

A TRIBUTE TO OUR ZIA MARIA PIGAT, NEE PASCOT

Lovingly by nieces Sandra Donadel-Pilla and Lisa Fantin

Maria Pigat, nee Pascot, who is alive and well, was born on March 13th, 1925 in Azzano Decimo, Pordenone Italy. They were 5 sisters and one brother : Elisa, Alessandro, Sandra, Elvezia, Maria, and Clelia. Sadly, shortly after the birth of Elisa, a 6th sister passed away of meningitis at the tender age of 2.

Maria followed in her mother's footsteps with her love of sewing, and at the young age of 12 she began pattern making and sewing lessons. Her teacher, whom Maria loved, lived 4 kilometres away. Maria would walk back and forth from her own town 3 times a day to learn her craft. The teacher, named Mrs. Badanai, would often speak of a place called Canada. Her brother Hubert had immigrated at a young age and had become the Mayor of Fort William in Ontario. The young student listened attentively to stories about this land and wished to one day visit.

Maria adored dressmaking and design, often making beautiful dresses for her sisters, although the sisters told the story differently, that she did not make them often enough! They would often fight over the beautiful dresses. Everyone in the town celebrated Maria's talent.

At the age of 21, Maria noticed that the 'most gorgeous' guy in town, Gino Pigat, was becoming increasingly interested in her. They fell in love and were married two years later. Her husband Gino had lost a brother to meningitis and was therefore an only son. His father Gelindo, had immigrated to Canada when Gino was only one year old. Gino's mother, Arminia, remained in the town while her husband came to Toronto to work as a bricklayer with relatives. The money was very good and Canada offered much prosperity. Shortly after they were married Maria found she was expecting a baby, and a son Dino was born. At this time Gino, also a bricklayer, was asked by his father to join him in Canada as there was much work available. When Gino arrived in Canada it was almost as

though he was meeting his father for the first time. Maria and baby Dino in the meantime would stay behind with Gino's mom until Gino was settled enough to call his wife and baby over to Toronto. Maria awaited that moment with bated breath.

In Toronto the 2 men would work long days as bricklayers. The money was good and the future was bright as Gino knew that his wife and son would join shortly.

Finally that day did come when Dino was two years old. Gino informed Maria that it was time to come join him in Toronto. Maria's parents Angela and Alessandro had passed away by this time and Maria felt happy and privileged to begin her new life in Canada.

Maria would immigrate to Canada on October 18th, 1950 at the age of 25, with 2 year old Dino in tow. She and the baby were reunited with husband Gino. At this time she also met her father-in-law Gelindo. Now at age 24 they were together.

During the voyage to Canada with Dino in 1950, Maria spent 2 weeks on the ship, Conte Biancamano. The ship sailed to Halifax. From there they took a train to Montreal. She recalls how filthy the train ride was. She said the train smelled as if 'animals had been transported on it!'. They arrived in Montreal covered in filth and quickly went to a restaurant to get cleaned up and changed. She recalls how 'all of us had brought a change of clothes; we all got changed to look fresh for the arrival into Toronto'. While on a layover in Montreal she met a gentleman who told her to stay in Montreal as it greatly resembled their town in Italy, with all the churches and church bells ringing. Maria of course needed to go to Toronto to reunite with her husband Gino. The train to Toronto was a far cry from the train to Montreal she happily recalled. She said she traveled to Toronto in luxury. On the train they ate soft white bread which was delicious! The train with the beautiful seats pulled into Union station in Toronto. The young couple and baby were ready to begin their new lives.

They all lived together in a house in Toronto that Gino and his father had purchased 2 years prior, for \$7000.00. The house was on Hope Street in the St. Claire and Dufferin area. They had borders for 5 years. The borders were acquaintances from their home town in Italy who too were searching for a better life and working in Toronto. Maria took great care of them; she would cook for them and wash their clothes.

Soon Maria gave birth to a second son, Giuliano. At this point Maria was able to call over from Italy, two sisters, Elvezia and Clelia who had later anglicized their names to Evey and Lily. The three sisters were now all residing and raising their families in Toronto together, feeling privileged in their new country.

In 1955 Maria's mother-in-law came to Canada and moved in with them so that Maria could go to work. At this point Gelindo and his wife were also reunited. Their home on Hope street was becoming too small so a larger and newer one was purchased down the street. Maria loved this new place with its sun-filled rooms and pretty garden.

Soon after Maria got a well paying job in a factory that manufactured television parts. She worked from 4PM to midnight. She worked there until a dear friend Santina opened a lovely couture dress shop. She worked as a seamstress for Angela's Fashions on St. Claire where she was able to practise her craft, and create beautiful chic couture. Her specialty was hand beaded gowns.

Besides being an amazing seamstress, and tailor, Maria was also a fabulous cook. Gino and Gelindo, who were avid hunters, would bring home deer, moose, pheasant, and she would butcher and clean every one, and make wonderful stews with them. She recalls Gelindo bringing home 50 pheasants one time. She plucked and cleaned every single one herself. Her Bible was the famous Silver Spoon cookbook which she still uses and adores to this day!

Unfortunately in 1984 her beloved Gino suffered a serious heart attack. He was no longer able to continue working as a bricklayer and decided to retire. The couple decided to move to Richmond Hill to begin a quieter life; Maria could garden and life could take on a slower pace. The Pigats custom built a beautiful new bungalow on a big lot! Having lived in the city for so long Maria did not require a license as she was on and off the street cars and buses, and navigated the city very well. However now life had changed. She now lived in the suburbs, and navigating around her new town was not as easy. Maria was 60 then, and decided she needed a license to drive! Her older sister Elvezia, who lived around the corner told her, "You need to get your license! I'm not going to be your personal taxi!". And so she did! At first it wasn't easy! There were more than a few failed attempts, but she kept trying! She was one tenacious lady, and was ultimately successful. From then on, the sisters would alternate Sunday drives to church. Maria enjoyed Richmond Hill. Her magnolia tree and rose bushes are the envy of the street to this day! She has made many many friends in the area and joined the church club.

Unfortunately, at the age of 71, her beloved Gino passed away and Maria's sons both moved to Richmond Hill to be close to her. In the years to follow, Maria traveled back-and-forth to Italy to visit relatives, and with the church group, also vacationed in the Caribbean islands.

Today she still lives in the same Richmond Hill bungalow that Gino built. Two years ago, at 95, she was finally convinced into getting some live-in help. The nanny, Teresa, has become a member of the family. Teresa goes home on weekends, and Maria is home alone those days. She says that she relishes those 2 days and spends them reading, knitting, and watching her favourite shows on RAI TV (Uomini e Donne, Heredita, Italian game shows). On these days she also enjoys cleaning her house and dusting her room the way SHE likes, cooking her own food, and washing her clothes by hand. Last summer, with the help of her nanny, she planted her own garden like she always has. Her sewing machine is currently being repaired, but she still enjoys altering and sewing dresses! And while sitting by the window she can still thread a needle!

Maria has four adoring grandchildren: Dennis, John-Paul, Simona and Richard, and 2 great grandchildren : Julian and Clare. Her sister's children also visit her often and are truly happy to call her not only zia, but friend. She regales us with times of old but is modern enough to partake in daily events, always offering words of wisdom! And in the end, a good old fashioned laugh is always to be had!

She is strong and she is courageous. We all agree that she is definitely hands down the most tenacious person we know! She loves life, prays often, reads the bible, and is a true optimist if we have ever met one! She is truly a beautiful woman. Despite some struggles and sacrifices, she will tell you that she has led a beautiful life! We love you Zia Maria.

About the authors:

Lisa Fantin is the wife of Tiziano Fantin. Tiziano is Maria's nephew, and the son of Maria's sister, Elvezia. Sandra Donadel-Pilla is Maria's niece, and the daughter of Maria's sister Clelia. Maria is the only Pascot sister alive today.