

## Memoir of Italo Serafini



Almost a year has passed since the death of Italo Serafini but his memory lives on. In fact, having got over the emotional distress coming from his demise, that seemed unacceptable even though inevitable, we can now sedately pay homage to him as a maestro, colleague and friend.

There can be no doubt that professionally he gave infinitely more than he received.

For years he was the pre-eminent Italian laryngologist. His research, experimentation and clinical experience in laryngectomy reconstruction constituted the solid reference base for, initially the preparation then the technical definition, the operations (crico-ioido-pessi, crico-ioido-epiglottis-pessi) that were to become commonplace in operating theatres the world over, significantly limiting total laryngectomy with its mutilation.

When he finished his specialization, at the end of the 1960s, that he was already well-known and highly esteemed the world over.

He received numerous invitations to present his work at conferences and training lessons, often with surgical demonstrations. In Spain, France, South America, Japan, USA (ever sceptical of foreigners) Italo presented his work in his characteristic manner, with clarity, scientific rigour, precise technical reference and unequivocal statistical data. Thanks to him Italian laryngology became highly regarded in the ENT world and he was highly respected. He was held in high esteem by his maestro, Prof. Arslan, but this was not enough to avoid...exile to Vittorio Veneto in 1974.

At the time, besides WW1 fame, Vittorio Veneto was little known but in the space of a few years it became important also in the ENT world, numerous young specialists wanting to learn laryngeal surgery and a multitude of patients from all over Italy came here.

How often Italo pulled my leg saying that in his ward he heard more Roman dialect than Venetian dialect.

These were the years of the collaboration with Carlon, an exceptional pathologist, who alas, died before his time. These were the years of the Vittorio Veneto "days of laryngology" which quickly became important appointments for the international laryngology world.

Furthermore they were the years of the birth of an exceptional ENT school which was to produce so many eminent specialists that, today, continue with enthusiasm the work of their maestro.

I have just returned from Vittorio Veneto where I participated in the course in surgery in direct dedicated to the memory of Italo Serafini, whose spirit I can assure you was with us. His spiritual presence was felt during every moment of that magnificent course, in the operating theatre, lecture hall and in those moments that our memories turned to him.

Furthermore I am sure that Italo saw from above with pride his students, Rizzotto, Lucioni and many others, as they presented exceptional surgical demonstrations and appreciated the respect and affection they still have for him.

It struck me pleasantly to still see the plaque in the ward, *Regional Laryngology Centre – Principal Prof. Italo Serafini*.

For 25 years Italo and I were united by a mutual friendship and brotherly affection.

In time I came to know and appreciate his humane qualities as well as his well known professional expertise. Italo was a kind man, sincere, and did not tolerate hypocrisy, bigotry or malice. Ours was a natural sense of friendship, profound and made up of few words but great consideration.

It was not necessary to ask for his help in moments of difficulty as he was ever ready to give a hand.

I never actually told him that he was a brother for me, nor did he tell me, but both of us were conscious of our profound friendship.

Italo was an ideal travel companion, together we visited many European countries, South American countries, Australia and the Far East. He had a contagious enthusiasm and an unusual interest in all that was new to him. Italo was a man of particular intelligence, sensitive, generous and kept an open house where a glass of prosecco was ready for all visitors.

But he had a quality that I always envied, irony, and he was able to see the funny side of anything, he would laugh and cause others to laugh with him. At the same time he knew how to laugh at himself but with more discretion.

He had the fortune to encounter a woman, Franca, who was his friend in whom he confided and who gave support in difficult moments. Often she would tease him for the way he would call her, *Francaaaa* ! More than calling her attention it was a plea.

They had a charming daughter, Chiara, of whom he was both proud and jealous.

About 10 years ago destiny decided to take back all at once most of the great gifts he had been given, but did it in a humiliating way, it did not take his life but took his autonomy obliging him to use a wheelchair. This transformed his character and sometimes he became a spoilt child, furthermore it increased the dosage as he was conscious of what had happened to him, both the loss of independence and his change in character.

Our visits to Vittorio Veneto were a torment. We all pretended, as he did, that nothing had changed but I had to avoid eye contact as every glance betrayed the truth and

his suffering, speaking of a past that would not return and an inevitable future.

The last year was a real torment of pain, physical and mental mortification with which he paid his debts to life. Death came as a liberation, firstly for him and secondly for us who could not accept to see him suffer in this way. But death was not only a liberation, but rather a sort of transfiguration and rebirth that gave us back Italo as he had been and as we remember him, a person full of joy who loved and lived an intensive life.

I like to think that at his arrival, above, he found to welcome him, his and my friends, Carlo Calero, Francesco Marzetti, Carlon and all together, in the peace of eternal life, they look down on us with the smile of the just and affection of true friendship.

Enrico de Campora