



casArrigoni

storie di formaggi

“There were nine siblings in Dad’s family, five boys and four girls, and he was the firstborn. After spending his childhood at home, he ran away from home at a young age due to his rebellious character and went to work as a famèi [household worker] in the plains (...)”

In fact, when I later followed in my dad’s footsteps to do itinerant work, he would sometimes tell me about the various schools he had attended: even down in the plains, the Bergamì¹ [Bergamo-area dairy men] usually moved twice a year, first in November, for St. Martin’s day, and again in spring, for St. George’s day. Basically, despite being born in Peghera, father, but also grandfather before him, only stayed up here during the summer for the mountain grazing, which in the past lasted longer because the Bergamì stayed up here until October and sometimes well into November before going back down into the plains.

There were a lot of farmers up in these mountains at that time and probably the meadows and pastures were not enough for all of them: most of them were therefore forced to leave the mountains and winter down in the valleys in search of additional fodder.

Our ancestors set the first hay contract for St. Martin’s day, the 11th of November. Then, in spring, Dad had to sign a second contract for the grass. (...)

As Dad used to say, “Nobody ever gave me anything for free!...”

He also used to tell us that, when he left home to work as a famèi², he would carry the manure from the barn to the fields together with the other boys using nothing but stretchers carried by two or four people – actually, this, together with other tiring manual tasks, was one of the responsibilities of famèi. They did not have wheelbarrows, so everything had to be moved by

¹ Bergamì is the name given to those who, mostly coming from the area around Bergamo, used to head to the lowlands with their herds in the Fall, to go back to the mountains the following Spring.

² Famèi is the name of those youth who left home to go and work in a homestead tending cattle. Their retribution often did not go beyond food and accommodation.

hand. We do not remember exactly how many years Dad spent away from home, but once he returned to the family he always stayed down in the plains to personally manage the business, which had been run by his father until shortly before then. During the summer, however, we always used to bring the herd up to graze the Piani di Bobbio in Valsassina.

Dad grazed his herd for eighteen years in a row at Piani di Bobbio, a beautiful mountain near Campelli (...) Since those pastures were very large, he not only went up with his own cows, he also brought others' animals to look after, both heifers and cows.

There in Piani di Bobbio, in our cabin, which was pretty big then and has since been refurbished, as many as twenty people used to meet up - there was the cheese maker, who used to make cheese and oversee the aging, mother, who was in charge of preparing food and running the shop (because there has always been tourism, especially in the past, with walkers and hikers passing by) and then all the others as well, each with his or her own task (...).

Just imagine it: Dad and his younger brother, Battista, would spend their whole day tending the cows because, with so many of them, there were always some that needed doctoring. Apparently Dad had a beautiful business down in the plains, with his own purebred cows because, in addition to supporting the whole family, he also had employees who came down from Valle Taleggio to work for him. (...) Having returned to Peghera at the end of the fifties, he devoted himself to sales. (...) The town council had offered Dad a traveling salesman's license provided he committed to drawing on locally-produced products. That first license was valid throughout the Lombard area (...).

He was equipped with a little truck that he used to go pick up cheese from various farmers, including ones in the surrounding villages. Dad had scheduled several specific days for picking up taleggio from his various suppliers; for example in Pizzino they used to meet at the Grasso fountain where the various herders from the mountains came down once a week, on the scheduled day, with their loads of taleggio. There were a lot of famers in the valley back then; in that small hamlet alone, where Pietro Vitali currently lives, we had as many as four stracchino suppliers: Edoardo, Pierino, Nino and Franco. A number of mule tracks met up at the Grasso fountain and it was also a meeting point for the mountain herders who supplied us with stracchino once a week all year round, or even twice a week in the summer,



since production increased in the summer and the Bergamini up on the mountain did not always have the proper environments for storing dairy products. Dad mainly got his cheese in Pizzino, where we had a number of suppliers, while in Peghera we never had very many taleggio suppliers because there were other salesmen there as well (...). Dad bought fresh taleggio, freshly made cheese, so it was up to him to salt and age it (...) Dad had set up some spaces for salting and aging, especially a room called a *purgatore* that was maintained at about twenty degrees, thanks to a small stove: he stored the fresh stracchino there to facilitate the release of the whey (...)

It was usually mother who took care of salting the stracchino the same day they were picked up, as soon as they were laid out in the crates in the “purgatory” (...), and assessed how well they had released the whey, if they were solid and well-shaped; she was thus able to see how much the individual cheeses had aged day to day and judge the right moment to move them to another space, specifically the shelves of the aging room. After having been salted on both sides, the cheeses were set out to age in this special cellar, equipped with wooden shelving. When positioning the stracchino on these shelves, a bit of salt was scattered by hand on the edges, the sides of the cheese, before laying them out on the wooden boards. (...).

Today we carry out the aging in wooden boxes with cotton cloths, but when we aged on the shelves there was only the wooden board. And so, when we turned the cheese, we used to also clean the board with a spatula then turn it over to place the cheese on the dry side of the wood. So even the aging process required a certain amount of work. After the salting period (during which the cheese was turned at least once every two or three days), the taleggio was turned over about once a week until aging was complete, which usually took at least forty days (...).



Dad's job was demanding, but Mom's role was fundamental for all the aging operations because she was very good at it, she truly loved her job.

She always had an amazing passion for taking care of cheese (...). Dad always insisted on knowing where each product came from (...). When he went to sell them, he packaged them individually, each in its own wrapper printed with the brand name of his company. So right from the very beginning the final packaging for the end consumer featured our brand name. (...). As a result, during the packaging stage he already subdivided the cheeses according to their destination, because once they were wrapped you could no longer identify which producer they came from. We mainly sold regular Taleggio, but also the Strachitunt produced down in the valley by Pietro and Basilio Vitali from Pizzino and Locatelli Gabriele, the brother of Guglielmo from Reggetto. (...) Ah, Dad worked so hard! Sometimes his work days lasted up to twenty hours, he only slept three or four hours a night. (...) When we happen to think back on our father and the life he led, this is the conclusion we come to: Dad did what he felt like doing, he worked like he wanted to work with the people he wanted to live with and surrounded by the people he wanted around him. We also remember the great respect and admiration he had for the farmers of our valley, a bond that he passed on to us as well in the form of a commitment that lives on today. Basically, Dad had a great passion for the countryside and animals because, coming from that world himself, he considered the farmers to be the best of humanity: he had enormous respect for them, they deserved to have everything they needed! (...)



Dad worked right up to the end - actually, he hurt himself while working. I could not imagine him retired because that was not part of his mentality, or really the mentality of our people (...). After Dad died we continued the work he had begun, which by that time we were quite experienced in. (...)

When dad got hurt, his brother Marco was still young, he was only seventeen, while Luciana and I already knew the work quite well, having always worked together with Dad.

So in that moment we had to make a fundamental choice, namely whether or not to carry on dad's business. (...)

We bought a new truck and so began our... adventure! ...”



The certifications we have earned:

These certifications contribute to ensuring the quality of our products.

