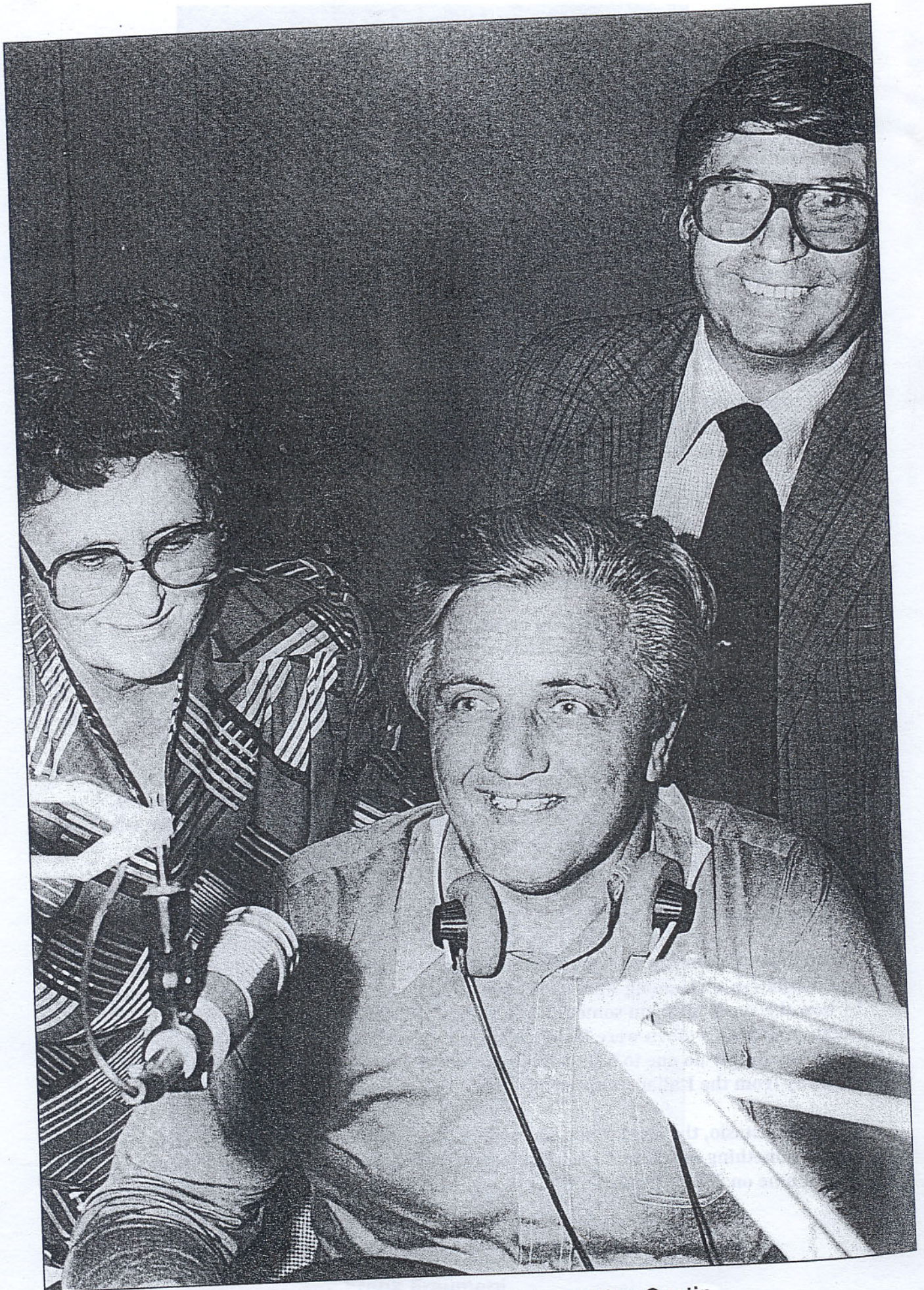




*75th Anniversary of 2KY
Dinner*

31st October 2000



Mama Lena, Frank Fraumeni and Dino Gustin

MAMA LENA

Post war migration brought many fabulous people to our shores with many incredible skills. As these people arrived in a new land with different customs and a different language and to some extent a lack of welcome and intolerance from a few, the settling in process was for at times a little difficult.

By 1956 most migrants who had come early had settled into their new life and home. However there were still a few things missing and one of these was the need to be informed and entertained. Needless to say it was important for the new settlers to know what their privileges and responsibilities were in this new land.

Each community had its own way and none more than the Italian community. The newspaper La Fiamma gave the Italian community a great window not only on what was happening across the world but also how to settle in to Australia.

La Fiamma was also the starting point for Lena Gustin as a columnist and broadcaster of excellence. Lena and her husband Dino arrived with her family in 1956 and went to Bankstown. In this suburb amenities like coffee, veal, pasta and a background of conversation that was familiar to them simply didn't exist.

One day she went into a coffee shop on the railway bridge because she saw an expressio coffee machine. To her dismay the owner didn't know how to operate it and she ended up with a cup of hot water and a little taste of coffee. She asked if she could make her own and the owner was amazed at how she was able to operate the machine and you guessed it, offered her a job.

At the end of a great day of coffee making, an Italian friend of Lena asked her if she would like to go with her to the offices of La Fiamma. The Editor, Evasio Costanzo, saw in Lena the image he was looking for to write a column. The kind of person who could heal and uplift the spirits of the members of the community that were so underprivileged and who were in need of material and spiritual assistance. It was a column for people to send in their problems and Lena would answer.....and so was born Mama Lena. Lena did this for 7 years.

Through her column Lena soon realised just how widespread the feeling of isolation and desolation was among women. As more and more letters arrived she was struck by how the small problem sometimes seemed so much bigger by the cultural isolation. Italian women were facing crises with husbands and children because there was simply no one to talk with or confide in and because their suburb was so far away from the Italian mainstream. Lena realised something had to be done.

Father Anastasio, the head of the Capuchin Fathers in Leichhardt, asked her to record something in Italian to help the community through the Italian language programme on 2SM. It ended up being a weekly programme helped by an English

co compere named John Mahon, who would himself have a great career in radio and television.

She moved from 2SM to 2CH to take on the weekly programme "Arrivederci Roma". This programme became an incredible success and she had many years of wonderful broadcasting at 2CH. Then in the 1970's a 2CH executive returned from the USA with some ideas for a programming change that would leave no place for ethnic broadcasting.

It was time to move on and join 2KY. Mama Lena's move to 2KY in 1973 was one of Sydney's best kept secrets. There would be one aspect about going to 2KY that Lena hadn't considered and that was her programme would have to be shared with the gallops and dog racing. She wasn't aware that racing occurred 6 nights a week in NSW.

To start with Lena was a little confused but very soon she became amused and interested in this uniquely Australian pastime. Quite remarkably the mixture became a godsend, as Italian women starting writing to Lena saying for the first time they were listening to the same programme as their husbands. The women listened to Lena and the husbands listened to the trots or the dogs.

It wasn't long before Lena was also having the occasional bet herself. To start with she believed that Italian radio would not have been accepted by the punters on 2KY. However she very quickly discovered that not only were they listening but also humming along with the songs. Quite often the panel operator in the Kings Cross Studios would hear his counterpart at Harold Park in the broadcast box singing out a familiar Italian song while waiting for the next race.

Mama Lena very quickly realised here was a piece of broadcasting magic. The co-broadcasting of "Arrivederci Roma" and the races was the ultimate in assimilation.



Mama Lena



Frank Fraumeni

Mama Lena, Frank Fraumeni and Dino Gaslini