

Cristaudo Family Story

1. Getting the Facts:

Salvatore Cristaudo was born in Santa Venerina, Sicily in 1887. His family farmed a small plot of land for a wealthy land lord in the shadows of Mt. Etna. Their house was made of rocks and straw as earthquakes were common. Growing up at this time was very hard. His family was poor and there was no education especially for girls. Salvatore did learn to read which meant he could write letters home to his family while serving as a soldier in the national service.

Salvatore fought in the Italian Army with the allies from 1914-1918. He was a sniper and served on the front line. He was injured and gassed. At the end of the war he returned home where the poverty and poor living conditions remained. There was no future in Sicily.

In 1897 Sebastiana La Rocca was born in the village of Scillichenti. Salvatore and Sebastiana were married and had a son, Francesco (Frank). Their families loaned Salvatore enough money to migrate to Australia with the hope of creating a better life.



Salvatore, Frank and Sebastiana

Salvatore travelled by ship to Sydney and then on to Ingham to join younger brother Alf to work cutting cane. Once enough money was saved, loans were repaid and Sebastiana and Frank immigrated.

Finally they purchased their own land at Garradunga in 1925. This block was covered in regrowth, tree stumps and boulders and needed to be cleared by hand, horse and dynamite. During this time, Salvatore and Sebastiana ran their own cane cutting gang working long hours in very tough conditions. But they had a home.

2. Family Tree:

While Australia was much more prosperous than their home land, conditions are very hard with no electricity, sealed roads and none of today's modern services. Five more children were born from 1924 to 1937, however 3 other babies did not survive child birth. In 1933, Frank suffered an infection and died. Something which would never happen today. Salvatore and Sebastiana were grief stricken.

The family pushed on with everyone doing the best they could. Working on the farm, feeding the animals, and drawing water from the well (65 ft. /20m deep) were all part of daily life.

“Food came from your garden and your chickens. Pop (Salvatore) bred pigs and turkeys, and the boys hunted pigeons in the scrub. We milked the cow, meat and ice was delivered.”

“Three of us would ride our horse ‘Tony’ and he only knew his was to school and home – nowhere else. At night we did school work and sewing by kerosene lamp.

22/07/2015

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Daradgee Environmental Education Centre



Salvatore feeding the pigs

It is a very difficult time for the Italians in Pre- World War II Australia. Despite being Australian citizens, they were still foreigners. Sharing the company and traditions of their 'compares' the Italians and other migrants enjoyed their new life. Sadly at the start of WWII, Italy sided with Germany. Now the Italians are the enemy and everything changed.

The children were picked on at school. They were left out of games and teased. Some kids would shout at them – “Dago’s” and threw rocks at them.

Worst of all, Salvatore was interned, taken away like a criminal and transported to the Cowra Detention Camp in April, 1942.

“They said it was because when they were visiting friends, other Italians. They used hurricane lamps for light while they walked to other farms to play cards or sing, for companionship. Some people said they were spies sending signals and they were reported to the police.” Salvatore was an Australian, he fought with the allies but he was now the enemy.

A combination of grief, previous illness and injuries saw Salvatore relocated to Sydney for an operation. During this time he had a breakdown and was detained in an asylum.

All the while Sebastiana kept the family together, worked the farm and petitioned the authorities for Salvatore’s return home. Her persistence saw Salvatore released and returned to his family March, 1943.

Post Office,
Garradunga,
Via Innisfail.

19th October, 1942.

The Honourable F.M. Forde,
Minister for the Army,
CANBERRA.

Dear Mr. Forde,

I am writing to you concerning my Husband who is Internee Number 30128 at Cowra Internment Camp, Sydney.

I understand that your Government is now giving all Internees the right to be heard and to show cause why they should not be further detained. I know that this will take a long time if this is so and I am, therefore, pleading to you to ask that my Husband's case be given special consideration on the grounds of his very bad health.

I got a telegram from him last Saturday reading

"Don't worry operation soon"

I naturally do worry considerably about his health because I feel that in any Internment Camp he would not be given food that is suitable for his particular state of ill health. My Husband served with the Italian Forces on the side of the Allies in the Great War for a period of four years and during that period he was gassed and got Malaria fever and spent six months in Hospital. The result was that his health was completely broken down. He has been twenty-two years in this Country. I had nine children, only one of whom was born in Italy and he is now dead. I have five children living, all born in Australia and my Husband and I never had any intention of returning to Italy. We have adopted this Country as our home.

At the request of my Husband I sent down References of Character to my Husband a few months ago. All I am asking is that you be good enough, in the event of his having an Appeal, to see that it be put on quickly as I feel sure his Detention is affecting his health. Before he was interned he was called up for Medical Examination for Army purposes and was classed as "Medically Unfit". In recent years he has had an operation for Peritonitis and has suffered severely with Kidney trouble. He has always had to have specially prepared food and although I do not know the nature of the operation that he must now undergo, I feel it is

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The Honourable F.M. Forde,
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entirely due to the unsuitable food that his health has been further deteriorated.

I cannot believe that a man who has gone through what my Husband has gone through and has so many interests in this Country, including a Cane Farm in North Queensland, would be anxious to do anything that would be against the interests of this Country. As a matter of fact, my Husband left Italy to get away from War. As soon as he was released from the Army there he decided to come to Australia because he thought this would be a land of peace.

I know that I have no influence with any person and on the recommendation of some of my friends I thought the best way of placing my Husband's case for merciful treatment would be through your goodself whose duty I know is first of all to the Army, over which you are the administrative Head, but I feel sure that, in spite of your official position, you will not fail to extend a degree of leniency that is prompted by humanitarian consideration if it is in your power so to do.

I am sending this letter to you through Mr. Martens the Member for the District in which my children and myself reside.

My address is:-

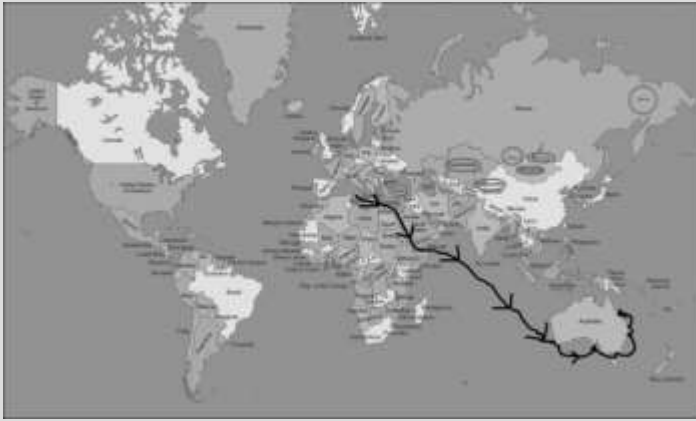
Mrs. S. Cristaudo,
Post Office,
Garradunga,
Via Innisfail.

Yours faithfully,

S. Cristaudo

The stress and pain for him and his family remained forever.

3. Make a Map



4. Identify a Critical event: There have been 2 critical events or periods of time which bought the Cristaudo family to be where they are today. Salvatore only knew poverty as a child and when he returned to his home from the First World War at 31 years of age, nothing had improved. All he could foresee was more poverty, more hard work and more grief. Having laboured and fought for two thirds of his life he knew that he had to leave Sicily to ensure his family's survival and eventual prosperity.

The decision to migrate to Australia proved crucial. Salvatore and Sebastiana were achieving success. Buying land, building a home, raising a family – these things could not have happened in Sicily.

The second event was the consequences of the Great Depression and the Second World War. Having Salvatore at the age of 55 interned, leaving Sebastiana and 5 children from 5 to 18 years of age to run the farm was very difficult. The family was poor, had few comforts and was being labelled as the enemy - Life felt unbearable.

But they survived. Had they remained in Sicily during this period particularly considering the German invasion of Sicily, things would have been far more serious.

5. Looking Back: Almost everything about Salvatore and Sebastiana Cristaudo's life was challenging. They began with nothing. They were peasants who were lucky to be alive after WW1. Hard physical labour helped them buy land but the Cristaudo farm on Fallon's Road was not a great farm. On a red soil hill it was difficult to grow sugar cane successfully. Too many rocks, too dry in summer, cane beetles and in an industry which operated solely with manual labour. Salvatore and Sebastiana could no longer continue and sold their farm in 1955 retiring at 68 and 58 respectfully.



Sebastiana and Salvatore upon retirement



Tom, Joe, Rose, Nan and Sam

From the lessons learned from their parents, Tom, Joe, Rose, Nan and Sam had their own families and continued on with successful farming and business interests mostly associated with the sugar cane industry. Salvatore and Sebastiana's 11 Grandchildren, 26 Great-Grandchildren and 7 Great-Great-Grandchildren have all benefitted from their strength and determination.

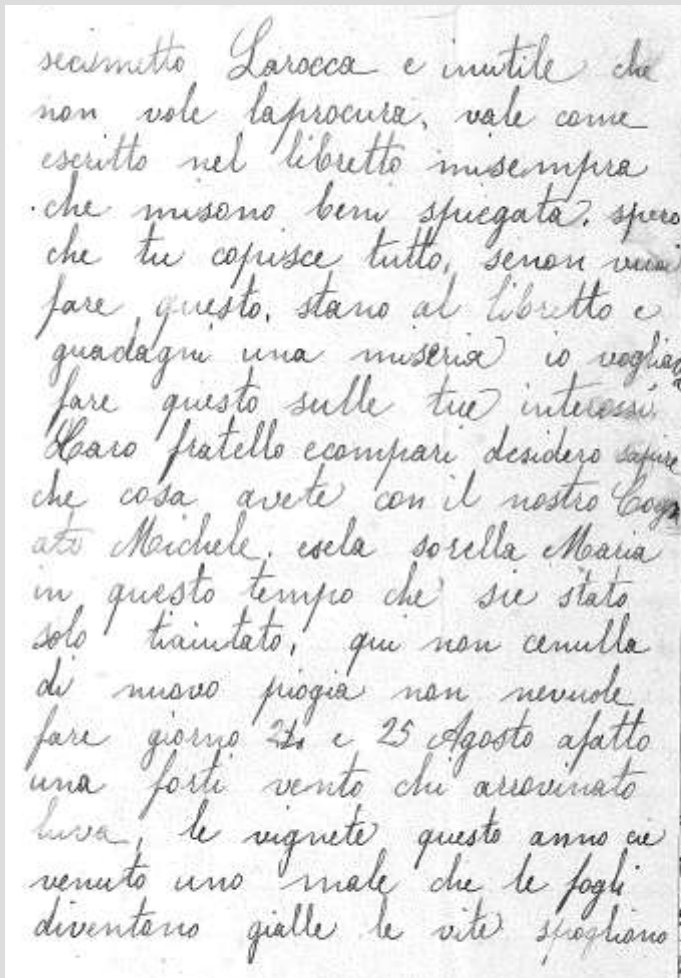
To make the decision to move their young family half way around the world to a totally foreign country, at a time of

uncertainty and danger was very courageous. To overcome repeated hardship and trauma shows incredible bravery and commitment to survive and never give up.

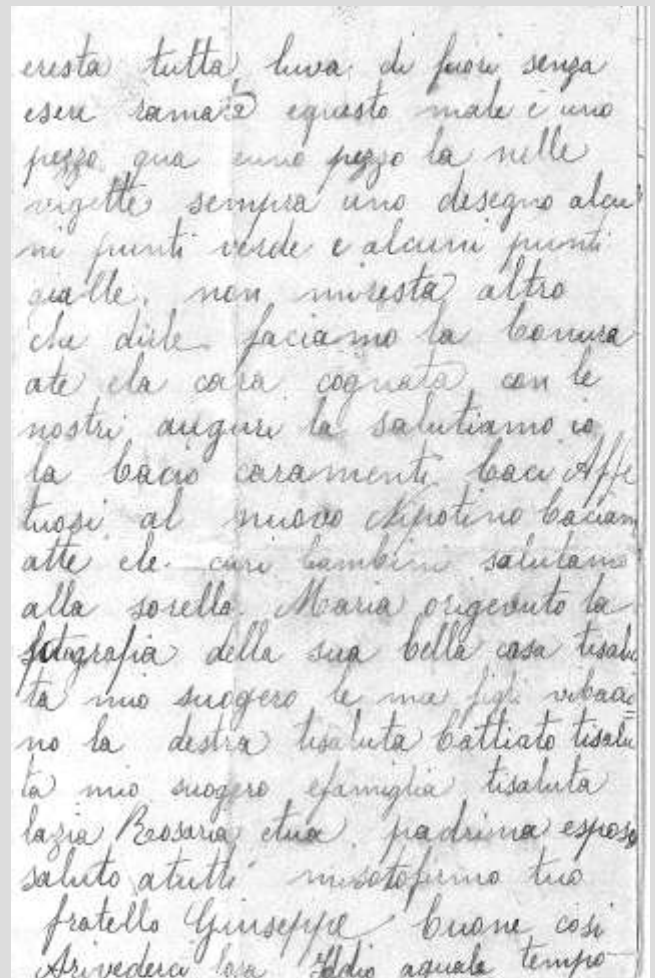
Interpretation from letter:

In 1925, Giuseppe, Salvatore's brother writes:

"This year there was a lot of rain and it damaged the grapes. On the 24th and 25th August there was a strong wind that damaged the fruit further. It has made the leaves of the grapes yellow. This year the vineyards are not doing too well. The grapes are all poor quality. We have only harvested about half the grapes we should have got this year."



sciametto Larocca e inutile che
non vole la procura, vale come
escritto nel libretto misempira
che misono ben spiegata, spero
che tu capisce tutto, senon vuoi
fare questo, stano al libretto e
quadragni una miseria io voglio
fare questo sulle tue interessi.
Caro fratello e compari desidero sapere
che cosa avete con il nostro Coppo
ato Michele, esela sorella Maria
in questo tempo che sie stato
solo traintato, qui non cenulle
di nuovo pioggia non ne vuole
fare giorno 24 e 25 Agosto afatto
una forti vento chi arresinato
liva, le vignete questo anno ce
venuto uno male che le fogli
diventano gialle le vite spoghiano



erista tutta liva di fuori senza
eser ramato questo male e uno
pezzo qua uno pezzo la nelle
vignete sempre uno disegno alcu
mi punti verde e alcuni punti
gialle, non misista altro
che diile, faciamo la benura
ate da cara cognata, con le
nostri auguri la salutiamo io
la bacio caramente, baci affe
tuosi, al musco christino baci
atte de cari bambini salutano
alla sorella Maria orgenuto la
fotografia della sua bella casa tisalu
ta mio suogero le mie figli ubacio
no la destra tisaluta battiato tisalu
ta mio suogero e famiglia, tisaluta
lazio Pessara, etua, padrina espres
saluto a tutti misotefirma tuo
fratello Giuseppe buone cose
Arivederci lora addio a quale tempo

This is testimony to the difficult farming life back in Sicily and helps reinforce their decision to immigrate to Australia.