

Family loses the rock in their lives

“Rico” Iannucci could have retired at any time but loved work too much

by *Diana Devine*



Rico Iannucci with his wife Corona

I would like to introduce you to my dad Ulderico Iannucci, or to anyone who knew him, Rico.

Rico was an Italian immigrant who came to Canada on a three-day voyage from Italy in the 1950s. He travelled with one of his brothers and a very close friend. He came to Canada with nothing but the will to work and the clothes on his back.

Not long after being in Canada and starting work at Central Precast for 35 cents an hour, he met the love of his life, Corona.

They were 22 years old and had fallen in love. They were married not long after and started to build their life here in Canada. They went on to have four girls and moved homes a couple of times.

Dad was one of the most caring, helpful and strong working people you would ever meet. He would be there at the drop of a hat for anyone. When we were teenagers, after late nights he would often be awoken at odd hours to come and pick up one of his daughters. He would never ask questions and never make you feel guilty; he would even drive friends home. His only rule was he didn't care what time you came home he just wanted us to come home and sleep there.

He loved to go camping and most weekends we would all go up in our trailer

to Ferguson Farm Campgrounds on Calabogie Road. Dad was always the life of the party and most evenings would end up with Dad playing his accordion by the campfire! He loved singing and he could play just about any instrument. He was also part of band when he was younger.

On a Sunday morning after going out on weekends we would be awoken to him playing the organ and singing. I think it was done intentionally to get us out of bed!

You couldn't waste a day in bed.

Being the third of four daughters, I had a great relationship with dad. He didn't have any favourites of course but he and I really got along. He always had a way of making me laugh and vice versa. He really got a kick out of my pranks. He was strict but you could always talk to him about anything.

When the time came for boyfriends to

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start coming by the house, all dad did was sit at the kitchen table in an undershirt and his big muscled arms and greet them. Need I say more? As intimidating as he was he had a huge heart and only asked that any boyfriend treat his girls well and with respect. Dad got to walk all of his girls down the aisle and see some of us have kids and be established before he died which I think was one of the biggest wishes. He wanted to know that we would be taken care of.

He only got to meet two of my own daughters and was so lovable with them. Every time he would see them he would play hide and seek after coming in from a days' work. It was like he had all the time in the world. He would also always give

them a toonie or a loonie. He was always giving people things and there were many occasions, even as an adult, that he would hand me money and say 'buy yourself a little treat'.

Family was the most important thing to dad and most times we would gather at my parents' house on a Sunday for a meal. It was never expected, we just did it. Even when we had our own families and husbands we continued this tradition.

Dad continued working hard in his life and never taking a sick day. He loved working and had a very strong work ethic. He instilled this in all of us and most of us had jobs by the time we were 14. Dad was a jack of all trades in his work career. He could do anything from operating large machinery to installing bathrooms and fixing leaks in foundations. In fact, in May of 2005 he came to my own home and fixed a crack in our foundation and he was actually in the same backhoe that would later bring him to his death.

Dad started working for Fuller Construction and loved every minute of it. His colleagues also loved him and his boss even got him to do work after hours for one of his daughters. Dad could have retired at any point but loved working so much that he couldn't do it and at 65 had more will, drive and energy than many people half his

age. He loved getting out and seeing the people and actually loved the work as well.

Friday, August 19, 2005 started out as any other day. I was nine months pregnant with my third child and was on the phone with my mom. We spoke every day, sometimes two and three times a day. It was about 8:10 am and we heard mom's doorbell ring. I said that I would hold because I was curious who was ringing the doorbell so early in the morning. I heard her walking to the door and then all I heard was shrieking and screaming and crying. I didn't know what had happened and just held my breath and stayed on the phone. Next thing I knew my oldest sister came on and said that mom would have to talk to me

later. I asked what was wrong and she said she would have to call me back.

What seemed like hours later but really was only 20 minutes, my husband came home as he had been called by my sister. They were concerned with how I would take things because I was pregnant. I will never forget the words that came out of his mouth, "Diana I am so sorry. I don't know how to tell you this, but your father is dead".

I just remember screaming and crying and saying no this couldn't be. The next couple of hours and days were all a blur. We had to pick his clothes, a coffin, go see him in the morgue and write an obituary. I was in shock and felt so lost.

Dad had been working in his backhoe on a job site on Parliament Hill restoring the library. He was compacting some garbage in the back. For some unknown reason the backhoe went into gear, shot backwards and started bouncing wildly while dad was facing the opposite direction. It went through an iron fence, teetered on a low concrete wall and just as my dad was almost out it went down the 200-meter cliff with my dad in it. He was pronounced dead on site and all this was before 7:00 am.

The funeral came and went and 21 days later I had my third baby girl. The next year seemed to just fly by. I had three children under four years old. I would cry every night with my new baby; I was so devastated and angry that God had taken the rock in my life. Dad was really the glue that held the family together. It was the day we realized that unsinkable ships sink and to never underestimate the impossible. Everything was so different now and we were all so worried about our mom. They had been married for 45 years and the love of her life was gone. We didn't really think she would survive this.

We all carried on with life but it was different now. You could see it in our eyes – we were all sad and it's like a light had been turned out. When my baby was one and half I decided I wanted to lose some of that baby weight, so I decided I was going to train for a marathon. I also wanted to do something to help me with my grief. This is where I came to meet Threads of Life. One of my sisters had shown me one of their newsletters and I thought that this would be a great organization to be part of – a place where other families like mine were able to talk and share.

I decided that I was going to run this marathon in my dad's memory and raise money for Threads Of Life. I raised close to \$3000 that first year and to date have

raised more than \$18,000 dollars!

Dad's case went to court and charges were laid but no one was found guilty. Nobody could figure out what happened to make that machine go into gear. All sorts of tests were done on the machine but only God and dad will know what really happened that day.

There was also a Coroner's inquest after this and the recommendations that were made were: certification and safety training for backhoe operators, and to place an emergency switch on the machines.

We had to sit through and hear all the injuries that dad sustained and how hard they worked on saving him. There were a lot of technical terms and things quite frankly his family didn't need to hear, but at the end of the day this was our dad that they were talking about and he was still gone forever.

What I really want to stress is how important it is to feel safe in your workplace. Not only is it important, but it is your right

to refuse work if you feel that the conditions are not safe. No one should go to work to die.

Our family continues to mourn dad. We have gotten stronger and we still remain united, but we never forget that terrible day in August.

My children, who were only two and four, still talk about him. They were young but they haven't forgotten him. We often say prayers for Nonno at night and my third daughter, who never met him, actually wrote a letter to Santa last year that her only Christmas wish was to meet her Nonno.

That's the kind of impact he had. He had a rare presence about him that was almost magical. We miss him more every day and hope that we can make him proud and allow him to rest peacefully. He deserves that far more than anything else after all the hard work and sacrifice he made for us.



Diana and her dad could always make each other laugh