

The Word from Movimento

By Cathy Giannini

The end of an era - The passing away of Mamma Lena -

Mamma Lena was born in 1914. She was orphaned of her mother by the age of 3 and was orphaned of her father by the age of 8. In 1941 she married the love of her life – Dino Gustin. In 1956 the Gustin family migrated to Australia.

During her life she was a teacher, a mother, a hotel administrator, a journalist, a radio announcer and also gave Dino a hand in various theatrical events.

In 1957, Mrs Lena Gustin began broadcasting an Italian radio program that featured Italian news, music, translations of Australian news and sport. She received on average over 2000 letters a week, some of which were simply addressed to “Lena Gustin” or the name of the program “Arrivederci Roma” – somehow they would still reach her. By 1965, Mamma Lena worked with RAI to bring a collaboration of radio programs between Rome and Sydney.

Early migrants will remember tuning in religiously to her Radio Program to hear news about Italy, to share their problems and fears. Many of these people had left home quiet young in search of a new life in Australia; often they were alone with no family support structure. Lena was a friend, a counsellor, a confident and an inspiration to many. She helped them to better understand the Australian laws and customs, offering the support and guidance needed to establish themselves – to fit in this new country that was very different to the home they had left behind. As this group of migrants made sacrifices, worked hard, combated loneliness and language problems Lena was there to comfort them. Hence she became their Mamma – Mamma Lena.

In 1967 she was knighted by the Italian government with the second highest honour “The Cross of the Cavalier”, and in 1968 the Queen honoured her with an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for the assistance she gave to Italian migrants.

In 1972 she was a member of the sub-committee of the NSW Migrant Task Force that was set up to investigate the need for an ethnic broadcasting service. A paper was presented in 1974 to the Public Radio Broadcasting conference reporting “the only way in which ethnic groups could expect to have a radio voice would be through the establishment of broadcasting stations devoted solely to ethnic broadcasting”.

She was a member of the National Women’s Advisory Council that looked at issues relating to family law, social security, discrimination and childcare. She was a journalist, writing regular columns in “La Fiamma” and was the editor of the newspaper ‘Settegiorni’. Later she established the Mamma Lena Child Care Centre in Fairfield.

The Mamma Lena Foundation was established to continue in the spirit of the work she started in supporting the community. The foundation has an award program for recognition of community members supporting the wider community in the categories of culture and generosity. Movimento FM are proud to have been recognised by the Mamma Lena Foundation in 2002 with the Premio Della Cultura.

Lena Gustin – our Mamma Lena – it was our privilege to know you and we thank you. For supporting our parents and grandparents. For your generosity to those in our community. For your contribution to our country. For the wonderful society we live in where we can proudly enjoy our bi-cultural heritage.

Just as you loved us with your big warm heart - we love you.



What's On...

Movimento FM Social Calendar

* Fri 7th Nov '03:

Via Musica @ Club
Marconi

* Sat 29th Nov '03:

Movimento FM
Christmas Party @
Royal Hotel, Leichhardt

* Fri 19th Dec '03:

Via Musica @ Club
Marconi

* Jan '04:

Dolce 4 – Sweet
Sounds of Summer –
Italian Harbour Cruise

Keep up to date with
what's going on with
Movimento FM
and future events.
Sign our mailing list
at events or send
your contact details
to the address as
listed on the
back page under our
contact details.