

# FROM SICILY TO AUSTRALIA:

## The Story of Vincenzo and Vincenza Dublè

by Sr Anna Dublè

### VINCENZO DUBLÉ

**Born:** 14 November 1902 at Montalbano Elicona, Province of Messina, Sicily.

**Died:** 25 November 1970 in Coburg, Melbourne. Buried at Fawkner Memorial Park, Melbourne.



*Vincenzo Dublé.*

Vincenzo Dublé was born to Antonio Dublé and Maria Sacca at No 208 Via Federico II in Montalbano Elicona. At the age of six, until he was ten years old, he attended the local school, where his teacher was Maestro Collichia. During these early years Vincenzo helped his father in his barber's salon, using a stool to raise himself up so that he could soap the faces of the clients.

At the age of eighteen, Vincenzo left home against his parents wishes and went to Messina, where he learned the trade of 'Barber-Surgeon' as it was practised at that

time. Six years later, at the age of twenty-four, he returned to Montalbano Elicona, where he set himself up in a salon of 'two chairs' at No 7 Via Provinciale, with a large two-metre sign which said 'Salone', which is still remembered by locals in the village.

Vincenzo's skills and techniques as a hairdresser and barber were of high standard, but over and above these he had been taught much more by his father, and through his work at Messina, Vincenzo had gained a knowledge of dentistry, giving injections, stitching of wounds, blood letting and the use of leeches, setting of bones (animals included) and the making of plasters. These latter were made from salt, water, egg white, rope strands and cloth.

Vincenzo had a natural gift for music and he acquired an ability to play the violin together with a knowledge of music. While he was at Messina he was asked to play in the 'grand houses' of the time.

In 1926 he was engaged to Vincenza Fiore, also born in Montalbano Elicona and on the 27 October 1927 they were married at the church of San Domenico in the piazza Maria SS Provvidenza. Vincenzo and Vincenza then lived at No 18 Via Indipendenza, in which house two of their children were born - Maria on 27 July 1928 and Anna [the writer of this account] on 21 May 1930. This house still exists today. The midwife in attendance was surnamed Lisi.

Vincenzo was the first man to leave the village of Montalbano Elicona to migrate to Melbourne. Together with Mr Santa Lucia, Mr Filippo Ridi and Mr Vincenzo Faranda of Braidì, a nearby village, he left his home and family, suitcase in hand, taking the bus to Funari, then the train to Naples, and boarded the ship there bound for Australia in October 1930. The voyage took about forty days and the fare was 8,000 lire. Apparently this particular ship was kept waiting four

days at Port Melbourne before the passengers were allowed to disembark. At this time America and Argentina had even turned some migrants from Italy away.

Upon arrival, Vincenzo Dublè took lodgings in North Melbourne with other migrants including, interestingly, Mr Tibaldi (of Small Goods fame) and Mr Italiano (of Cheese Products well known today!). Vincenzo expected to continue his former profession as he searched for work, but soon found this not to be. Of necessity he then had to become an itinerant hairdresser/barber as permanent or stable work was unavailable in the area at that time. Eventually he found temporary work as a potato picker in Gippsland, after which he returned to Melbourne. Fortunately he found full time employment as a hairdresser-barber in Sydney Road Coburg, the shop being adjacent to what is now Foley's Mall. Wages at that time were about 3 pounds per week.

As a result of his hard work he was able to send for his family, so on 8 September 1934 his beloved Vincenza and her two daughters left Montalbano Elicona to travel by ship to Melbourne, Australia to rejoin Vincenzo. No words could adequately describe the hardships encountered on the voyage, and the reunion! The family first resided at Whitby St, Brunswick, later moving to 24A Munro St, Coburg. The girls attended school at the Bell Street State School in Coburg, but later went to the Catholic School in Mitchell St, North Brunswick, St Margaret's Mary. Again, later on, they attended St Paul's Catholic School in Coburg. On the 15 March 1936 Anthony Vincent Dublé was born. Vincenzo having lost his job to another person prepared to work for less money, he decided to open his own salon at 99 Bell St, Coburg.

On 18 August 1938 Vincenzo received his certificate of naturalization. When the house next door to Vincenzo's Salon in Bell Street became available for renting, the family moved in to No. 97 Bell St - a very suitable arrangement for family-oriented Vincenzo and family. On 3 January 1939 another daughter, Lena, was born.

It should be noted that during the Second

World War years, Vincenzo carried on his business and in spite of the racial and religious prejudice of the time and was greatly respected by his clientele and business contacts. Those who remember him in Coburg today speak of him affectionately and with genuine respect. He taught himself to read, write and speak English adequately. He also put his musical ability to good use. Together with some Italian friends, such as Richard Gorito and Tony Giardine, he visited places such as Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital where Concert Parties were held to entertain the patients, playing his violin and sometimes the guitar, during these concerts. He instilled into his family a love for music, and on Sunday evenings Italian music filled the air at the Dublè home as family and friends combined their talents to produce marvellous musical evenings.

### VINCENZA DUBLÉ

**Born:** 26 January 1900 at Montalbano Elicona, Province of Messina, Sicily.

**Died:** 7 October 1987 at Bendigo Base Hospital, Victoria. Buried at Fawkner Memorial Park, Melbourne.

Vincenza Fiore was born on 26 January 1900 to Salvatore Fiore and Anna Popolo. Her early years were typical of the times when girls concentrated on learning domestic skills and were, of necessity, very involved in home-making.

From about the age of twelve Vincenza was taught by her elders the art of weaving fine cloth to be used as bed linen, towels, table linen, tea towels, etc. She learned to crochet with exquisite finesse and knitted, sewed and embroidered with great skill and finish. It should be noted that Vincenza used these skills throughout her life, knitting and crocheting until shortly before she died.

On 27 October 1927 Vincenza married Vincenzo Dublé and by 1930 two daughters were born. In 1931 Vincenza farewelled her husband as he set out for the unknown - for Melbourne. He was the first man to leave Montalbano Elicona for Melbourne. Vincenza was left to carry on with the care of her family. No words can describe this

separation or the courage of Vincenza when, with her two young daughters she in turn said good-bye to her beloved mother and family and friends and set off to join her husband. Vincenza, Maria and Anna left on 8 September 1934 being the first woman and children to leave Montalbano Elicona for Melbourne.



*Vincenza Dublé.*

The voyage was fairly gruelling and lengthy - about 40 days - but at long last the Dublé family were re-united. The difficulties in immigration in these pre-war years were monumental, especially so to a young mother used to life within a loving, extended family environment in a close-knit village community in far away Montalbano Elicona. Communication was only by letter which took weeks to arrive. The language barrier alone must have been daunting, not to mention the racial prejudice of the time. However, with strength-giving love and unity Vincenzo and Vincenza met the challenges of the new land together. On 15 March 1936 their son Anthony Vincent (known as Tony) was born, and on 3 January 1939 another daughter, Lena, arrived.

Vincenza's whole life was spent in dedication to her family and caring for the home. Her outstanding craft skills in knitting and

crocheting were always being put to use as beautiful works, too numerous to mention, were produced.

During the 1950s and onwards when many more Italian migrants arrived in Melbourne, the Dublé home was always open to those in need. Incredibly generous, whole-hearted hospitality was extended to all who sought help. Vincenzo, with the help of his English-speaking children, found many a job and a dwelling for the paesani and relatives while Vincenza totally supported all the efforts, providing and cooking countless meals and performing other helpful services. Sometimes twenty or more would be catered for at Sunday dinner, and it is to be remembered that Vincenzo alone was the family bread-winner in these difficult years. Holidays were unheard of for the hard-working man.

After Vincenzo died in 1970, leaving his family well provided for, Vincenza and family left Coburg and moved to Bendigo where she continued to be the stable and supportive force behind the setting up of a family business, the Captain Cook Motel-Hotel.

At the age of 80 years Vincenza's devotion to her family led her to undertake, with enormous courage, her first-ever journey by air, back to Italy so that she could personally be assured of her daughter Lena's welfare. Lena and family had in the meantime relocated to Abruzzi in Italy. During the visit Vincenza was taken back to Montalbano Elicona where she stayed briefly.

In 1983, at 83 years of age, Vincenza once again undertook a trip back to Italy to be



*The Dublé grandchildren attend to the grave of 'nonno' Vincenzo.*

with her daughter and family. She again went to Montalbano Elicona, this time accompanied by her daughter Anna. This longer visit allowed Vincenza to revisit the places of her childhood's treasured memories and meet with the people after so many years. These visits were indeed emotional experiences.

When Vincenza returned to Australia, she continued to lead a quiet retired life yet always doing what she could to help her

family. On 7 October 1987 she became ill and died very suddenly leaving four children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was buried with her beloved husband at Fawkner Park.

In 1984 the Dublé children donated to the National Museum of Australia the dentistry tools of their father Vincenzo with an account of his life and experiences as a migrant in Australia. Vincenzo never practised his 'special skills' in Australia.



*A panoramic view of Montalbano Elicona taken in 1934.*