



THE FAMILY HOME IN LABIN, CROATIA.

A house in that city was also divided by the border; you could eat in the kitchen in Yugoslavia then cross the border and go to the toilet in Italy without leaving the house. You needed a passport to go and have a shit. These anomalies were eventually corrected.

I was born in 1937 in a small village called Rabaz of about twenty-five houses in the north of Italy. The village today is a large tourist town with the Yugoslav name of Raba and is part of Croatia. In Roman times the barbarians from the North came down and raped, burned and pillaged. The situation is similar today, only with tourists doing it. About twelve kilometres away is the large coal-mining town of Albona, as it was then. Labin is its present Yugoslav name and it too is part of Croatia.

My family home, where all of my family, except me, were born, is in Labin about five kilometres from the village where I was born. The home itself is over five hundred years old and is three stories plus an attic. The ground floor contains the entry area and the kitchen to the left. The back of the house was three or four steps lower than the front of the house. All cooking and eating was done on the ground floor. On the right-hand side of the ground floor are large double doors that lead to the hand mill area where grain was ground with large circular grinding stones and the flour was stored. Above the mill, on the first floor is the birthing room.

Several generations of my family have been, and are still being, born in that room.

Again the border town situation creates some strange anomalies.

Within my family:

- My Mother was born in that room in 1911 and is Austrian.
- my sister was born in the same room in 1941 and is Italian.
- my cousins born there after the Second World War, are Yugoslavs,
- and those being born in the same room today are Croats.

Four generations all born in the same birthing room, probably using the same sheets, but four different nationalities.

My grandparents had two sons and five daughters. My mother was one of the five daughters. The two sons were living in the house because they were working the land. When I was there the first floor housed my Uncle and Aunty and their two daughters. Eventually they had four daughters, two born in Italy and two in Yugoslavia but all in the same room. As you went up the steps to the entry on the first floor there was a very large room where the children used to play during winter. Also my grandparents lived on that floor. On the second floor was the other brother with his wife and two boys. My grandparents, with these two families, ran the large farm. Then there was the attic where they used to hang the meat and salami. Two pigs were killed every year to make salamis, prosciutto and all that kind of stuff. Out the back were the stables and another building with a tower. I'm not sure what it was

for, but they used to keep pigeons in there.

The toilets were openings in the wall where the toilets stuck out on the first floor and everything would free fall through the air into a composting hole at the back of the house. I'm not sure what happened in a strong wind. The house is still owned by family members but has been split into separate strata title units complete with modern toilets.

Not only do nationalities change in border towns but names do as well. The family name traces back to Switzerland 200 years ago. My father was not born in the family town of Gorizia, but in Budapest, Hungary. I have traced this name on the internet and Iachin is the name of one of the columns on Solomon's Temple so it may go back to early Jewish times. I'm not sure how much truth there is in it as I just took it as it is. My mother's family was originally from Romania.

When Mussolini came to power he Italianised all names so my grandparents changed their name to Iacchini. My father at this time was working in Argentina for two or three years but by the time he returned to Italy the Italianisation of names was no longer an issue and he retained the original name of Iachin. I am the last one with the name. My son would have been the only one to carry it on, so I am the last one with it. My Uncle, who moved to Switzerland, retained the Italianised name.

Redefining the borders at the end of the Second World War created many hostilities and difficulties in the area. We had very few documents and had to escape from Yugoslavia to Italy then apply for refugee status. I was sent to a boarding school in northern Italy in 1945. My mother and sister escaped



SERGIO'S FAMILY GROUP, NORTHERN ITALY, 1941

in 1946. The intention was to migrate and start a new life in another part of the world. My father was not allowed to leave as he was an electro-mechanic and most of the engineers had fled after 1945 so he was required to help complete a major power station that was being built.

When the job was finished he was given a work medal and publicly congratulated. In early 1947 he asked permission to visit his family in Italy. Permission was granted. He hopped onto his single cylinder 500cc Ariel motorcycle with his three quarter length leather coat, gloves and a funny shaped Scottish cap, showed his paperwork at the border, told the border guards he would be back soon, and left forever.

Originally we wanted to go to Venezuela because we had relations there but I don't know what happened, we couldn't get there. My father had a friend he used to work with in a mine in Italy. He offered my father work in Brazil. My father decided it was by far the best option. A welcoming country with people he knew, plus the offer of support and a job. Fate offers many twists and turns. Just before we were due to depart, my father's friend got bitten by a tsetse fly, or some other bug, and died.

Where to go? There was a choice of two, Canada or Australia. Father preferred Canada but I wanted to go to Australia. I was only fourteen years old but I was determined to go to Australia. I thought it offered more opportunities. I wanted to go to what I saw as a wilder country that was not developed as much as the others. I hounded my father continuously until he relented and we sailed for Australia and arrived on the 11th of November 1951 aboard the 'Skaubryn'. A lot of the people who call me a Wog have been in Australia a lot less time than I have.

When we did all the paperwork in Italy at the International Refugee Organisation, someone in an office along the way put a 'J' instead of an 'I'. So we became known as the Jachin family, which is the name I have now. At one stage all my official documents including my passport were Jachin. All except my drivers licence which was Iachin. In those days when you went to get your licence they asked you your name. You didn't need any papers or proof of identification. So they asked me my name and I said Iachin. I thought, bummer! I'm going to keep my name. Eventually, having two names got too much so I went to the RTA in Cooma and changed it to Jachin. So everything is in one name now. Mind you it is not the right one, but bureaucracy is happy.

*Hoola Hoop*

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