

SILVANA MOSSANO

Monday October the 25th, 2021- Eternit bis hearing

It's always the same story, the same symptoms – a wheezing cough, back pain, dyspnoea, weight loss -, the same tests - X-rays, CT scans, talc pleurodesis to drain the lungs full of 'water' -, the same diagnosis - imagined and feared even without being a doctor -, the same treatment- chemo, experimental treatments and then palliative ones to keep the pain at bay in the final phases, **the course of the illness** - anxiety, fears, anguish, progressive physical decline and the inconsolable agony of leaving life and loved ones- and **the desperate frustration** of those who remain, full of anxiety and powerless to cope with the unstoppable decline of those they love, to caress those previously active and lively hands that have become slender, pale and icy.

Each story is everyone's story with a few differences: men, women and mesothelioma. They stood up to it with courage and dignity, but, for the moment, the malignant carcinoma rabidly attaches itself to the pleura or peritoneum and still prevails. Such are the stories of the 392 victims of the Eternit Bis trial, who make up the long list of names in the charges against Stephan Schmidheiny, accused of causing their deaths by spreading asbestos inside and outside the Eternit plant in Casale, which the Swiss businessman owned and managed directly from 1976 to 1986. The unknowing and blameless victims were more than 392; these are the ones in the trial, promoted by the Public Prosecutors Gianfranco Colace and Mariagiovanna Compare, being held in Novara, before the Court of Assizes, presided over by Gianfranco Pezone (with Judge Manuela Massino and six jury members or popular judges). The real number of deaths in Casale and in the surrounding villages, is much, much higher.

NUMBERS AND STORIES

So far the numbers we have heard the numbers that convey the idea of the magnitude of the tragedy: virtually, we have entered the plant, we have "strolled " on the "beach" formed by the sewage spilled into the River Po on the left bank, we have travelled far and wide across the city on maps, from the Ronzone Eternit plant, to the warehouses of Piazza d'Armi, to the railway station, in particular the freight yard known as "*Piccola Velocità* (Low velocity)".

Yesterday, October the 25th we entered the homes of the ill-fated victims. And although all their stories are similar, each one vents out their frustration in their own way, because it affects their very life and the lives around that shared, loved, respected and counted on it. Family members, plaintiffs in the case, arrived one by one and told their stories with dignified soberness. Every now and then their words stuck in their throats, but it's just a passing moment, then they resumed. It is not their pain - the pain of those who remain - that they want to relay: they keep that deep inside themselves. Instead, they tell us that it was not yet time for their vital, dynamic, cheerful loved ones to die, that it was an injustice, unfair and that, if research is not funded and a cure is not found quickly, who knows how much longer they will have to suffer injustice.

"She was my mum". "He was my dad". "He was my grandfather". "She was my grandmother". "He was my uncle".

Lawyer Laura D'Amico called just under twenty witnesses. She had the microphone placed as close as possible to the bench where the witnesses were seated and she remained standing, for more than four hours, delicately and politely asking the questions to unravel the story.

Maddalena Dusio on the death of Velia Anatrini.

"She was my mother. She was born in the province of Verbania, but had lived in Casale since she was four. She was a housewife. When she began to complain of shortness of breath, even when climbing just four steps, as a doctor, I examined her first and immediately realised there was a pleural effusion. Unfortunately, you see a lot of mesothelioma patients and you know... She was diagnosed in 2001'. A short time later, Dr Dusio had to also diagnose , 'my brother, who was 63 years old' of the same disease. She pauses for a few moments to order her thoughts. A moment and the she resumes: 'In March 2001, my mother had lost a lot of weight, but in January my father had died, she had looked after him during his illness, and I thought that the loss of weight was due to the heavy burden of caring for him'. It was something else.

Daniela Treviso, for the death of Evasio Amisano.

"He was my uncle. Today, here in my place, it should have been his sister, my mother, but she died three years ago, on 15 March 2018. Her name was Carla Amisano, and she too died of mesothelioma." They lived in the same courtyard. "The uncle was a bricklayer and a 'scagliolista' (a specialist of scagliola plaster), a simple man, with a hobby of reading and poetry. A good man, always with a smile on his face". Until? "The first symptoms were a cold, a bit of a cough. The agony lasted a year, he died in 2013."

Giulia Allara on the death of Daniela Pezzo.

"She was my mum. She died in 2012 at the age of 53." She recalls the places where she had lived: 'In *Salita Sant'Anna*, then in *Casale Popolo* and, since 1982, in *piazza San Francesco*, where there is also a driving school where she worked with dad'. Before she fell ill, 'she was full of energy, she had many friends, she played cards and loved *buraco* (a card game like Rummy)'. Until the mesothelioma showed its first symptoms in autumn 2011: 'Just before Christmas the diagnosis was confirmed. She died in October the following year, but from May-June she couldn't leave the house, she had no strength, she couldn't stand up. My father and grandmother looked after her. She left me and my sister, I was 25 years old, and she was 15.

Valeria Enrico on the death of Margherita Avonto.

"She was my mum. She died in 2010. I lost my father long before that, in 1965, in an accident at work, as if not enough...'. Her voice fades, then she picks up: 'Mum always lived in Villanova, she worked the land, she was a simple woman, devoted to her family, as a grandmother she looked after my children, I don't know what I would have done otherwise... At the beginning of December 2009, she called me, she was worried: "Come, Valeria, come". When I arrived, her belly was swollen like this [the witness shows it with her hands]. I took her to the emergency room of the hospital in Casale, and they checked her out and diagnosed a mesothelioma of the peritoneum. She stayed there for a month and a half until one day she said to me: "Take me home". She died a few months later.

Gian Luca Bertola on the death of Adriana Sapelli.

"She was my father's first cousin, she had always lived in Casale, first in *Via Luparia* and then in *Via Roma*, where she died on 17 April 2004. We were her only relatives, so we were very close: we always had Sunday lunch and Christmas together. She worked as a hatter, a hat maker, at home; she only ever went out to go to church ". A year before her death, she "suffered from backache". That back pain. "They drained the "water" out of her lungs many times, in the end she was admitted to the hospital and my mother looked after her until the end".

Gabriella Grossetti on the death of Matilde Finotto.

"She was my mother. After a short time in Altavilla, since 1957 she had lived in Casale: *Salita Sant'Anna, via Buozzi, via Guglielmo III* and *via Mantova* until her death. She was a housewife, looking after the house and children: me and my sister Giuliana. The first symptoms appeared in November 2003. She phoned me: 'I'm sick, I'm sick, I can't breathe'. Tests were carried out and after three months, on 20 January 2004, she passed away. In the end, she couldn't even speak anymore. The doctor showed me the x-ray: 'See?' he said, 'she hasn't got a single piece of healthy lung left'. Her lungs had practically been entirely conquered by mesothelioma.

Rachele Ferrara on the death of Vincenzo Ferrara.

"He was my dad. He ran a *pizzeria* first in *Via dei Grani*, then in *Via Sant'Evasio* and finally in *Corso Indipendenza*. In Casale, in the city centre"! As a boy, he had done his military service [conscription at the time]in the city, at the Mazza Barracks. He was a man who was all about work and family (as well as his mother Maria Di Martino, there are three of us: me and my sisters Monica and Michela), quiet, soft-spoken, and we greatly respected him and followed old-fashioned rules. He died on 24 March 2010, having been diagnosed three years earlier on March the 12th, 2008. He had lost weight and was struggling to breathe, but at first he didn't mind. He never knew about the mesothelioma, we kept it from him'. Her words fade into a sob. Then she resumes: 'We looked after him, over the last few months with the help of the Vitas association. Yes, yes, he died at home'.

Massimo Miglietta on the death of Marisa Vescovo.

"She was my mother. Until 1958 she lived in *Popolo*, a suburb of the city. When she married she moved to Casale in *Via Canna*, near the *Lanza Canal*: practically on the route between the Ronzone Eternit plant and the warehouses in *Piazza d'Armi*. She was a housewife, went out just to shop and was focused exclusively on her family. In 1989 she was widowed, when my father, a bank clerk, died of a heart attack. She took care of my children, born in 2000 and 2004, for the little time she had available". She died on 19 July 2005. "At the end of October 2004, she complained of chest pains: the X-ray showed a pleural effusion. I am a doctor and, in more than thirty years of practice in Casale, I have only ever seen three cases where the pleural effusion was not mesothelioma". Then the usual therapeutic procedure: 'First chemo and then, since it had no effect on the disease, we moved on to palliative care, which I followed, being her attending physician'. His mother was one of the 'dozens and dozens of mesothelioma patients' he has treated since becoming a family doctor (GP) in 1990. "She faced the disease with great dignity, she didn't want it to be spoken of outside, because it was intolerable to her that relationships with others were distorted by compassion. So, as long as she could, 'she went about her life. In the last few days, she was at the seaside, with my wife and children, because she wanted to help her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. But she was struggling, she couldn't reach the beach. On Monday, we were supposed

to go back to Casale for a check-up, and she wanted to be tidy, so she went to the hairdresser's. It was a palaver to find a place where it was possible to park nearby, which, is not so easy at the seaside! On Sunday evening we went back to the city, she was sick during the night and... Her idea was to be able to go on for a few years, but instead... instead only 9 months". Even if he was a doctor, he was powerless to change his mother's fate. "In Casale there is a dark cloak hanging over everyone. A person who feels a pain in their chest doesn't go to the doctor to ask for treatment to make the pain go away, they go and ask for an X-ray. We are all involved and suffer from anxiety.

Laura Catalano on the death of Angela Varese.

"She was my mother. A housewife, she lived in Casale, after a short period in Ottiglio from 1968 to 1972. She was a very active woman, she did a lot of things, she helped me raise my children when they were young: they remember all the good things she cooked for them. She was full of friends, she was a member of associations, travelled, followed cultural activities and even helped out in the parish. She died on 18 December 2013. It was very hard because... because... she was healthy, she was healthy until the summer before, in July, when we were in Susa Valley on holiday. She wasn't well, I took her to hospital and the doctor, after examining her, told me: Mrs Catalano, there's a problem'. I simply said: "We live in Casale Monferrato" and while my mother wasn't looking the doctor made a grimace of disgust. She was transferred to the San Luigi hospital in Orbassano. "Even here, when they saw that my mother lived in Casale, the doctors made faces. "And they told me to prepare for the worst. I knew: living in Casale... who doesn't have friends or relatives who lost family members to this disease, to the disease? At the first bout of first cough you never think of flu, but something serious. At the San Luigi hospital, Angela Varese underwent thalassotherapy (sea water therapy). "When she came out of the operating theatre, she said "I have Casale's disease". She was prescribed chemo therapy and the doctor told us: "It's useless for you to come here, go to Casale where they have great experience, they are even more experienced than us". For a few months, she wasn't too bad; she lost weight, she didn't walk much, but she got by. In September 2013 the situation got worse; she moved into my house. We had the support of the Vitas association: a nurse came every day and a doctor came a couple of times a week; volunteers came to keep her company. They supported her and me too, psychologically. When we had a moment of organisational difficulty, Degio (the oncologist Daniela Degiovanni,) suggested a temporary stay at the hospice, but I didn't want that; we gritted our teeth and managed to keep her at home. She died there among us".

Daniela Torelli on the death of Maria Andreone.

"She was my grandmother, my dad's mother. She lived in Casale from 1963 to 2000, when she died: in *Piazza San Francesco*, in *Via Sosso*, in *Corso Indipendenza*, in *Via Mellana*". *Via Sosso*, where Maria Andreone lived between 1965 and 1987, "as the crow flies, it is very close to the Eternit plant, where my grandfather worked as a shipping clerk between 1960 and 1980". And who washed the overalls, asked lawyer D'Amico? "Grandma, of course; grandpa brought them home and she washed them. Her voice suddenly became harsh, and, immediately afterwards, in a softer tone bordering on tenderness: 'We spent a lot of time together, she brought me up, we had a very close relationship. My grandmother loved to read,' he recalls. She started feeling unwell in the summer of 1997, and had with back pain. The diagnosis was confirmed at the hospital in Casale in November and she died on 11 April 2000. I remember very well when my grandmother began to get worse; in

addition to back pain, she had difficulty breathing, her dyspnoea was accentuated, and the painkillers had little effect. My father was a radiologist: he was well aware of his mother's illness, but he never wanted to tell her directly what was wrong with her. His daughter-in-law, my mother, looked after her until the end.

Giorgio Guidotti on the death of Luciana Deambrosio.

"She was my mother, I lived with her and, before that, with my brother Sergio who also died of mesothelioma in 1987. My mother had always lived in Casale: in *Via Visconti* and, since I was born, in *Piazza XXV Aprile*. She was a brilliant woman: she went dancing, loved to go bowling, had many interests. Job? In her youth, she told me, she sewed coats for the military; then she worked in a factory. She died on 3 October 2005, only lasted a few months. The first symptoms appeared in May: she had a testy cough, it was thought to be bronchitis, but as it wouldn't go away, I took her to hospital, I was working in the emergency room at the time. The doctor gave her an X-ray and saw the effusion. The CT scan confirmed it was mesothelioma. She was so afraid of suffering the pains of hell that she had seen my brother suffer about twenty years earlier... my brother died...'. He pauses, struggling to get the words out, then says: My brother died like a rabid dog. She and I lied to each other: I tried to deceive her and she let me believe that she took what I told her at face value'.

Fabrizio Ferrero for Francesco Ferrero.

"He was my father, he lived in Ozzano, where he was born in 1931, then in Treville, in Casale and, from 1983, he returned to Ozzano, where he died on 11 July 2011. He had worked at the Eternit plant from 1974 to 1983: he was the chauffeur of the company's official car, he used to travel from Casale to Genoa (where the company's registered headquarters were.) to bring documents or accompany executives to the airport. It was a nice car, I... I was proud. Every now and then, my mum would drive us kids (apart from me, there are my sisters Gabriella and Samuela, and my brother Simone) to the factory - yes, there was a lot of dust, I remember. And, above all, my dad said there was a lot of dust. My father was a very quiet person...'. He breaks down and runs a hand over his face. "We were a very close family, he had a piece of land, he did odd jobs around the house. In the summer of 2010, he started to feel unwell. In mid-November, he felt a strong pain in his shoulder bone, I am an osteopath and a physiotherapist, I tried to treat it, but the pain didn't improve. So he had an X-ray. At the end of the year, the diagnosis was relentless: "He had the disease. For the first few months, he was in fair condition, then came the crash. Between February and March 2011, he gradually found breathing more difficult and he had severe pain in his back. He died at home, looked after by my mum and all of us.

Katia Marinotto on the death of Maria Paola Granziera.

"I am her daughter. My mother was born in Camino, in 1964 she moved to Casale in Oltreponte, and from 1969 to 2002 she lived in Oltreponte, in the house she and my dad had built together. Mum had always worked in the clothing industry, both as an employee and as the owner of a workshop. In the last two years before her retirement, she worked as a clerk in a company in Casale. She died at the age of 60, on 21 March 2002. Before falling ill, she was a hyperactive woman: she used to take long walks in the hills and in the mountains, in the Varaita Valley; she even walked round the Monviso Mountain on foot. She loved being in the midst of nature and when she returned

from these long walks, she felt full of energy. And then there were her friends, they came to our house, we had dinners, barbecues. She also managed to find time to help out the elderly, the lonely, the sick. Until? "She never complained, she tended to play it down, but this time it seemed more serious to me, so I insisted on her going to the doctor's. In June, the X-ray showed that one of her lungs was full of water. At the Molinette Hospital, on 1 July, Professor Maggi operated on her: the operation was complex, because the disease was much more extensive than had been thought. Afterwards, she seemed a little better. What can we say? One hoped. Back home, after convalescence in Veruno, she took a few steps, followed the treatment with painkillers, and then there was the chemo, with its side effects, nausea, vomiting, weakness. My uncle, who had been a nurse, administered the treatment. She died at home; we never left her alone".

Robert Possedel on the death of Sergio Possedel.

"He was my father, he died at the age of 53. He always lived in Casale, he was an engineer at the old phone company, Sip, which later became Telecom. And he was a judo instructor at a local gym. He died on 30 June 1994. The first symptoms appeared in September, October 1993: an insistent cough, we lived on the third floor, he struggled to get upstairs, he had to take a break and sit on the stairs. It was his last year at work, then he thought he would retire. He never did.

Maura Bagna on the death of Elena Ginepro.

"She was my mother, she had always lived in Casale: *viale Bistolfi, via Gonzaga, strada Cavalcavia*, all addresses near the railway station. She was a nurse (SRN) and, when she retired, did voluntary work and she looked after my children. We had a symbiotic relationship. She died on 5 April 2012. It all started in the summer of 2010, when she experienced chest pain. Like her, I am a nurse and married to a doctor, but neither of us thought that the pain could be caused by something like that. In 2011, the CT scan confirmed the diagnosis of mesothelioma, and to think that the X-ray showed nothing abnormal. Instead, there were already secondaries (metastases) in her ribs. She never knew; against everyone's advice, I chose not to tell her. She had chemo and it was a disaster. She moved in with me, so she was never alone again. One evening, while taking a shower, she broke her arm (humerus), the result of a bone metastasis. We had to take her for orthopaedics treatment for a while, then to cardiology, where I work, because there was also pulmonary oedema. The last two days she was in the hospice. In short,' she sighs, closing her eyes, 'she never left the hospital.

Ivana Roggero on the death of Alessandro Roggero.

"He was my father. He had always lived in Casale, first in *Porta Milano*, then in the centre and finally not far from the *Sobrero Institute*. He worked in a bank; he liked to read and travel. He was close to my mum, always together. And he was very close to my children too: he was a very good grandfather, always there for them, he often took them to play in the public gardens, and they adored him. If he hadn't been there when they were little, I don't know what I would have done with work. He died on 13 April 2010. He had pain in his shoulder, he couldn't even sleep. It was strange for me: I had never seen him sick. He went to the hospital and... it all came out. After he died, everything changed. He was my mother's support, her point of reference; she aged suddenly, before she was always cheerful, then she became sad, frightened".

Nicoletta Libero on the death of Franco Libero.

"He was my father, he lived in Casale in *Salita Sant'Anna* and was a bank clerk at the San Paolo Bank, a very active man, a sportsman, always together, him and mother. Before his illness, he was in excellent health. He died on 12 November 2005, at the age of 66. In September 2003, when he came back from his holidays, I saw him and knew something was wrong. He confirmed that he was out of breath when he climbed the stairs. Since his mother and sister had died of heart problems, he became suspicious and went to see a specialist, a friend of his. The cardiologist immediately realised: "There is water in the lung here". That evening, I took him straight to the hospital to remove the fluid. Then he was admitted to the San Luigi in Orbassano, they gave him a shot and sent the sample for analysis. We waited for the outcome. I will always remember it...'. The memory is heartbreaking, her voice slurred. "It was 30 December, the doctor didn't want to give the diagnosis, 'go home, spend the holidays in peace and then we'll meet again...!', but my father insisted, he wanted to know everything. He insisted, he wanted to know everything. And so the doctor gave in and gave his verdict. My father told him: 'You are giving me a death sentence'. And so it was. Sometimes he would look at me and say: "I never thought I would end up like this". He was afraid for us, that we might have been exposed like him. He also tried a treatment that... but yes, we knew it was useless, but you do everything, don't you? We took him to Rome, for an alternative therapy by an American. Dad didn't object, but he said: "I'm doing it for you. Do you really believe I will be the first to be saved?"

Massimo Pozzi, secretary general of the Cgil Union for Piedmont

The union is a plaintiff in the Eternit Bis trial, Lawyer Laura D'Amico.

He recalled his experience as secretary of the Union in Alessandria, his closeness to his colleague Guglielmo Cavalli (who died of mesothelioma in 1992, in whose name a school competition is held yearly, involving thousands of students from the Casale area), the conference on asbestos promoted in 1984 with the Inca (the Union's welfare & assistance branch), the struggles and pressures to obtain the 1992 law that banned asbestos in Italy. "Our commitment remains, at every level, because unfortunately the disease is still with us".

PICKET OUTSIDE THE COURT

On Monday 25th, a delegation of the Cgil Pensioners' Union and a delegation of Ibl workers attended the picket, organised by representatives of Afeva and Legambiente, at the court (held in a university building) where the Eternit Bis trial takes place, to support the fight against industrial accidents and environmental pollution (a worker died a few days ago at the Ibl plant in Coniolo).

NEXT HEARING

The next hearing in the Eternit Bis trial will take place on Monday November the 8th, 2021 (the 1st of November being All Saints' Day and therefore a national holiday). It will continue hearing the families of the victims - a total of 36 – called by other plaintiffs' lawyers.

<https://www.silmos.it/eternit-bis-ora-si-entra-nelle-case-delle-vittime-dellamianto/>