was a teacher asked me if I could tell my own story in his high school. I accepted and spoke for the first time about my stolen schooldays to a class of schoolchildren. I had promised myself I would not cry during the telling, but I had a knot in my throat and eventually broke down.

Later I answered an invitation to join “Project Memory,” which had been formed by a group in Rome to invite people willing to speak about the Racial Laws to students at the public schools. I

was politically active, and enrolled in the Italian Communist Party, and I would sometimes speak during rallies, so I thought it would be useful for me to continue sharing a piece of history that had affected me so personally.

Subconsciously, I think it also allowed me to return to school without having to sit in the last row. Because no one can give me back the schooldays that were stolen from me, and I cannot forget them, and maybe I am looking for some kind of moral restitution.

I have always accompanied my children, grandchildren, and now my great-grandchildren on their first days of school. A few years ago, I was with my great-grandson and the thought flashed through my head: What if the teacher tells me that he cannot attend school because he is “Of Jewish Race?” When I told my young audience about this irrational thought of mine, the students responded: “Don’t worry, this could not happen today, because we would accept him and protect you, and your grandson.” Statements like this do provide a form of compensation.

I suffered from insomnia for a while during the 1980s and 1990s, for no apparent reason. When I went to see our family doctor, a Jewish man named Cohen, I told him I could not figure out what was bothering me and he said, “My friend, we suffer from incurable Semitic angst, we carry it in our DNA. We have it and we need to keep it.” I have no idea if this “Semitic angst” exists, but I cannot prove that it doesn’t either.

I had decided I would never go to Auschwitz, because the mere thought of going there terrified me. One day, I was speaking with students in Lunghezza about “Project Memory”. The principal of the school, convinced me that in truth I deeply wanted to go, but that I was very afraid of the emotions I would face. I decided he was right and decided to make the pilgrimage with the principal and some students. My wife was against it, saying “Do you have to suffer even more? Isn’t what happened enough?”

That was in 2005, and as the day of my trip approached, I became increasingly emotional. But I kept telling myself I would not break down, because it would spoil the moment, and I did not want to cry in front of the school children, who would also begin to cry.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz was a concentration camp and work camp in southern Poland, located about seventy kilometers (forty-three miles) from Krakow. More than a million victims died there: 90% were Jewish; the rest were Poles, Russians, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, political opponents, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In addition to the original camp (Auschwitz I), there was an extermination camp in Birkenau (Auschwitz II), a work camp in Monowitz (Auschwitz III) and forty-five other subsections where the deported were used to work in mines, agriculture, and industries linked to the war effort, the first of these being Siemens and IG Farben (which produced Zyklon B, the gas used for extermination).

The deported began to arrive in 1940. A medical officer of the SS would make an initial selection. Generally, only 25% were deemed fit for work and the remaining 75% (generally, women, children, and the elderly) were automatically condemned to death. In the gas chambers, they were greeted by what Primo Levi called "the crows of the crematory": the *sonderkommandos*, a unit of Jews that collaborated with the SS in exchange for special treatment in the camps. They collaborated knowing full well that if they had not they would have ended up like the others.

The detainees were stripped and moved into an area made to look like a changing room: there were even instructions in various languages describing the procedures for collecting one's clothes. The *sonderkommandos* had the task of guiding the victims into the ovens and collecting their clothes and teeth.

The testimony of some of the *sonderkommandos* has allowed us to understand what went on in the gas chambers. In 1980, thirteen pages written by a Greek member of the Auschwitz *sonderkommandos* named Marcel Nadjari were discovered. He had placed this farewell letter to his family, written two months prior to the liberation, into a leather pouch and buried it. The pages were unreadable and completely eaten away until, in 2017, a new technology made it possible to read them.

One passage read,

"After they were stripped, they were taken to the death chambers, where the Germans had placed tubes so they would believe they were in a shower. The gas cylinders always arrived in a Red Cross vehicle driven by two members of the SS. After six or seven minutes in the chamber they began to die. A half an

hour later, our job began: taking the bodies of innocent women and children and putting them on the elevators that led to ovens where they would be burned without any fuel, thanks to their body fat.”

The few prisoners that were declared fit to work were stripped, shaved, and dressed in tunics, pants, and clogs. Their forearms were tattooed with a number identifying their various categories: a red triangle for political prisoners, a green one for common criminals, a black one for the “asocials” (a vaguely defined group that included prostitutes and the vagrants), a blue triangle for immigrants and stateless people, a brown triangle for the Roma and Sinti, and a yellow star for Jews.

The camps were organized into various areas: the hospital, kitchen, Gestapo headquarters, the prison, an area reserved for experiments, and the area of the cremation ovens. The barracks were separated by sex, with triple bunk beds (where multiple detainees piled into each bunk), the wash room, and toilets.

A detainee living in these conditions malnourished, subjected to the cold, infectious diseases, the attacks of the guards, and working twelve hours a day lasted an average of six months.

Rudolph Höss and other members of the SS directed the operations at Auschwitz, reporting directly to Hitler, Himmler, and Eichmann. A group of doctors worked alongside Höss and the SS, headed by the infamous doctor Mengele, known for his cruel medical and eugenic experiments using human subjects, especially children and twins. Each block had a *kapò* (usually a detainee themselves) who decided the fate of the various prisoners.

The camp was liberated on January 27, 1945, by the Soviet Army, who found 7,000 prisoners still alive. They began a new existence, but the memory of the horror and a sense of guilt would never leave them.

As Primo Levi wrote in *The Submerged and the Saved*: “I felt completely innocent, but institutionalized among the saved, and thus permanently in search of a justification in my own eyes and the eyes of others. The worst of us, that is to say, the most flexible, were the ones who survived; while the best all died.”

We entered the camp surrounded with barbed wire, passing under the words “*Arbeit macht frei*” (“Work sets you free”). We saw the barracks where the prisoners slept piled in like cattle, the enormous open latrines, the storeroom “Kanada” full of eyeglasses, dentures, shoes, baby clothes, piles of gas cartridges, ID cards; and then, the offices of the SS, which were, by all appearances, normal offices, but where the paperwork was used to administer the efficiency of the extermination project.

When we arrived in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, at the desk where people were selected for the gas chambers or the work camps, I could not help kneeling and praying in honor of the dead. There was an icy silence, then the principal came and hugged me in tears.

In the evening, we all ate together and after dinner, the students got up to go to sleep. Many of them passed by me and affectionately placed their hand on my shoulder and said, “Ciao Ugo, goodnight,” and one of them kissed me on the forehead.

Now that I have passed ninety years old, I still want, and have the duty to tell what happened, especially to young people: because without memory there can be no future.

Primo Levi wrote: “We are not allowed to forget; we are not allowed to be silenced. If we do not speak, who will?”

Primo Levi

Primo Levi was born in Turin in 1919 in a Jewish family whose ancestors came from Spain and Provence. Primo was studying chemistry at the university when the Racial Laws were passed in 1938, and since the law allowed Jews who were already enrolled to complete their studies, Primo graduated in 1941, with the distinctions “Magna cum laude” and “Of Jewish Race” printed on his diploma.

He frequented anti-Fascist student groups, became a member of the Action Party, and joined a Partisan group in the Val d’Aosta after September 8, 1943. He was arrested at Brusson on December 13, along with two other companions and sent to the concentration camp at Fossoli.

In February of 1944, the Germans took control of the camp and began deporting its prisoners to Auschwitz. Primo was sent on a convoy destined for Poland, where he arrived five days later.

Levi explains his survival by a series of fortunate circumstances. First of all, he spoke German, and could understand the orders that were given. In the early phase of the conflict, the Nazis still needed manpower and Levi was put to work, at first as a manual laborer in construction. He became friends there with a worker from Fossano who worked for an Italian company and had some freedom of movement. His friend would bring him a mess tin of soup every so often.

Due to his degree in chemistry, Levi was transferred to a laboratory. Levi’s final stroke of luck was to not fall ill until January of 1945. He contracted scarlet fever at the very moment the Soviets arrived. The Germans had begun abandoning the sick (including Levi) and transferring the others to Buchenwald and Mauthausen, where almost all of them died. After the liberation of the lagers, Levi was held for a few months in a Soviet transition camp in Katowice, where he worked as a nurse.

He began his trip home in June, an absurd odyssey that led him through Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, and Austria, before arriving in Italy on October nineteenth. Levi recounted these events in *The Truce*, where through the eyes of a man distraught from the trauma from the camps, Levi depicted the harsh reality of a country devastated by war. He found that writing brought him some form of solace and he began to write *If This is a Man*.

“For the survivor, telling one’s story was an important and complex action, a moral and civic duty, as well as a primal act of liberation and social promotion. The survivor of the lager became a repository of a fundamental event of human history, a historical, legal and moral witness, and felt frustrated if his testimony was neither solicited nor received, and remunerated if it was. ...In *If This is a Man*, I tried to write the biggest, heaviest, and most important things.”

Quoted from *La vita offesa. Storia e memoria dei lager nazisti nei racconti di duecento sopravvissuti* (The Offended Life. History and Memory of the Nazi Lagers in the Accounts of Two Hundred Survivors), edited by A. Bravo and D. Jalla, Franco Angeli, 1986.

Refused by the prestigious Italian publishing house Giulio Einaudi, *If This is a Man* was published by the anti-Fascist intellectual Franco Antonicelli, a small publisher with limited distribution.

On April 11, 1987, Primo Levi took his own life.

If This is a Man is one of the most important testimonies of the reality of life in the lagers.

The title of the book is taken from Primo Levi's poem
"If This Is a Man":

*You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, returning in the evening,
Warm food and friendly faces:*

*Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who knows no peace*

*Who struggles for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman,
Without hair and without name
Too weak to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.*

*Remember how this came to be:
I commend these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts
At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising;
Repeat them to your children.*

*Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.*

