

SILVANA MOSSANO



On March the 15th, 2012 Marco Giorcelli died. He breathed his last breath at 7 am that morning. For fourteen months he had lived with pleural mesothelioma, or rather, that was the time he had been aware of the disease. In fact, who knows how many years he had had it in him, how many years people affected by it live. Mesothelioma is the asbestos cancer, known for its long latency, time from when the fiber creeps in; silent, devious and patient, the fiber deceitfully weaves its web.

Today exactly ten years have gone by since his death.





Marco Giorcelli, mesothelioma victim: he was 51 years old when he died.

Marco Giorcelli never worked at Eternit, and never handled asbestos for professional reasons. He was an excellent student at the Balbo Classical High School and graduated in Modern Literature from the University of Turin. He had been a brilliant journalist ever since the age of eighteen and, for nineteen years, from the age of 33 until his death, he was the intelligent and passionate Editor-in-Chief of the bi-weekly "Il Monferrato". "His" newspaper.



In Via Roma in Casale Monferrato

Marco Giorcelli died at the age of 51.

Marco Giorcelli is among the 392 names listed in the Eternit Bis trial, which is taking place in the Court of Assizes in Novara: that number - 392 - is a sample (by default) of the asbestos victims of Casale and its surroundings. They are many more.



Marco Giorcelli, loved cycling (2007)

Marco Giorcelli was my husband.

But I am not a plaintiff.

Why?

1 - I did not accept compensation from the defendant Stephan Schmidheiny as an out-of-court settlement. It was a legitimate opportunity, which some have chosen (or choose) freely. If you settle, you can no longer be a plaintiff. I did not: I did not ask for and, therefore, did not receive one cent.

2 - Another reason why one does not become a plaintiff, is although one might have a strong bond is affectionately with a victim, there are no family ties that confers the right to be a plaintiff. I, on the other hand, would have the right to be part of the case as a victim's widow.

3 - Another reason why one might decide not to become a plaintiff is because one has no trust in the sentence attributing the defendant responsibility and that the compensation ordered by a judge will ever be paid: a lack of trust could be understandably motivated by the disappointment many feel and have felt after the Eternit maxi-trial guilty verdict was swept away by the statute of limitations. But I do not: I have not lost faith that, sooner or later, a sentence will indisputably sanction that our community has been wronged and that someone committed that crime, - willfully or negligently the Court will say - causing hundreds and hundreds of victims.

So?

I have chosen not to be a plaintiff because I am driven by a stubborn and persevering (let's say: even naive) hope that this tragedy will end in a possible reconciliation through repentance, free from any blackmail to try and avoid the criminal trial.

I waited - confident, and then, I have to admit, frustrated - for the defendant Stephan Schmidheiny to appear in Court even at the last minute, at least once, a moment before the verdicts that followed in the Eternit maxi-trial in Turin: I waited for him on February the 13th, 2012 at the end of the trial in the court of first instance (in front of the computer monitor, open on the kitchen table, watching it: Marco was already

very weak by then and I did not leave him alone even for a moment); and then on June the 3rd, 2013 in the Court of Appeal; and, again, on November the 19th, 2014 at the Supreme Court in Rome. A defendant is entitled to the last word. He or she can choose not to be questioned, but still make spontaneous statement and he can say whatever he (or she) wants, their version of the facts, an apologies. Nothing. He did not come.

Then the Eternit Bis procedure started. The case has been divided in three courts, including the biggest one, which takes place in the Court of Assizes in Novara, for 392 asbestos deaths in Casale and surroundings.

And I have not lost hope that Schmidheiny will repent.

I am aware that I do not have a large following in my resolute goal and in my tenacious yearning, but I cannot find any other way to appease this long suffering that has affected my land and my people.

Even digging into the depths of my soul and looking for objective reasons, I cannot cultivate resentment, I need an act of pacification, of reconciliation I would argue that, exhausted by grief, we all need it.

To get there, we need the Swiss entrepreneur to drastically change attitude. He needs to come out of his protective fort; we need to look each other in the eye.

And he could say: "I, Stephan Schmidheiny, did not want to kill these people, I am deeply saddened by it, but I was not totally aware that asbestos could cause this steady stream of deaths over the years ". Well, one would have to ignore the scientific studies known at the time, the Neuss conference he convened, the mystification manuals developed and implemented by his staff...

Allow me to proceed, my goal is higher.

Schmidheiny could continue like this: "However, it is indisputable that I worked with asbestos in my factories, when it was not forbidden by law". It is so, even if the business side was full of propaganda and pressure so that Governments (in Italy and elsewhere) remained lukewarm or calls to ban fell on deaf ears for a long time.

Allow me to proceed, my goal is higher.

Schmidheiny again: "It is true, although it was not forbidden, other industrialists of the sector and I ignored the alarming and scientific warnings (which turned out to be well-founded) and continued to use it until it was banned by law".

So what? So what now? And, therefore, now, Mr. Schmidheiny perform a noble act: beg forgiveness of all of us who have suffered and are suffering. It is a demanding, but indispensable request. It is the moment, after so many years. For us, for him.

And help us in the only way possible: by investing the resources needed to fund research so that a cure is found quickly, as quickly as possible. How much? "Whatever it takes."

Not a few million thrown around, "do what you want with it, but leave me alone," no. What is needed is a body - a foundation or other - coordinated by you: as you have proven to be a capable entrepreneur (I have sincerely admired your commitment to help the people of Latin America), put yourself at the head of it to identify and hire the best scientists in the world who, without allowing vanity and battles (which we have

sometimes witnessed with sadness!), find the decisive therapy. A treatment to cure. Think: in Casale Monferrato and in the world. You could be proud of the result in saving people.

That is why I am not a plaintiff: because I have not lost hope and the clarity of mind to keep this channel open. At the trial I suffer but the only compensation I ask Schmidheiny is much more than what a judge could award me.

In the meantime, the trial(s) is/are (will be) running its course. This is called justice. And judges, I am sure, will take this into account in what is called "trial behavior."

And if Mr. Schmidheiny asks: "What will I gain, if the trial continues?", this would be my answer: "You gain yourself, Mr. Schmidheiny, without the shortcut of a quid pro quo; you gain your inner peace which, otherwise, whatever the outcome of the trials (those underway and others that may be brought), you will never have, as long as you live. It is his great opportunity for redemption."

Only sincere and factual repentance can be followed by forgiveness.

I, an aggrieved party, await his step, with a clear mind and an outstretched hand.

The following are two passages that are significant for me.

The first is the editorial that Marco published, on January the 31st, 2011, just after his diagnosis of mesothelioma was confirmed. It was entitled: "Sick of/with/due to asbestos, now am a real Casale man!"

The second is the last short chapter of my book "*Malapolvere* (Bad Dust)" (Edizioni Sonda) published on December the 10th, 2010. What inspired me to write that book was the pain for my people, about whom I began to write in 1984, at that time, not personally involved. At the time Marco (while I was writing "*Malapolvere*") was very well, there was no sign of the disease that was diagnosed, by a wicked and mocking fate, a few weeks later. After reading the draft, unaware of his impending doom, he told me, "It's good, good, but it's so painful I wouldn't recommend it to my best friend."

* * *

MARCO GIORCELLI

Malignant epithelial mesothelioma. The verdict is there, in three words. With one - they explained to me - that holds hope, because it indicates the less aggressive form of this tumor. The asbestos tumor. The one that we can best try to fight, with the highest hopes of survival. And I will try.

But those three words, so clear on a medical report that does not need to add too many explanations, since Tuesday, January the 25th are my star of David, the sign of my - let's call it disease - my being different, the words that have changed everything inside me. Until Christmas Eve, a month before, I had worked and lived head down: with frenzy, haste, with the blessed and cursed passion of a job that keeps you glued to the office even 14 hours a day. Then, on the very evening of Christmas Eve, an insistent cough rang the first bell of alarm. Just flu, just a little insistent, like the one that is people have this year? Would it be better to get vaccinated next year? No, it wasn't the flu. And the right vaccine still doesn't exist. Pleural mesothelioma. It's the one that took away first hundreds of Eternit workers, then hundreds of citizens, of different ages. "Environmental exposure," the oncologist concludes. Of course. I've ever worked with asbestos.

But I have always lived in Casale Monferrato, this unfortunate, devastated city, which, however, I cannot stop loving. Fifty years, excluding vacation periods, breathing in the air of this town that raised me: smelling the violets of spring, braving the heat of summer, letting the fog and the smoke of roasted chestnuts shape my bones, eating snow. Studies, loves, friendships, family, work: it's all here. In Casale Monferrato and on the surrounding hills: soft roundnesses that I have learned to know since I was a little boy, standing on my father's Vespa, riding over the "bricchi" and stopping to take a breath on the most scenic points, from where we could recognize the bell towers, the villages, the profile of the Alps.

I've always considered myself a true Casalese, a person from Casale. Since Tuesday, January the 25th, I am more so than ever. I, too, bear the deepest sign of being from Casale: asbestos related cancer. Like thousands of people who are no longer here, like hundreds who are fighting the same battle. We are the people from Casale Monferrato. A small Hiroshima, a small Nagasaki, a small Chernobyl. But how small? Certainly we are companions in misfortune, and if we were to collect the overalls of those who worked with asbestos and died of it, we could make an enormous pile, like Auschwitz. And, in another pile, the shoes, bags, books of those who have never worked with asbestos, but who died anyway for this cursed fiber.

So far, since January 25, I have not yet felt anger, I mean a personal feeling of resentment, for those who have littered the city with the dust that has taken so many of us away. And so many friends and people I have known personally: Mauro Cavallone, who followed me like an older brother, who almost didn't even have time to fight, and who waited for me to take his last breath; Luisa Minazzi, who kept the less aggressive variety at bay for a few years, and who perhaps breathed dust in that courtyard near the embankment where I also played, as a boy: but it will have been almost 45 years; Giorgio Cozio, who suffered in the room next to mine and left us in silence, one night; Alessandro Prosio, who one day came to me in the editorial office with a note that said: "Damn asbestos. Thank you Eternit" and who a few months later gave up. And many, many, too many others: my uncle Valente, my aunt Anna.

Or rather, I would like to say, for now I have not added - perhaps because the physical pain has so far spared me - any further feeling of anger, for the fact that I too have found this symbol, this star of David embroidered with one word, mesothelioma. Because I have been feeling angry for years: not for the defendants of the maxi-trial that is being celebrated in Turin, the largest ever opened in Italy for a massacre at work, but for all that accumulation of cruelty, lies, subterfuge, connivance, which allowed the "Asbestos Lords" to build, a monstrous machine to produce power and money, money and power in Casale and around the world,: a custom-built car with a small, perhaps - for them - negligible defect, that it uses human fuel: dignity, lives and broken families. Turned into dust before their destiny was fulfilled.

Honestly, before the maxi-trial started in Turin, I thought that at the origin of the disaster there were attitudes that were seriously guilty, but above all irresponsible: a terrible lightness, a tremendous underestimation of the risk. What emerged at the trial, which revealed the existence of manuals of lies and therefore an atrocious awareness of what was being done and caused, horrified me. There are certainly guilty parties and theirs was a crime against humanity.

The defendants have the right to a fair trial and I wish them not to be guilty: otherwise we should feel sorry for them, more than anger, for how they denied the sense of humanity in the name of profit, of power. Certainly, we of Casale Monferrato ask for justice. For our dead, for our suffering, for our families devastated as if another war had been fought over our skies in the twentieth century. Very long, exhausting. And with no possibility to defend ourselves. A crime against humanity.

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From the book "Malapolvere" (2010, Edizioni Sonda)

Open letter

Asbestos Gentlemen, hear me.

We who have been branded by asbestos live in fear today. Thousands of personal fears which, when added up, become collective anguish. It is heartbreaking to doubt that, all of a sudden, without warning, it will be you or, even worse, your child, your mother or your father, your brother, your husband or your wife, that it will be your friend, your colleague, your neighbor who will be the next victim of mesothelioma. More than asbestos, its cruel stepchild is the obsession of our days, the nightmare of our nights.

We, who have been branded by asbestos, study, work, raise our children, watch them play and live, make plans, take out a mortgage for the house, invest healthy ambitions in work with the latent doubt that our future projects may already be prey to the unaware tiny fiber that could choke our breath.

We, who have been branded by asbestos, fear the days of a sentence without appeal. Whoever submits to the judgment of men has more opportunities to prove his innocence, to avert a sentence, to appeal to human understanding and pity. And whoever relies on the judgment of a God knows that His mercy will take sincere repentance into account. Asbestos fiber does not: it knows neither a sense of justice nor stoops to mercy. It strikes without logic and kills. Goodness of heart, education, wealth are not worth it.

We, who have been branded by asbestos, want to free ourselves from the inescapable noose.

The only possible way out is to find a cure against mesothelioma.

But we need money.

Gentlemen of asbestos, we need "your" money.

How much? You decide. With the entrepreneurial skills that have guaranteed so much success, make the best and noblest of investments: look for the most capable scientists, entrust them with the task and motivate them "concretely" towards the goal.

It will be "our" common goal: the faster the researchers will find the effective and definitive solution, the faster you will stop the paying out and the faster we will celebrate the victory of the healing of asbestos.

That day will be a beautiful day. For everyone.

We, who have been branded by asbestos, want to believe that you will not back down. No "image expert" could offer you a better face, a better way out than this. No judge or conscience adjuster could offer you a more virtuous absolution and ethical redemption.

The only way to succeed is to invest in this battle.

The only way to win the battle is not to leave the field before you have defeated your opponent.

This is what will happen, won't it?

Silvana Mossano