





Daniele Tassa

By Natalie Tassa, Birmingham, 2024





My dad's name is Daniele, which is Daniel in Italian. And my brother is also Daniel and then I've got Daniela in my middle name. A lot of people used to call him Danielle incorrectly, so at appointments and things like that or they'd come out and they'd go "Danielle Tassa?" and he absolutely hated it. So, he liked 'Danny' but mostly 'Dan' because people didn't know how to pronounce his name and they used to call him the girl's name, he would say, "It's not Danielle."

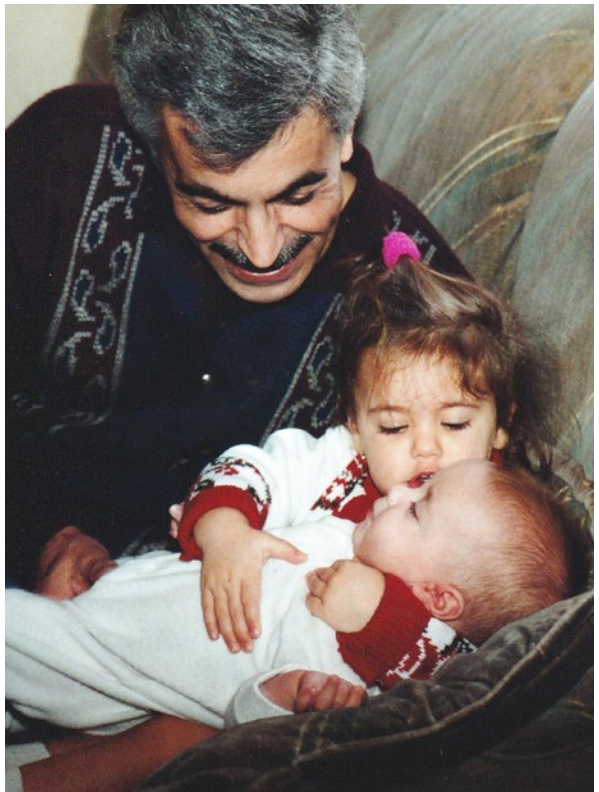
He was born in Italy. He followed his brother Dino over to England. He was very close to his brother, and he missed him that much that he followed him over. Unfortunately, Uncle Dino passed away very shortly before my dad.

Dad is from Italy from a little town called Avellino. It's just by Napoli, which is in Naples. We thought for a long time that he was born in Rome, but he wasn't, he was born in Irpinia in the Province of Avellino on 21st June 1947. He came over to England as a student in 1967 at the age of 20.

It was a very different life in Italy and times were hard. My dad was a very clever man. When you come from a country where people are struggling a lot around you, and you see a country where there are opportunities, it feels like the country of dreams, to come to England and get a job.

I think when he came here, he would have faced some adversities. Also, at that time, coming into the country as a young Italian man, he got a lot of attention. And he was known for having a lot of attention in his younger years. He was a very 'one woman to the next'. It's very well known in my family that he and my uncle were quite the pair, 'Italian stallions' as they say.









I think whatever adversity again he faced; that strong, proud feeling of being Italian helped him. And then coupled with the fact that you've got, I suppose, women throwing themselves at you, I think he really embraced it. He loved it, he stayed here, and he built a new life.

He came to England as a student, but soon decided he would stay longer and needed to work. He first started as a long-distance lorry driver and next did other delivery driving jobs. He also worked at Land Rover and later a lorry driver for Birmingham City Council working his way up the ladder to Stores Manager. He then went on to work as an Estate Agents.

From when I was a small child, I remember he worked for the Council. Dan and I used to go to the site where he worked, which was literally just a five-minute walk from home. I remember being taken there a lot as a child, we would go into his office and into the storeroom, which was full of things like screws and nails. It used to excite us because there were all these racks and racks. We'd always pinch a few screws or go and play with the photocopier. We used to love going into his workplace, it was nice. And he was the boss.

He met his first wife Pat, my sister Sarah's mom, and then years later he met his second wife Sue, my mom, they had myself and my brother Daniel. Dan's my younger brother. There are 16 months between us. We're like twins, we're inseparable. He's my best friend. We've always been close; we know what each other is thinking. You would think that we were twins. People think that we're twins a lot of the time because we're so close, I go out and chill with my brother a lot.





My sister's name is Sarah, she is the oldest, but we are all very close. When we were kids, Sarah would take us out a lot to places like the cinema and Drayton Manor, she also did a lot of learning activities, and creative things and played a lot with us doing things like Power Rangers. Sarah has also taught us a lot from as long back as I can remember and still until now. I am very close with her. She is also very clever and a musical person just like pops.

Dad was a very loving and caring father. He was very present, active and involved in our lives, being there 24-7 with us. He was always playing with us. We used to play games, we used to beg him on a Sunday to take us to the park and he used to, we used to get what we wanted. He was a loving dad, and I was daddy's little girl. Looking at the photos of us growing up, I'd always be in between his legs or on his back. My dad was quite reserved but very loving at the same time. He was always there for us. From taking us out to when we were growing up and then giving us lifts to friends or if I was running late or had something to do with college, he would take me.

He taught us how to ride a bike. There were loads of things that he did, and I've got memories of my dad with cuddles on the sofa. He'd always have his blue and red striped dressing gown on, and I can still see myself cuddling up to him on the sofa.

He didn't just teach me to ride a bike. He taught me to drive a car, my dad was a good driver as well. Being from Italy, you must be, I think driving in a country like Italy, coming to England, these roads were a breeze to him. So, he was a very good driver.

I remember he used to always play in the garden with us as well. It was something we used to do a lot. In the summertime, we'd get to swim and get the pool out. We'd be in the garden a lot with dad. He was a very family man; it was all about the family. So, family parties, meals, the cinemas, Sea Life Centre the park, taking us to all those kinds of things. I don't remember Dad going out much when I was a child unless it was with Mom and us.





He was very musical. He played the guitar, accordion, and the keyboard, and he wrote his own music. He used to write Mum love letters. I've got memories of me, my brother, my sister, and my dad sitting there with our guitars. Me and Daniel had children's size guitars and he'd try and teach us - not that we were very good. He was more of a guitar player, but he did sing as well, so he would be writing the lyrics and playing the guitar and the accordion. He loved his music. He loved things like the Rat Pack, Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, The Beatles, and a lot of Italian artists. That was his kind of music. We had music playing in the house, especially when I was younger. He loved Adriano Celentano. He's an Italian artist.

I can probably sing better Italian than I can speak because of that reason. I remember car drives, every time we'd get in the car it was always Adriano Celentano playing. I think it's embedded in me because as a kid if we'd jump in the car, it would always be on. It would always be Dad driving. He drove to Disneyland Paris, we used to do family holidays every year.

Dad would always be active. He had had a triple heart bypass in 1996, we were quite young then but it still didn't stop him.

He was a true Italian. This was a very strong influence in our lives, which I'm very happy and proud about. The way that he brought us up was very Italian. We would sit around the dinner table and eat together as a family. Family was important. Mom and Dad brought us up to always respect the elders, for instance, you don't walk into a family party without going straight over to the elders to say 'hello', and you would always say goodbye.

Loyalty, respect, and family were heavily embedded in us. With Dad, I feel like it was not just the Italian culture but the person that he was that brought our family together. All my mum's brothers and sisters have said it. He really brought unity into the family. When Dad came along, we'd all do a lot more together as a family. He brought that love and warmth.







And then there was the food as well. The culture that he brought to us all – it's amazing to have an insight into a very different culture. I truly believe that I am the cook that I am because of my dad, He was an amazing cook. Anyone who would come to our house would always talk about the meal, sometimes for years after. And he used to make wine from grapes with my Uncle Dino. And that became a thing in our family. It was like Dad's famous Italian wine. Everyone loved it. Anyone that'd come to our house, you would leave with your belly full. You couldn't come to my house at dinnertime and not eat. My dad would be offended. Sometimes people find it a bit overwhelming because He would say, "Do you want another, do you want something else, do you want another drink, do you want another biscuit" and so on.

That Italian influence was also about football as well. for a female, I love my football, as does Sarah and Dan, and that's because of Dad because we grew up watching Italian football. On the weekend, every weekend we'd watch football together and even in our older years as adults, we would still watch football with my dad.

Growing up with the Italian part of me was hard at times when I was younger, and I had quite a bit of stick from a few people over certain things. But nothing that ever bothered me because of how proud I was. Even when people made little comments and things like that, it really wouldn't bother me because I was so proud to be Italian and proud to be Dad's daughter.

I have been to Italy, and I've been to an Italian wedding, which was something I won't forget. It was a crazy experience. I was a child at the time. It was a little boring for a child to sit through a three-hour service. But after that, the food was unreal. I've never seen anything like it. There must have been at least 20 courses. They'd come around with plates of stuff and you picked which ones you wanted and which ones you didn't. You could have everything you wanted.





I felt like Dad had found the perfect balance of trying to keep the Italian culture instilled into us, but also to not making it awkward for us. They'd hate it if we were bullied over being too Italian in a certain way or not being aware of the English culture as well. He brought us up with a good balance.

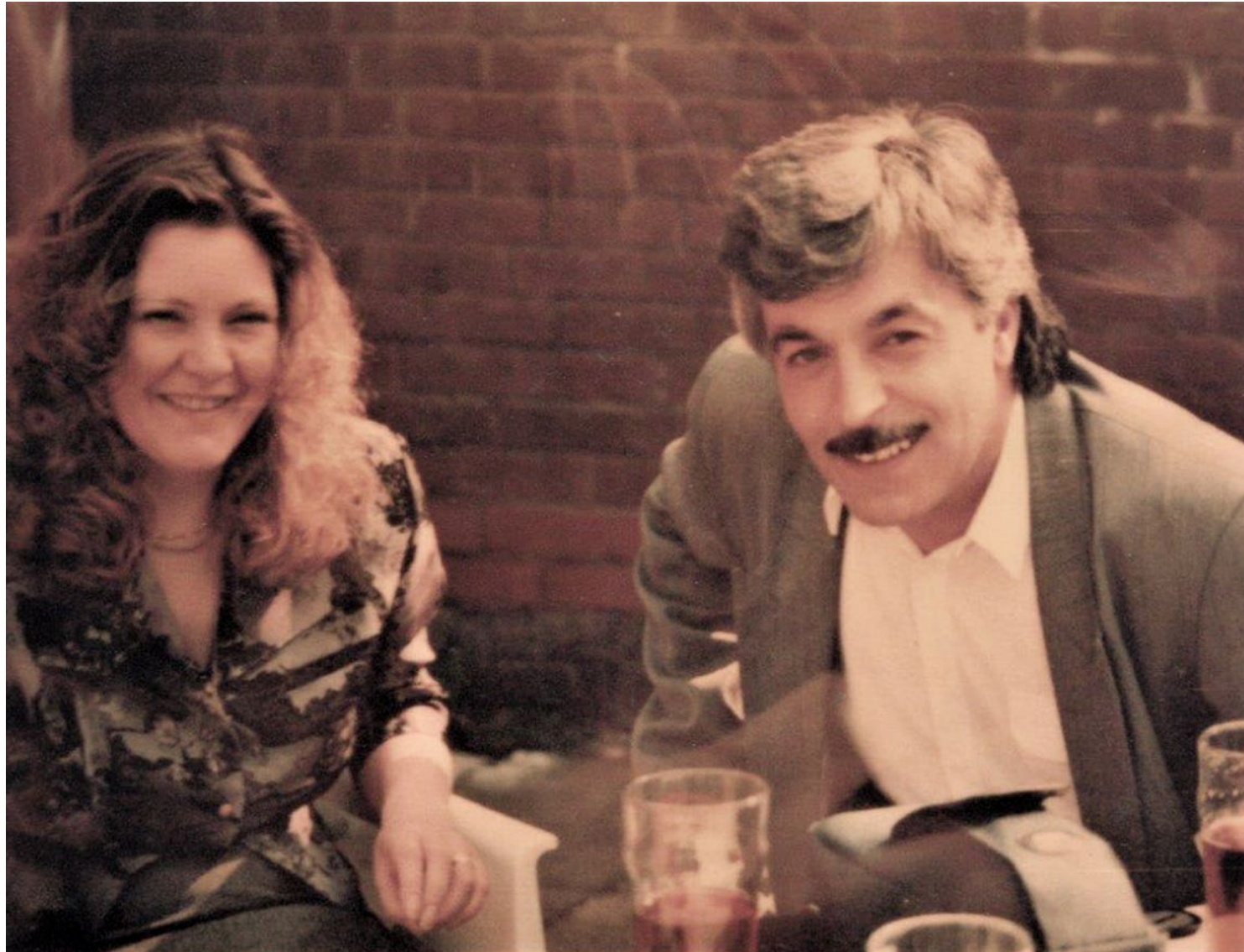
Sarah, came to live with us when she was 16. So, we grew up with my sister and then she married the next-door neighbour Chris. So, she's still next door, Sarah and Chris had a daughter Francesca (my niece). Pops was a very loving grandfather. 'Nonno' is what we call granddad in Italian. My niece Francesca was the apple of his eye, pops absolutely adored her, and she adored him. He was so proud of Cesi and loved watching her grow up into the incredible young lady she is. Pops was a very loving dad, granddad and husband, a true family man.

So, Mom and Dad would go out together, with my aunties and uncles, or with their friends. They'd go on holidays and cruises together, He did go out with work once or twice, we do have a memory of him coming back absolutely drunk out of his face and us really laughing because he was really drunk, and it wasn't very often that he'd do that.

I've got my dad to thank for all this stuff that I've learnt and seen. And for some of the morals and traits that are within me. When I have children, I want my children to sit around the table with me and eat a meal with me, all of us around the table together. I want my children to know about their Italian family roots. I want them to have visited Italy and to know Italian words. I want them to be brought up with loyalty and respect in a warm, happy family home, everything pops gave to us.

Dad spoke English very well, considering it wasn't his first language, any time we had a question about English or Spanish or anything like that, Mum, Dan and I would all ask Dad he was just so clever. So even though English is our first language we'd go to Dad for the answers to those questions.





We still have a connection with family in Italy, but I do feel that's lost a little since Dad passed. My Dad's brother uncle Dino passed then his sister, then my dad, and then my dad's other sister all passed away within a couple of months. We did say we were going to take Dad's ashes back to Italy. We said we might do that in his honour.

He had this famous finger point that he used to do. He put his face down, look up through the top of his eyes and point his finger. It's a thing in our family now. We've got numerous photos of it, but I remember that finger point as a child. He was usually very chilled out, easygoing and laid back. But when he lost his temper, you knew about it. But me and Dan had a way of making him laugh. So, we used to get away with a lot of stuff like that, he was a bit of a softie. When we were teenagers, we were a bit of a nightmare at times, so although he was a softy, he was very firm at the same time.

Dad and Mom brought us up to be respectful and to also know the difference between wrong and right. He brought us up with good morals. Loyalty and respect were a big part of that as well. My mum always says that as kids, she never worried about taking us anywhere. The amount of people would say how well-behaved and respectful we were. When I worked in the hospital Mom and Dad sometimes would come after one of his appointments, he'd come up to my ward to see me. I used to work in a chemo unit, so I'd like to have 150 patients a day. And then all my patients were like, "Oh, that's your dad!? Oh, your daughter's such a beautiful person. She's so lovely. She's made a difference to my life." And he would be so proud. The patients would grab him, and mom and they would be singing my praises, and I could see how proud he was. It was nice for me to know that I was making Dad proud.





He was quiet and quietly confident. He was quiet but when you speak to him, he's got a whole other side and then he's got this funny side to him as well. He could be funny with his sense of humour. He'd got a smile that would light up a room and a laugh that would infect everyone around him. He was very witty, and you wouldn't expect it and then he'd come out with it, and it was just hilarious. He also had a way of making me feel safe when he hugged me, and this has been said by not just me, but so many other people as well.

He was a very caring and sensitive person. He was a very strong man, always wanting to look after everyone else, but sensitive deep down as well. When I look back, I can see he was a sensitive soul. He'd be upset if he knew anyone else was upset. When he got unwell, he struggled with feeling like he maybe wasn't fulfilling his duties. He was always worrying about everyone else, always. Caring about everyone else and thinking about everybody else and not himself. I could see he was struggling. It was after he'd been diagnosed, and he was going through his treatment, and he shared his concerns with me that maybe he didn't feel like the man that he was before that. He didn't feel that maybe he wasn't being man enough to fulfil his duties as a father and as a husband. And I said to him that he's the bravest, and the strongest I've ever seen him in my life. That he's the bravest man that I know. Because he went through so much stuff, and he never complained. He was in so much pain, but he would not complain. He'd get on with it. He was such a soldier. My friends say to me, "Your mum and dad are both soldiers, you come from some soldiers, you've got that strength, Natalie."

So, he never complained about himself. He'd be sitting there in so much pain, but if any one of us had a bad neck or anything, he'd be trying to care for us. We all come first in his life; we were his number one. Don't get me wrong, through my teenage years we had our rocky patches. I think that's typical, daughter and dad clashing, with me becoming a woman, and him struggling with that. We sometimes clashed when it came to men. But that was him being protective of me, so protective. I was his princess; no man was good enough for me.





When he became unwell, I became closer to him in a different way. Working on the unit where I worked for such a long time helped. He opened up to me a lot about stuff that maybe he didn't share with others. So, I think that we had this completely different closeness. I almost feel like I went back to being a child with him. I'd rush home to cook because he used to love my cooking. His favourite dish was spaghetti, but with plain tomato sauce. It's just a simple dish but you have to pack a lot of flavour into it to get that rich taste. So, I'd cook for him every time he was discharged from the hospital. Sometimes he wouldn't eat a full meal, I knew if I cooked the spaghetti and tomato sauce, he'd eat all of it because he absolutely adored it. He said, "I never thought anyone could cook this meal better than me until you came along!"

My dad could be very reserved. Sometimes you know when Dad was angry with you, you just knew. And though he was quite reserved in some ways, he was always very loving, affectionate, and open. I knew I could talk to him. I wouldn't necessarily talk to Dad about man troubles, that was with Mum. But I would always talk to Dad about anything else going on in my life. Work, things like that. I was very open with him. If I went out and got drunk, I'd tell him all about my shenanigans. Communication, especially in later years, was actually fantastic.

When he was unwell, I'd come and sometimes just sit and cuddle him on the sofa and scratch his head because he loved that. They'd developed a nickname for me over the last couple of years, they'd all miss NHS. He had a wound once that wouldn't heal. The hospital was dressing it and it wasn't doing anything. I started dressing it for him and I used some Salt, a good old natural remedy. And it cleared up. He'd been going back and forth to the doctors in the hospital for ages, trying to get this wound cleared. So, they developed the 'Miss NHS' name for me. It was like, "Nat, can you check this out?"





I used to kiss where his cancer was to try and make him laugh. I used to do loads of stuff because I could see he was struggling. Me and my brother would have this little thing. I'd get back from work and Dan would say, "Nat, Dad's down today" and so I'd switch into an absolute clown and do loads of things to try and make him laugh. He used to try and help because that was his way. He'd say, "Even if I can't do much, I'm coming to help", and he's in the kitchen tidying up so he'd come in the kitchen and then I'd start sneaking things into his pocket. Spoons and things like that. And then he'd come and sit in the lounge, and he'd be like, "Oh, Nat!" And he'd laugh and laugh about it. That's the type of person he was.

My families on both sides are so close, on mom's side they consider Dad as their brother. In between my Uncle Dino and my auntie passing, Mum's sister's husband Uncle Michael passed away. Even though Uncle Dino was Dad's brother and best friend, my dad was very close with Uncle Mick. Dad, Mom, Auntie Carole and Uncle Mick would go out together a lot, they would also join us for Christmas, Easter, and many celebrations. Then there is my Auntie Shirley and Uncle John who were very close and all 6 of them would holiday together, go cruising. Go out for meals and drinks together. Especially when Dad was going through his treatment, Uncle Mick would sometimes drive and they'd try and go out once a week together. But then also Dad was close with my Uncle Barry, he'd ring Dad every single day, tell Dad a joke and cheer him up. Considering it was my Mum's brothers and sisters, they all loved him and said he brought family unity and love. In fact, on summer bank holidays the whole family would go out for day trips together.

Pops had 5 brothers and 3 sisters from Italy and later found out he had 9 siblings, he was very close to them and used to speak to them regularly, sometimes daily, he used to love speaking to his brothers and sisters and cherished the phone calls, some days speaking for hours. He was very close to Uncle Dino, Pops would take us round to his every Saturday when we were younger and we loved it. He loved family parties, family BBQs and big family meals, we're a very close family and have such a laugh.





We were always taught to eat around the table. And then little things like leaving the table, we were, as kids, brought up to ask if we could leave the table in Italian. Sometimes our friends would come round, and they'd think it was a bit weird asking to leave the table. As I got older, I'd go to my friend's house, and we'd be able to eat in front of the TV. So, at home I used to say, "Oh I want to eat in front of the TV" And used to have to ask Dad "Can I please eat in the lounge?" And then with a little smirk he'd say "OK, go and get a plate. If you don't put any crumbs anywhere, you can."

He loved his gadgets. For Christmas once we bought him an Apple Watch and he wasn't expecting it, and he was so grateful. My dad was such a grateful person, we'd bought it and hid it in a breadstick box. He was opening the breadstick box and realised that there was an Apple Watch box inside, he just burst into tears because he was that grateful. And I used to buy him little things a lot. I'd come home with like his favourite nuts or little things to cheer him up.

I used to make my dad cry a lot but in a nice way. When he was going through his treatment, I'd write him little letters and cards and things like that. And I bought him this superhero card. And he'd burst into tears every time. I'd watch him start to read it and then I'd see his eyes start going red. And then he'd look up at me as if to say, "Why are you doing this to me, Bab?" And then he'd look back down, and I knew that he knew what I was trying to say to him. He appreciated everything, the smallest of things. He certainly knew he was loved. But he showed us so much love to us. It had to be. I wouldn't have had it any other way. But then it makes it more painful. The harder you love, the harder you grieve. And I loved him so hard.





I want him to be remembered for how strong he was through his illness. Not all the rubbish that he had to put up with through it all. His body was going through so much, but he would never let it stop him. We'd always have to tell him to go and rest, sleep, and take it easy, he's always trying to get up and help with the dishes, with the dinner and things like that. But not only that, it must have taken out of him mentally, and for him to still be strong for his family, to still be positive. The amount of rubbish he went through, the number of things that went wrong for him, he stayed strong and strong-minded through it all, and it was inspiring to see.

He was so brave really. First to be told that you've got cancer, then to get told that you've you will have an operation and it'll be fine then to tell that you're not going to be cured then to be given the wrong chemo. Whenever he could have given up, he didn't, he remained strong and very brave. I don't think there are many people like him in this world. He'd been through a triple heart bypass, he had stents fitted, and he had to have a TAVI. All he had to go through, but he was always so strong. He always cared about everyone else more, they were more important. He was going through all that and he's worried about Mom, Sarah, Dan, Cesi and me.

Daniel is such a mini version of Dad. His morals, his traits, everything about him. It's so lovely, Sometimes I feel like I'm hugging Dad when I'm hugging him. Because he's so alike. Even the way, he just even looks like him. His mannerisms. His morals, his heart. They've got that same beautiful heart. My Dad was a very beautiful soul who brought a lot of happiness and love to people around him. And for such a beautiful person to watch them go through so much hard stuff, it's heartbreaking. But then to see the way that he dealt with it and persevered through, and his strength and his bravery, it was also very inspiring.



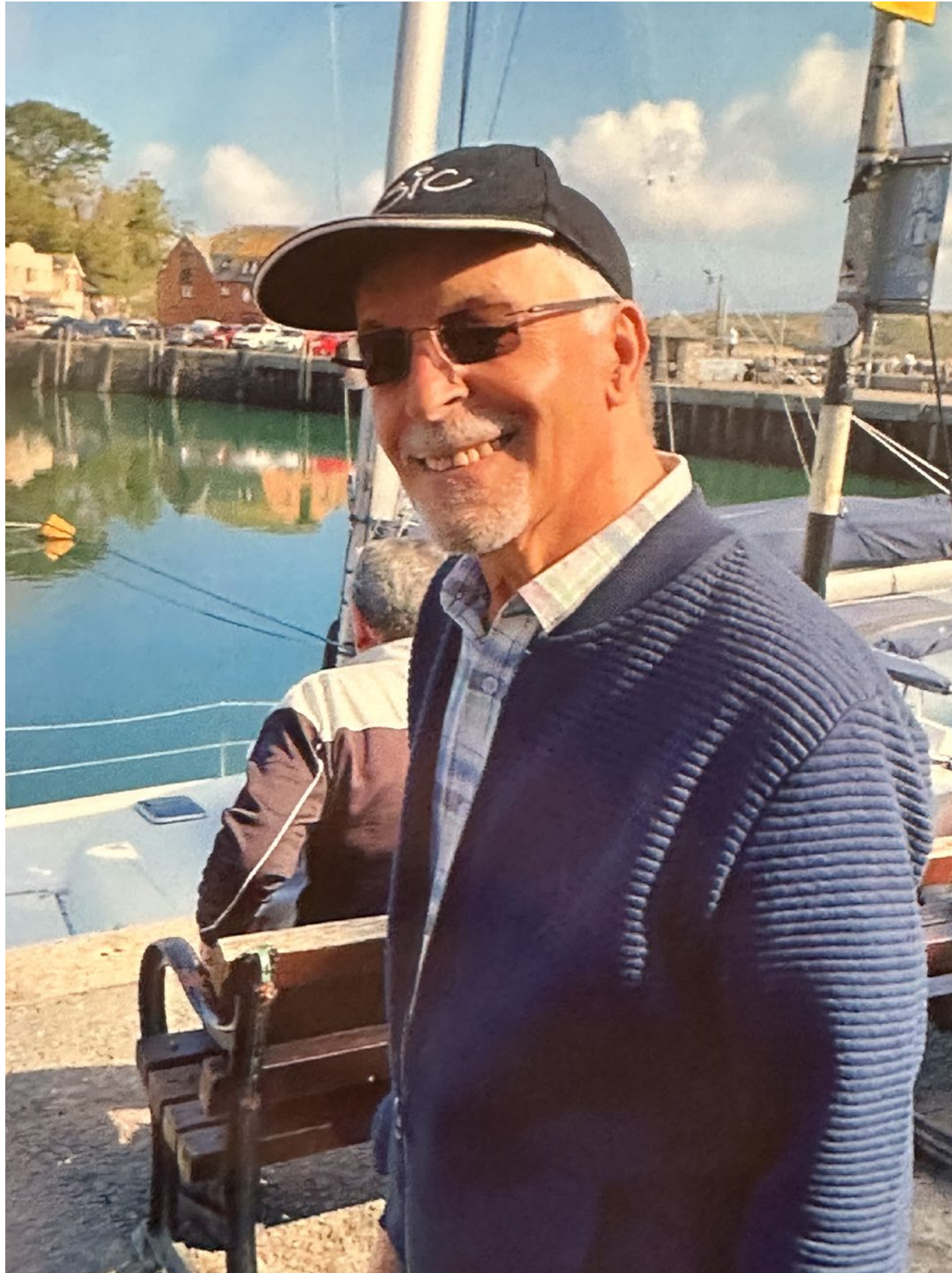


And it made me think, if Dad can go through all that and still be strong, so can I and this strength is the thing that stopped me from blurting my eyes out through this whole conversation. It's holding onto the strength that I know Dad instilled into me.

Dad was a Catholic, but over the years he stopped going to church. His family in Italy converted to the Assemblies of God church. This inspired him and He and Mom started to go to church again. It was a little Christian church up the road. They went there for years, and he really got his faith back. He used to go to church every Sunday and his church friends were fantastic. They were such lovely people and so supportive. They were always checking in on him, popping in and popping around with little biscuits and things. It was a really lovely community, and they are very supportive of Mum as well.

The pastor who led the Funeral service had become quite close friends with Dad. He really knew Dad, he captured exactly who Dad was in his speech. Sarah, Dan and Cesi and I spoke at the funeral. We tried to paint a picture of who Dad was, but everyone knew anyway. We had our flowers made to say POPS in the Italian Colours. Dan and I never used to call him dad really, we used to call him Pops. It's Papa in Italian, I used to call him Popito sometimes. The funeral was lovely. It was absolutely full and some people had to stand up at the back.





Growing up he taught me what love was. He showed me what love was in the way that he treated Mum. For me a woman growing up it was good to see my dad treat my mum the way he did. Dad not only was a good role model as a person, but he showed us how to be a good person with good morals. It's treating others around us in a way that's respectful and knowing right from wrong. He adored my mum; he looked after my mum. At late nights he'd be, "No, I'll drive through, it's late, I don't want you driving in the dark." He looked after his woman; he respected his woman. And that for me, as an adult, shows me that's what I would strive towards. I want that same love. And I want my partner to adore me and love me in the same way that Dad loved Mum and how he adored Mum.

He was a true gentleman. He never complained. When he was angry, we could always almost make him laugh. Everyone was always welcome at my house. He was hard-working, he brought me up to be a grafter, to not be scared of hard work. He had a really good work ethic. He was really good around the house, if there were any jobs doing, he was such a handyman. He'd fix this, fix that. I've noticed as well that my brother's the same. My brother can fix this, fix that.

And I think it all came from Dad being such a loving, happy man over the years. He's given so much to so many, means so much to so many and touched a lot of people's lives. Pops was always so caring, present and supportive; he taught me so much and he and the family together showed me the meaning of love.

GOD BLESS DANIELE GIACOMO TASSA







