

## Andiamo!

There is something energizing about a new year. Call it a fresh start. Call it expectation. But there is a sense of one's life story having inched forward and a new chapter begun.

My new year's musings lead me to think of my grandfather, my 'Nonno' as my Italian heritage has me call him. If greeting a new year is about looking ahead with optimism, grasping unfolding opportunities and accepting change, then Nonno – who has just greeted his 93rd January – has a great deal to teach me.

In a sense his whole life has been a process of welcoming change. Raised in an insular family of northern Italians whose idea of a foreign land was southern Italy, he shocked them all as a young man by joining a firm that was to send him travelling the world for the next 40 years. Argentina, China, Russia, India, Europe... the globe was his home long before the term 'global village' was coined and well before the creature comforts of international travel. While other salesmen took the luxury ocean liners from continent to continent, Nonno zipped ahead of them in the somewhat dubious aircrafts of his day.

Early in his travels he fell in love and married a graceful English woman. Family folklore says they were a romantic young couple who, not being able to speak one another's language, courted in French. But marry an

English woman?! A foreigner?! More disapproving shock waves were felt back home.

At times Nonno's business travels coincided with war and revolution. Living in Mexico at a time of religious persecution, my grandmother taught catechism in an 'underground church.' Abandoning their home in Shanghai on the eve of the Communist takeover, they caught the last plane out of the city amidst a scene of panic and chaos. Their first trip to Australia coincided with the outbreak of World War II. Classified as an 'enemy alien' and prevented from continuing business, Nonno turned his hand to vegetable gardening as a source of income.

Reading between the lines of family history I see in my grandfather a man unafraid of innovation; not necessarily seeking change, but always welcoming it with patient optimism as circumstances demand. With the advent of internet technology he was one of the first in the family to surf the net and send e-mails. Not for any special love of cyberspace. Rather, the computer offered a way of keeping in touch with his daughter in America – so in his typically pragmatic style Nonno learnt the ropes.

Underpinning his practicality is an enduring enthusiasm for life. He nursed my grandmother through mental illness and buried two of his sons, yet Nonno's sense of life as gift and opportunity remains unquenched. When all familiar signposts are

shifted—whether by war, death, technology or a stock market crash—a matter-of-fact spirit of hope wins through. Today is done. Tomorrow heralds new possibilities. Andiamo! On with it! To this day, even if mystified by a grandchild's choice of partner, career or lifestyle, his final word will always be a loving exclamation: 'Best of luck to you!'

Most recently Nonno has been writing essays championing the cause of world peace. 'We must work to eradicate all war,' he argues with passion. 'Don't say it can't be done.' He doesn't let up. He is 93 and still prepared to change. While most people in their twilight years feel justified in their set ways, there is my Nonno, still sampling and savoring life's gifts and opportunities.

So, what does the new year hold? My grandfather teaches me that in the surprise lies the potential. Andiamo! On with it! •

