

ULLADULLA is a fishing town (population 7,000) on the South Coast of NSW; the name is said to mean "safe harbour." In the early 1930s the town was transformed by the immigration of Italian fishermen; today it represents a curious blend of two cultures. One Italian custom, the Blessing Of The Fleet, attracts more than 30,000 tourists on Easter Sunday and has been adopted by Australian fishermen up and down the coast. BERWYN LEWIS reports.

FISHING FAMILIES



ON ULLADULLA fishing trawlers, the patron saint of the sea, St Salvatore, sits beside the latest satellite navigation gear.

Italian-Australian marriages are the rule in the town and not the exception. In the houses, Madonnas adorn microwaves, Infantas gaze upon barometers and two-way radios tuned to boats at sea crackle with Italian jokes and songs. Marbled floors, rows of columns on balconies, and cellars of good Australian wine grown by Italians are testimony to their success.

At Lucy Greco's (a great-grandmother four times over) the mantelpieces and china cabinets are genealogical repositories. Framed photographs of smiling Australian brides partnered by devastatingly handsome Italian grooms suited in apricot velvet and matching outside bow-ties are flanked by glass swans, china elephants, crucifixes and kewpie dolls.

Today the children of these couples, and *their* children, are doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers, restaurant owners, university and school students. And some of them have followed their fathers' footsteps and gone fishing for a living.

Today in Ulladulla you can't buy a *cappuccino*, at least I couldn't find one, but you can buy *arana* and *aranciata* alongside bottles of Coke and Quelch, the local orange juice product, in milk bars. *Spicchiatteddi* (Sicilian biscuits) are more likely to be packed into school lunch boxes than Vegemite sandwiches, and the word spaghetti or "Spag" is synonymous with Italian. Someone is either a "Spag" or married to a "Spag."

The history began five generations ago when Joe Puglisi, now 80, came to Australia in 1919 from the island of Lipari, near Sicily. His father, Michael, followed in 1921. They were one of the first Italian families to arrive in Australia.

They settled in Wollongong and began to fish, as they had for generations in Italy. They soon discovered the highly lucrative waters of Ulladulla, in those days a collection of shacks, a post office and a saw mill. Their timber boats were about 30 feet long. One of the originals, now more than 50 years old, is still in use with the Millard family.

Using hand-lines they fished for snapper, flathead, morwong and shark. They travelled at less than walking speed, at about six knots with their 8 hp engines. Today their boats with 460 hp engines reach top speeds of 11 knots. Then, too, if they weren't using shark bait they'd use chuck steak which they purchased for fourpence a pound. It had to be cut up and attached to each of the 120 hooks on each of the six hand-lines on board.

In 1937 the family moved to Ulladulla. A partnership was formed between father, two sons, Joe and Tory Puglisi, and a brother-in-law, Joe Greco, who married Lucy. Today there are more than 40 fishing families descended from the original fishermen.

According to an Italian custom the oldest sons are named after their grandfather and oldest daughters are named after their grandmothers. Until it all became slightly out of control in Ulladulla.

"There were too many Salvatores, Joes and Lucy's running around," says Lucy, who is now 67 and lives with her daughter Josie. "You'd stand at the back door and call out 'Tory,' or 'Joey' and half a dozen kids would run up."

Today it's still confusing. You can meet four Salvatores in an hour at the Co-op. There's a 21-metre boat called Salvatore V owned by Fred ("King Farouk") Campesi and his wife Nancy. Their son, Salvatore works on it. There's another boat, the Torina M, admittedly a derivative, owned by Tory Puglisi. And Tory's youngest son, Salvatore, does not work on the Torina M. He's a carpenter.

THE FIRST family boat was built when Tory Puglisi was 11. He came to Australia 61 years ago at the age of three.

At first the catch was freighted to Sydney by an old Studebaker coach to Nowra and then by train. By 1938 the Puglisi family invested in their own freighter, a Ford ute. They also had the twice-weekly Illawarra Steamship Navigation Company service from Nowra at their disposal.

Fishing trips lasted from 35 hours to six weeks. Everyone lived on board and they were lucky if they had a couple of gallons of water between them. When they needed stores or a wash they would pull into Ulladulla, stock up, and wash up in the creek.

"There was no wireless in those days," says Nancy Puglisi, Tory's wife. They have been married for 35 years.

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Tory and Nancy Puglisi with photo of forebears... "the men would be gone for weeks on end."

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"I was by myself with the children. You wouldn't know where the men were for weeks on end."

The old nets were made of cotton and the women would help mend them. These days nets are made of polyethylene.

"In those days there were so many leatherjackets around they'd eat the snapper off your line, so you couldn't fish by daylight," said Tory Puglisi.

Nowadays boats are loaded with the latest in high tech. Radar, echo sounders, water temperature gauges, power steering, auto pilots, sat. nav. (satellite navigation) instruments and computers, refrigeration, hot showers and a range of radios including one channel always connected to those back home.

"We can tell them what time we'll be home for tea," said one of the "deckies" (deckhands).

Fishing techniques include seine trawling, tuna poling, trapping, netting, hooker gear, otter boards, set lining and hand-lining, but everything has been changed by the sat. nav. and the spotter planes.

"You can punch in your co-ordinates, set the exact direction and go chase the tuna," says 21-year-old Salvatore Campesi. Spotter planes are owned by Heinz, Safcol and Tuna Processors. They radio through the positions and the boats race to the spot. It's a first-in, first-served system.

Tory Puglisi uses what he calls his "secret service" radio channel which no one else can tune into. He can thus use exclusive information. He also avoids giving away too much about the size of his catch or his position when he radios into the Co-op. He reports the details in a code based on multiples of four (eg, six boxes means 24).

Fishing is no longer the simple man's occupation. Boats cost over half a million dollars. Fuel costs are up to \$1,300 a week. Competition from cheap imports from New Zealand is undermining the local market. Because it does not have a high political profile as a primary industry, fishing receives little by way of government subsidy. Add to this the fact that the price of fish, for the supplier, has scarcely changed in 10 years and you have an industry which is close to floundering.

After the fish cheque comes in from the Sydney fish market, the Ulladulla Fishermen's Co-op deducts the costs of freighting and handling. The remainder is distributed between the boats. From their individual payments they deduct their licence fees, and for boat owners there's insurance of around \$150 a week, maintenance such as new nets, wire, ropes and the painting of the boat's hull three times a year.

"We sell our fish for 60 to 70 cents a kilo. The fish shops get \$1 a piece. Everyone thinks it's the fishermen making all the money, but fish prices haven't kept up with the times," said Salvatore Campesi.

During World War II the Puglisi's boats were commandeered. "They put a sign on the mast, 'As from today this boat is the property of the US Navy.' We had to wait for four years till we got going again," said Tory Puglisi, whose boat, the Little Michael, was sunk off the coast of New Guinea. He eventually received compensation.

But it was a difficult time for him. He had just built a house, he owed money to the Taxation Department and because he was considered an enemy alien he was not allowed to travel without a police permit and had his driver's licence confiscated.

During that time Tory and his family built boats. After the war they built their own trawler, the John Dory, the first of their fleet.

TORY DIDN'T expect his sons to become fishermen, but one of them, the oldest, Michael, works on the Torina M. Another son, Joe, studied medicine and science, worked as a pathologist and then returned to Ulladulla to open Tory's Seafood Restaurant with one of his sisters, Lee. It opened in 1981 and overlooks the port of Ulladulla.

Tory doesn't go fishing any more. He is a government-chosen board member of the Fish Marketing Authority and travels up and down the coast.

Tory's youngest son, Salvatore, is engaged to an Australian, Dawn. "All the Australian girls in Ulladulla have Italian boyfriends. They're all good looking," she says.

According to another Italian custom, fathers give their sons a block of land each. Salvatore and Dawn, consequently, have built their house.

Nancy Puglisi believes love, Italian style, leads to more stable marriages and begins in infancy with classic Italian affection towards their children. "The kisses begin when they're babies and last for the rest of their lives," she said.

Not all Ulladulla Italian families have been as easy going with their children as Nancy and Tory Puglisi. Everyone knows of an arranged marriage and recently Augustus Puglisi went to Italy to fetch a bride. He



LORRIE GRAHAM

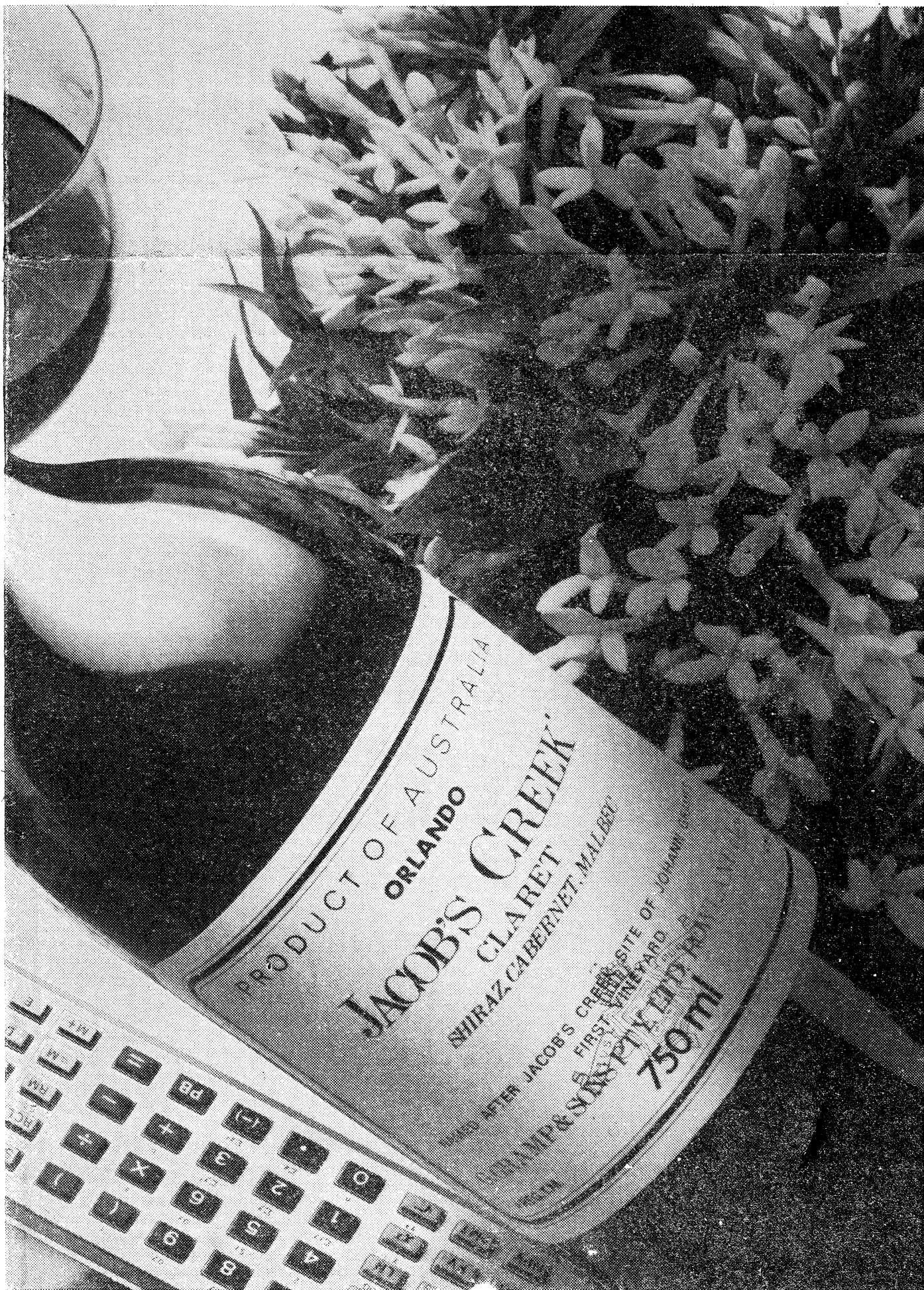
You'll find business a pleasure at Jacob's Creek.

The remarkably mellow red from Orlando.



Puglisi family at home, left; Fred ("King Farouk") Campesi and son Salvatore, above; Lucy Greco, 67, and grand-daughters, right... "the kisses begin when they're babies and last for the rest of their lives."

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returned, installed her with his mother, Gracie, where she is now learning to speak English, while he fishes for their future in South Australia.

FISHING isn't exactly one of the safe jobs. In 1981 the Mariana, an older boat, went down off Eden. Two of the crew were rescued by Fred Campesi.

"They were in a total state of shock. One of the guys fainted when we got them on board. Nobody knows what happened. The boat filled up with water and the pumps couldn't keep up," said Salvatore Campesi.

Other boats lost at sea include the Vis in 1980, a South Australian boat fishing in NSW, the Imlay Star and the Apollo in 1982 off Eden and off Ulladulla in 1982, the Italian Star.

Down at the Co-op, Joe Greco, secretary and manager, presides over the freezing, packing and freighting operations.

The stainless steel sinks, draining boards and overhead, abattoir-style racking, the weighing and bulk freezing rooms are deserted. It's still too early. The fish don't start arriving by the barrow-full until after 1.30 pm.

Joe is the son of Lucy and the late Joe Greco. He is a nephew to Tory and Nancy Puglisi. There are 45 members of the Co-op but only 20 are producers. "The others are not fishing or have gone back to Italy," says Joe.

The Co-op, formed in 1959 with a pooling of all individually owned resources, has ice-making facilities which produce more than 30 tons of ice a day, stored in a 120-tonne capacity room. There's also a slipway, an engineering and fuel shop, fish packing and holding rooms, a ship chandlery and blast freezers.

Freshly caught fish is weighed, packed in 35kg lots and consigned to the Sydney market. It is sold on the auction system with reserves placed on certain species. If reserves fail to be met, the fish is stored for a day. After that, if it's still not sold, the fish is dumped with offal dealers and processed into fertiliser.

"The fishing industry is in turmoil," says Joe. "There are too many boats supplying the two markets in Sydney and Melbourne."

He glances across at the idle boats in the harbour. "The trouble is, the more fish caught the greater the glut and the more the price drops." It pays to catch less.

"But," says Joe, "it still gets a bit hectic around here when they come in."

On good days they fish around the continental shelf, 16 to 20 miles off the coast at depths from 200 to 400 fathoms. The fishermen crowd together on the narrow fishing grounds.

The Co-op chiller rooms are kept at a 0 deg C. When the catch comes in they'll be packed with more than 5,000 boxes.

In the old days, seven-ton blocks of ice had to be broken up with sledge hammers. Today ice is dropped into the storage room, stored at 16 deg C and automatically raked to prevent fusing.

THE SOFT rain flattens the sea. The first of the returning boats is sighted on the grey horizon. A small crowd gathers at the end of the wharf, alerting the practised eye of the seagulls. A tractor pulls up, hauling a series of crates. The roar of the huge container truck backing up to the Co-op dock and the chatter of two-way radios bursts upon the quiet harbour. Everything and everyone is synchronised around the arrival of fish.

The boat ties up. Twenty-five boxes of silver bream are unloaded within minutes by men in bright orange foul-weather gear. The winches scream, the young men haul on the lines and heavy blocks, ropes are fed in and out. Fish and the smell of diesel fill the air. They've been out since 2 am. Now it's 5.30 pm.