

TO MY CHILDREN AND GRAND CHILDREN

So that they know who we are,
where we come from and
what we had to do.

DOMINIQUE D'INTRONO

UE' NEPA'

Quanne specciò la uerre
Tutte stajne pe u cule n'derre
la mesèrie érre accamme la tigne
ahi vogghje a scì zappènne vigne

When the war ended, we all had our asses on the
ground,
wretchedness was like a stigma, however much you
worked the vineyard

Se scettaje u sanghe dalla matine alla sère
e poje da mangià nan staje nudde da recère
pe chesse chidde ca tenajne na morre de figghje
na ge la faciajne a mandenì la famigghje

You sweated blood and sweat from morning to night
and you had nothing to eat
those who had many children could not feed their
families.

E pe manghe cambà strappènne-strappènne,
lassèrne tutte, e da Quarate se ne scappenne.
Pure ca nan tenajne re d'occhiere pe chiange
ad acchjà fortune scerne alla Frange.

So as not to live from day to day
and because they had enough of weeping, they dropped
everything and
left for France, to seek their fortune.

Dà nan èrre u, mbierne, ma manghe u Paravise
però staje la fatiche pe guadagnà le ternise
e chiane - chiane grazzie all'emigrande,
accumenzerne a cambà tutte quande.

Over there it wasn't hell, nor was it heaven
but there was work to earn a living and little by little,
thanks to the emigrant
everyone began to live better.

E doppe qualche anne a San Catalle, da
Grenoble
nan venajne chjù pe u trene, ma arrevajne pe re
tomobeles.
Cudde érre u sègne ca avajne acchjate fortune
e ca manghe avajne scì cercà nudde a nisciune.

After a few years, for Saint Cataldo's day,
they no longer arrived from Grenoble by train, but by
car,
it was the sign that they had made it good
and didn't need anyone to keep body and soul together.

Fu acchessi ca de sore, frate. canate e cuggine,
a Grenoble arrevèrne ne sacche de Quaratine
e le Frangiese accumenzèrne a storce u nase
a vedèrne tande frestiere inde alla case.

Thus it was that, sisters, brothers, brothers-in-law and
cousins, a bunch of Coratini arrived in Grenoble and
the French began to wince
At seeing so many foreigners coming to their country.

Mo doppe tanda tiembe, Grenoble è camblate
e a le Quaratine la medagghfe l'ane date.
Mo staune sotto a do bandiere
e adè ca vaune nan sonde chjù straniera.

Now, after all this time, Grenoble has changed and the
Coratini have been given a medal, now they have two
flags,
and wherever they go they are no longer foreigners.

Mo parlene tutre u Frangése
ma prime pe chidde érre giargianèse
mo ne - pas, sapene cè vole disce,
ma prime érre u nepaute de zi Felisce.

Now they all speak French, but before it was
"Javanese" to them
now "*ne pas* (don't)", they know what it means,
whereas before, they thought he was Uncle Felix's
nephew.

Sabino ZAZA

Why did you leave?

Why did you leave is a frequent question that we are asked during meetings with Coratini students invited to Grenoble. The answer is in the poem by Sabino ZAZA.

One would think that their teachers are stricken with amnesia, or that they want to conceal what life was like in the south of Italy after the war and more particularly in Puglia, in Corato, where I come from. You have to see how we lived in 1940, and then in '46 after the war, it was terrible, awful, in southern Italy!

It's true that life in Corato today has changed a lot compared to what it was like when I was born, especially with the creation of food industries, the marble industry, transportation, etc. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate is still very high, especially among young people. Today, they study in the tertiary and quaternary sectors, but find few job opportunities.

In the agricultural sector, unlike in the 1950s, the supply of jobs is greater than the demand: there are fewer agricultural workers and thanks to the mechanization of tools, the work is less hard, they are paid correctly, and they can stay in the country, whereas in the past, these day laborers represented the bulk of the candidates for emigration. But today's young people don't want them because they are not well respected jobs, with little rest and vacations.

It must be said that in Italy, profession and social rank are very important: when addressing a person, don't we have to add his title, for example *Signor Avvocato*, *Signor Professore*, *Signor Ragioniere*, whereas in France, just *Monsieur* is sufficient most of the time?

Who are we?

The D'Introno hail from Corato, according to research carried out at the Italian consulate and at the foreigners' administration in Nantes.

We may well have originated in central Europe. This seems plausible because Puglia, in the singular in Italian, in the plural in French, was for a long time dominated by the Swabians. (Frederick II¹ (1), the Germanic emperor, made Foggia his favorite land).

Our branch of the D'Introno was known as "*pezze nere*", because my grandfather wore a black scarf tied around his neck in all seasons. At that time, almost everyone had a nickname that was either related to a piece of clothing, as was the case with my

1 Frederick II (1197-1250) is a remarkable figure of the Middle Ages; cosmopolitan from birth, he was German by his father, Norman by the maternal line, and was both the Germanic emperor and king of Sicily".cf. https://www.persee.fr/doc/bude_0004-5527_2000_num_1_1_1978 , accessed 26/10/ 2020

grandfather, or related to a profession, such as "*trainier*", who drives a cart, or "*fungaral*", who looks for mushrooms, or related to a physical condition, such as "*cul de chjumme*", who has a big butt ².

I did a search at the registry office in Corato. I learned that my grandfather was born in Corato in 1869. He was the 3rd of 6 children, 3 boys and 3 girls. His brother participated in the Italian expedition to China during the Boxer³ Rebellion.

My father was born in June 1913; he was the second last of 6 children, 4 boys and 2 girls.

As for my mother, she was born in 1912. She was the youngest of 3 sisters and was 3 years old when her father was killed "*sul Piave*" on the Austrian border during the First World War in 1915. He left a widow and his 4 daughters.

Thanks to her courage and hard work, my maternal grandmother was able to raise her 4 daughters and give them a minimum of education. She had a small sewing workshop, and taught her 4 daughters the trade of seamstress.

It is thanks to her, to this grandmother, that we were able to pay our smugglers to come to France.

In my mother's time, to get married, a girl had to have a trousseau that was more or less substantial depending on the status of the groom. When we cleaned out my mother's belongings when she died, we found sheets, blankets and towels that had been part of her trousseau.

While my mother's youth was spent quietly going to school and learning the trade of dressmaking with her mother and three sisters, my father's was more eventful. He only attended school for a week, after which he told his father that he preferred to go with him to the fields. At the age of 6, he went to join his mother, father and younger sister in the country, and lived there until he was 20.

2 Dizionario etimologico coratino, CATALDO BUCCI, Tipografia Meridionale ed, 1982

3 **The Boxer Rebellion**, which shook China from 1898 to 1901, was started by a secret society called the Fists of Justice and Concord, which practiced what was then known as Chinese boxing and today as *kung fu*. This movement, initially opposed to the foreign powers that were dismantling China and to the imperial court of the Qing that was ruling at the time, led to the siege of the foreign legations present in Peking on June 20, 1900. This siege lasted 55 days and ended with the defeat of the insurgent Boxers and the placing of China under the trusteeship of eight imperialist nations (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia). The great European powers arrived in China at the beginning of the 19th century. They wanted to open it to their goods and create spheres of influence. They eventually forced the Chinese Empire to cede to them ports and districts of Shanghai, where the French, German, American and British concessions were located. (Source https://wikirouge.net/R%C3%A9volte_des_Boxers, 2020).

The whole family lived on the farm where my grandfather was the manager, or "*massare*", in Per'tre Scane.

They were very big landowners, who owned about 200 hectares. My grandfather spent his entire career with them, first as a farm worker, then very soon, at the age of 23, as a manager, until his death at the age of 68. He was known as *Massar'Demineche Pezzanere*. (see the photo of the farm).

So my father joined his parents, but not to play. At that time, if you didn't go to school, you worked: first he watched over the turkeys, then tended sheep with a "*Pecurale*" ⁴, then cows with the "*vaccare*"⁵, and when he was old enough to learn a trade, it was quite naturally that he leaned towards an occupation on the land. Thanks to his father, he was able to learn several specializations that later allowed him to find work in all seasons; he learned to plow, to harvest, to prune trees (*sperua*), to prune vines (*peta*) and to graft (*nesta*). Workers who only had one skill had to look for work on a day-to-day basis, which was not always easy, depending on the season. This was my father's life until he left for military service! At the age of 20, he left for the army, as he was of the class of 1913.



That's where he learned to read and write. In 1933, he was 20 years old, when he went to Rome to join the cavalry. He was not discharged until 1935. He got married 3 years later in 1938, and by the time he had his first child, he was called back into the army at the end of 1939.

Fascism was on the rise and with it its desire for colonization. My father was sent to Africa. He landed first in Libya, then in Eritrea and Ethiopia; finally in Italian Somalia, where he boarded a ship in Mogadishu to take him back to Italy via the Cape of Good Hope. When he returned home in 1941, the world was in the middle of a war; I was born! The army forgot about him for long enough to let him put the second child on the way. In March 1942, he was mobilized again, this time to go to Greece.

⁴ A shepherd

⁵ A cowherd



My Father's Trip to Africa

He said to me, « *rodédjé, rodédjé* » : I always wondered what this place could have been. It was the island of Rhodes in the Aegean Sea, where he would stay until the end of 1943, after which he was demobilized permanently.

From 1933 to 1943, his family life was put on hold. He was not in the army continuously : no, he was "*richiamato, richiamato*" during those 10 long years.

**His elder brother took part in the first world war,
my father in the second...**

and I did 27 months of military service, 14 of them in Algeria!

Back to civilian life in Corato, my father was no longer interested in working the land. He went to the town hall to see if there was any work, to get a salary, even if only as a sweeper rather than as a farmer, but he was told "you're too late"; he stayed anyway for two years in Corato and this time he was able to attend the birth of his third child. Then, taking his little suitcase with him, he left to try his luck in Milan. At that time, many Italians did the same: they left the south to go to Milan, but also to Turin and other big cities where they hoped to find work, and especially to earn money.

But in the north, Italians from the south were considered "Ethiopians". My father found little bits of work here and there, and then he realized that the people from the south, the so-called '*TERRONI*', had little chance of making good.

He stayed in Milan for a year, until the beginning of 1946, and then returned to Corato; but he really didn't want to live this peasant life anymore! He said to my mother, "Listen, I've heard that many people are leaving for France, so I'm taking my suitcase and going to France!



Towards France

At the beginning of August 46, he decided to leave. He was not recruited, in 1946 there was no recruiter! He just left, but as he had no money, he had to appeal to the generosity of our grandmother, his wife's mother, to pay for the trip, the smuggler and the taxi to get to Grenoble.

His journey began in the early days of August 1946. He traveled 3rd class by train; at that time the benches were made of wood, the backs were hard... On arrival in Bardonecchia, the smugglers were waiting, and the emigrants left on foot in groups to cross the border.

Depending on the composition of the group and the state of health of the people, the journey lasted from two days to a week. There were Italians like him every day⁶ : every day there were ten, fifteen, twenty, who arrived, without anything at all, without understanding anything.

In Bardonecchia, my father was caught by the *carabinieri* during a paper check. They put him on a train to return home. But my father had paid for his trip, which was expensive, so he could not believe that his trip was going to end in such a way ! When the train entered the first tunnel, he jumped out of the carriage and went back to join the smuggler and the other illegal migrants, most of whom were Coratini. In his misfortune, he was lucky to have a competent smuggler.

I don't know the exact date of my father's departure, but I do know that he arrived in France on a Friday, at night. At the end of the second week of August, he was in Grenoble, staying in the rue Saint Laurent, at the home of a great aunt who took him in with two of his cousins who arrived at the same time as him.

Three days later, all three of them were hired at SOULAGE⁷. Then, the following week, my father sent us a telegram: "I have work, we can be accommodated, come and join me". Easier said than done, since my mother was 34 years old, with three children (6, 4 and 2 years old), and we had to cross the border on foot, through the mountains.

After a family meeting, my uncle Michele, husband of one of my mother's sisters who had no children, decided to accompany us and try the French adventure.

Our grandmother was again asked to contribute to the money for the trip, both for us and for Uncle Michele. But for us, the trip was very difficult.

6 "By the paths of the snowy mountain..." Historical perspectives on migration routes across the French-Italian border (1945-1960) <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/7037>.

7 Emile Soulage, an engineer who graduated from the Arts et Métiers in 1898 and in 1919 founded the Soulage company, specializing in railway equipment, located along the railway line.

We left with very little luggage and just enough food to survive. We didn't have a backpack, a "*zaino*", which didn't exist in Italy, or only for people who had the means.

We had the "*bors*" that my mother had made, that is to say, a cloth bundle.

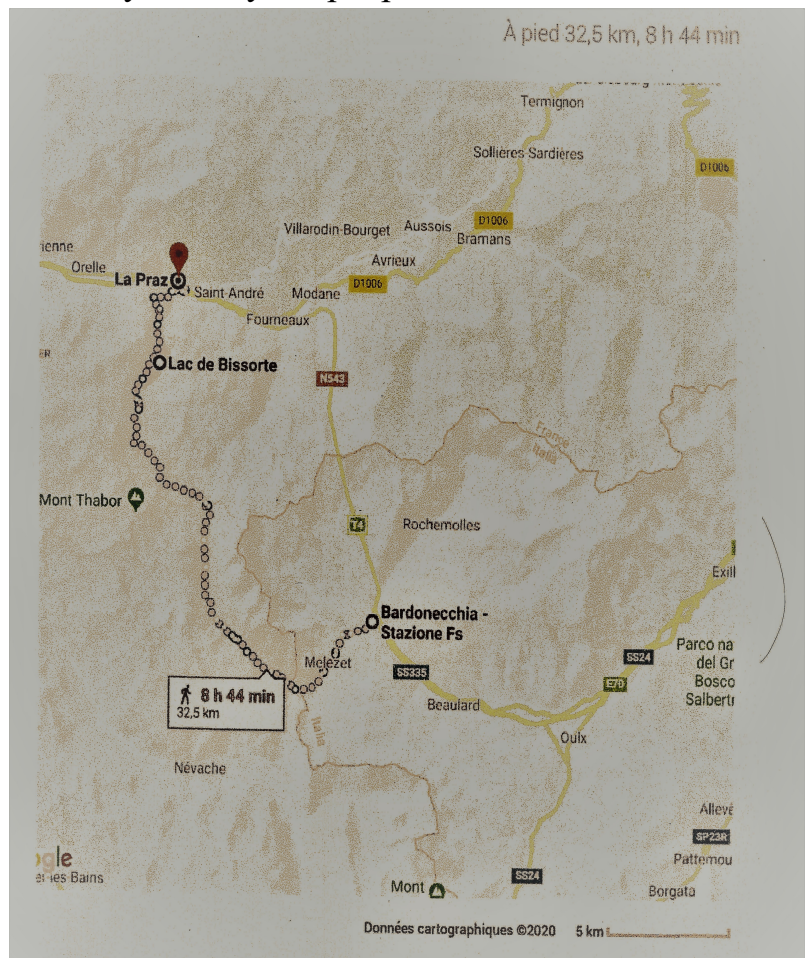
We took the train, like my father, to Bardonecchia. We got off the train, walked to the *smuggler* at a certain place, and started to climb the mountain. The *smuggler* was a Coratino. Many Coratini had turned into smugglers, as if they had been mountain men all their lives! Of course, it was the money that motivated them! It was big money, I think that for the 3 children, my father, my mother and my uncle, we paid 16,000 lire. In 1946, according to what my parents told me, this represented 2 months' salary in France.

Our smugglers were beginners and we didn't know it, of course! It was

September, the weather was still good. The mountain passage was via Bardonecchia, Melezet, then towards Mount Thabor, lake Bissorte, and finally the descent to the village of La Praz. Many years later, in 1986, I did the Bissorte - La Praz route once again.

In addition to my mother, my two brothers and my uncle, our group was composed of 16 other people, all strangers. We only knew 2 people, cousins on my father's side. This group was made up of many "old people". It must be said that at the time, when you were 60 years old, you were old, you had lived and worked quite a lot. And there were a lot of people of that age with us. The smugglers made us walk just a little during the day, because the Italians were looking for us, they didn't want us to emigrate; so we walked mostly at night. I don't remember how many hours we walked. My uncle carried my little brother, who was 2 years old, my mother held my second brother's hand, who was 4 and a half years old, and I, who was 6 years old, managed to walk on my own.

I remember that other groups passed us, as some walked faster than us.



On foot through the mountain

My mother told me that at one point, a group passed us; it was at a time when my mother was carrying my little brother, the second one, who was tired.

Some of the people in that group took pity on her. They took my brother from my mother's arms, saying: "We'll leave him at the top"; at the top of the mountain there is the lake of Bissorte and a small dam with a small house; they put my brother in this cabin, and closed the door. My



Bissorte lake dam

brother cried for hours, but he doesn't remember, he is not traumatized. Nowadays, we are quickly traumatized, we have to see psychologists, but at that time, nobody cared about a possible trauma. My brother cried and cried all the tears of his body, poor guy! My mom was crying too because she didn't know if she was going to find him again. Finally, we met up, everything went well; the people who had carried my little brother were people like us, who had simply wanted to help.

From the lake, we went down to La Praz, in the middle of the afternoon, since we had arrived on the French side. In the village, the rendezvous was behind the chapel (which still exists) and I can't help but talk about it today every time I pass by. This is where the taxis came to pick up the migrants to drop them off in the early morning in Grenoble. We hid there until the night. It was late, about 2am, when the taxis arrived.



The chapel, La Praz

Where my father had taken only two days, our ordeal lasted almost a week.

The arrival in Grenoble by cab was around 6am, on Saint Laurent street. My first sight was the public fountain in the middle of the street.

In Italy, in the south, we didn't have running water, there were only public fountains that were on the "STRADONE" ;



Lion fountain, Saint Laurent street, Grenoble

it's a street that encircles the town, from the inside, because outside the "*STRAMURALE*" (the town walls), there were no houses, at least at the time, it was hardly inhabited; at the age of 6, when it was necessary to do "*il bucato*", the laundry, you went to fetch water from the fountain. And when you had to do the laundry for 8 people, you needed a lot of water to fill the barrel! That morning, when I arrived in France, in Grenoble, I said to my mother, in the Coratino dialect, "*ma pure do se deve a piga l'aqua*", even here I have to fetch water from the fountain? My great-aunt hastened to answer me: "no, no, we have water in the house, above the sink. Phew!"

Our installation

The first 6 months were difficult for everyone!

- for my father and my uncle, because they had to go to work on foot, 20 km a day,
- for mother, who was all alone with three children, locked up all day,
- for me, who entered school at the beginning of October, on the 8th to be exact, speaking only Coratino and knowing no one. I went to the Saint Laurent school, there were 32 of us in the class, 5 French, all the others Italian. 72 years later, in 2018, I organized a reunion day for the former students of the elementary school. I managed to find 42 buddies and many of them were with me on my first day at school in 1946.

We were staying with my great aunt. My father, mother and younger brother slept together in one room, Uncle Michele, my brother Jean and I slept together in another, and the two cousins who came with my father slept in an alcove. As for the aunt, she slept in her kitchen.

We didn't have much when we arrived, much to my mother's despair: we didn't have any furniture, so she used cardboard boxes that she turned upside down, and she put blankets

over them to make a piece of furniture. She stayed at home, did the housework and above all, prepared meals for 6 adults and 3 children: I remember that she never complained, but that she often cried.

My father worked at Soulage⁸, avenue Jean Perrot. On the Sunday after his arrival, two days later, he met some Coratini friends who told him: "Don't worry, on Monday you'll come with us to the hiring office at 7 o'clock, and we'll find you a job"; indeed, three days after his arrival, he was working. Soulage at the time employed between 300 and 400 people, not in manufacturing, but in demolition: they demolished wartime wagons, recovered the scrap metal...which was then sold to a scrap dealer in Grenoble.

As soon as he arrived, my father had my uncle hired. But at that time, foreigners who found a job had to go first to Montmélian, "the Ellis-Island of Grenoble", to have a medical check-up; if they were unlucky enough to be found with a health problem, tuberculosis or any other contagious disease, they had to return directly to their country of origin.

In Montmélian, the people in my family were fortunately recognized as "OK to work". They were in good health, so they got the work permit; the card was red at the time. Later I got one too, but it's a shame I didn't keep it.

The first two months, my father and my uncle, as I said, walked to work, 10 km in the morning, and as much in the evening after 11 hours of work; it is understandable that their first purchase was a bicycle. This allowed them to bring back each evening a bag of wood that their boss gave them.

Six months after our arrival, we struck lucky : a cousin of my aunt Graziella, who had come to France in 1924 after a stint in the USA, had just bought a villa. He had made a fortune selling haberdashery at the flea market, located on what is now Place Achard. He

8 Émile Soulage (born in 1879 in Saint-Barthélemy (Isère), graduate of the *Arts et Métiers*, Cluny, class of 1895), was the founder of the *Société anonyme Soulage*, a large company in the Grenoble region specializing in the repair of railroad equipment. He died in 1953.

Today, the Soulage Park, located along Avenue Jean-Perrot, is a former private property purchased by the city in 1975. It includes a mansion dating from 1864, which was bought by the industrialist Emile Soulage in 1922. Currently this beautiful house is used as a children's home for the Bajatière district. Its architecture distinguishes it from other houses in this neighborhood built from 1912 to 1920, called Fangas houses, after a local entrepreneur who built them from the same L-shaped plan, with an elevation.

managed to get the owner of his apartment to rent it to us. For ‘parachuted people’⁹ such as us, this apartment was luxury. Suddenly there was a room just for my parents, a living room transformed into a bedroom for my uncle, the children slept in the alcove, and there was a large kitchen. In short, a dream come true ! This was the summer of 1947.

Now that they had a means of transport, my father and my uncle could also go to work on Saturdays and Sundays for some local farmers, who paid them in kind, with farm products: potatoes, wine, flour. It was with this flour that the women made pasta every day of the week !

Thus, we began to like France. Wages had risen, my grandmother, aunt and mother had returned to their jobs as seamstresses, and soon they were struggling to keep up with the orders that were pouring in. My mother soon made a name for herself, she sewed left and right and I delivered what they had sewn every Saturday. I was able to make tips, so that at the age of 12, I was able to buy a new FOLIS bike, a very nice bike. For me, these years don’t remain in my memory as a sad period: there were all the friends on ‘Saint Lo Street’, even if I was the only "parachuted" one. Indeed, all the other children, except for one or two who arrived after me, were sons of Italians who had been there since the 1924 immigration wave. So they were kids born in France, and they helped us integrate quickly; they heard their parents speak Coratino of course, but they spoke it only a little, just enough for us to understand each other. So we adapted quickly.



My first Folis bike

It was the earlier immigrants who called us "parachuted", not the French; for the French, it was simple, we were the "dirty macar's". This was what Saint Laurent Street was about : with its 5,400 mostly Coratini inhabitants, it really was a "little Corato".

9 Among all the names given to the Italians, *macard*, *ritals* for the Italian refugees, as well as *macaroni*, *piaf*, we were known as ‘parachuted’ because we arrived at night and in the early morning, there were on some days fifteen or so new illegal arrivals. It should be noted that from mid-1947 onwards, if you could prove that you could stay with a relative, you could come with a visa.

The world of work for foreigners in 1954

In 1954, on March 26, I was 14 years old. I passed the school certificate in June, then I went on vacation to TRANI, as usual, until the end of August.

At the beginning of September, I started to look for work, but as I was an Italian national, I had to go to the Foreign Workers Bureau at the Dode barracks, on Joseph Chanrion Street, to ask for a work permit; they explained to me that in order to get this permit, I had first to find a job, but not just any job: I had to choose between bricklayer, plumber, or locksmith. The other trades were not available, at least for apprentices. I looked for a place as an apprentice locksmith, and I found one, not out of vocation, but out of need. I must say also that it was the easiest option, because my future boss had his workshop just 300 metres from my house; so I could go there on foot.



The Dode barracks, early 20th century

I would like to point out that at that time, foreigners were worse off than today; they couldn't choose their job, there was no help, and they were severely punished in the event of a problem: I knew some young people who, after a fist fight at the Saturday dance, had been expelled from the country and made *persona non grata* for several years. There were no charitable associations to defend them.

I did a 3-year apprenticeship with a very competent, kind and humane teacher. I must say that all the apprenticeship masters that I had, even if some were less understanding than him, were all very competent. They are the ones who taught me the basics of the trade that I practiced in different positions until my retirement.

During my apprenticeship, which lasted 3 years, I worked 10 hours a day, all week long until Saturday noon, and on Wednesdays I attended classes at the APPS; I obtained my CAP (professional qualification) in the 3rd year. Until 1960, I worked 55 hours a week. Then I was called up for 27 months of military service, 14 of which were in Algeria, in Kabylia, as a radio operator for a *harka* ¹⁰.

¹⁰ In the Arab and Berber countries of the Maghreb, a militia troop raised by a political or religious authority.

When I came back, from July 1962 until August 1973, I worked as a piece-worker'. I then took a job as a works manager and until 1980, I didn't count my hours and my weeks were more like 70 hours' than 35 hours' work. I worked like crazy, became a company manager, and ended up making a very good living.

I am now 80 years old. I started working on January 2, 1955, and retired on March 31, 2004. That's 49 years of work!

Childhood buddies and friends.

I have already mentioned that buddies who were with me in the 6th grade class in elementary school on my first day of school in October 1946 are currently still buddies who are always happy to meet each other.

In 2018, I organized the Saint Laurent neighborhood reunion; I managed to find 42 buddies! Some of them traveled hundreds of miles to be there that day!

Retirement, the autumn of life

The passion for work has been replaced by the love that I have the time to give to my grandchildren, time that I did not always have for my children. But a choice had to be made: either to live as a lowly manual worker and bring home a modest, or sometimes decent salary, or to work a lot, with no schedule, leading a sporadic family life, but earning a good living.

Thanks to my work and the passion I devoted to it, I was able to blossom, meet interesting people with whom I have learned a lot, and earn enough money to take my family on vacation, and afterwards travel the world with my wife, and satisfy my passions, especially for cars.

For me, the quality of life was to be able to offer my family a decent life, without having to rely on aid and credit. Yes, I had

the chance to BE ABLE, and especially to WANT to work !

Meylan, December 2020

Dominique D'INTRONO

Thanks to Rosalba PALERMITI for having been kind and patient enough to put these memories into shape