



THOSE WHO MADE THE COMPANY

The Hidden Path

A short story of the Persicos and their model-making workshop

PAOLO ARESI

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the fruit of long summer conversations
with Pierino Persico and his family.

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I dedicate this book to my father Pino, born in 1915 and recently deceased. My father was a simple man, but with great values, among which his exemplary love for his wife Palmina.

He devoted his life to his family.

Work was not a burden for him. He prayed a lot, not to ask for something from heaven, but just to feel closer to God. My father only counted on what he could make with his own hands. His example of life is the precious gift he left me, my family, and all the people who were close to him.

Pierino Persico, February 2013

Seven years that changed the world

Since the first edition of *The Hidden Path*, the world has changed. To be precise, the world had already begun to change. The industrial delocalization process was already underway, that is, companies – particularly their manufacturing operations – were relocating to foreign countries, where the cost of labor is decidedly lower compared to Italy. The countries in the Far East had long started their rapid development phase, leading to China’s economic boom. “Globalization” had already been a buzzword for years. But, after 2007, the great economic crisis, the financial crash, was set off, and it does not seem to be ending any time soon. For the first time since the end of World War II, Italy is in a recession.

Many companies in our own backyard have had to close down; many others have been forced to downsize. Some, on the other hand, have managed to buck the trend. In the summer of 2009, one year after the crisis had broken out, Pierino Persico was optimistic. He would say: “The crisis is a serious one. You can feel it. I don’t know how many companies are going to re-open their doors in September. But for us things aren’t going so badly. We must meet the challenge coming from Asia, the challenge of globalization, and respond with quality, design and enthusiasm. We’ve seen a twenty percent fall in all market sectors, most significantly in plant automation. Big companies aren’t investing any more. Old machinery and systems are being repaired and maintained. This effect is particularly strong in the automotive industry.” Since then, three years have gone by, and the financial and economic

crisis has been through a few more phases. Today, on this day at the end of 2012, Pierino Persico explains: "Today, the leisure motor boat industry is not in crisis: it's dead. If we hadn't changed direction by switching to the high-end racing sector – competition boats, boats for big races built of carbon fiber and composite materials using a variety of processes and machining technologies –, we too would be drowning. In the old days, we used to make the boat model and the mold. It wasn't our problem if the boat didn't perform; we only executed the job working from designs made by others. Today, everything has changed. Now, you'd never have a customer who comes to you and asks for just the model. The financial crunch has also been felt by the motor boat market. Many brands, even prestigious ones, are experiencing hardship."

During these last five years, Pierino Persico has delegated more and more responsibilities to his sons. However, he keeps on following his company with passion. He says: "Now we're tackling more difficult projects that place heavier responsibilities on us. Boats that push technology to the limit, to the extremes of its capabilities. Painstaking attention is given to the weight and shape of the watercraft. Parts are checked every step of the way, every manufactured component is given the once over. Our catamarans must "fly" over the water and the hulls must be able to withstand tremendous stress. We build twenty-meter boats with hulls of minimal thickness. We use sophisticated design systems and take advantage of advanced composite materials, such as kevlar and carbon fiber applied using vacuum and infusion technologies, to ensure greater respect for the environment as well as performance results which were unthinkable just a few years ago."

The way the work is done has undergone profound changes, Pierino Persico says. It is not like in the old days, when for a chair, for example, a customer would ask for a model and the related mold, at the most. Today, one has to supply not only the finished piece, but also the machine to manufacture it. Persico continues: "I'll give you an example. For the new Mercedes Class A, we built the plant, a machine that takes the raw material and manufactures one finished door per minute (an interior panel with leather, fabric or PVC upholstery). Once, I'd make only the model of an interior panel for a car door. Later on, I started making the model and mold; then the model, mold and press. Today, I supply the complete process. We start with a slab of recycled material impregnated with polypropylene. Inside the machine, at a temperature of 260 degrees and under four hundred tons of pressure, the slab goes from a thickness of twenty millimeters down to two millimeters. From there, the panel moves on to another stage, where it gets upholstered either with leather or fabric without using glue. The polypropylene inside the panel is reheated, and the upholstery is laid on the panel and pressed down until it sticks without any glue. But we have to be extremely careful: if the panel is pressed too much, it becomes glossy; if pressed too little, it won't stick. We start from a flat slab, which then acquires a complex shape with curved sections. We manufacture machinery of this kind for all automotive upholstery jobs. Mercedes and other companies ask for perfection and competitive costs, as their requests for tenders attract competitor companies scattered all over the globe. Winning a bid of this sort requires a team of qualified people and complex engineering work on the various operations and processes of the machine or system."

According to Pierino Persico, the degree of specialization is very high. A continuous challenge, which seems unsustainable at times. "The financial aspect puts us at a disadvantage compared to many of our foreign competitors. Payments are made later and later," says Persico. "We have to take into account the fact that a German competitor pays half the interest we do. Moreover, foreign governments often help companies with incentives because they create jobs. In Italy, you are alone, alone in facing the banks and the government machine. You really feel alone, with no help and no benefits, and deferred payment more than one year after the final test date. There are no more easy jobs left to do here, because the easy jobs have all moved to Asia. Several of my friends have shut down their businesses. Today, you must be financially self-sufficient so you can afford to wait for payment; you must be good at developing new ideas and projects. It isn't enough to be good at making models and molds. You always have to be able to go a step further."

In May 2011, Persico acquired a closed-down factory in Nembro, formerly owned by Comital, which had been there since the end of the eighteenth century and had given work to so many families. During the last few decades of operation, the plant had produced aluminum foil (like Domopak). Pierino adds: "As always, in this new venture, we had to overcome lots of obstacles, run a real obstacle course, to get financing and insurance. At times, you feel like you are in a maze, or a bureaucratic straight jacket. It's a big problem."

Today Persico employs 250 people. Pierino Persico went on: "This year we hired ten engineers. We hire highly qualified people and a few college graduates. Even in the administration department, a good young

accountant is not enough; you need to have an expert capable of managing the complex tax and customs bureaucracy for shipments to China or Mexico, and another employee to organize employee trips all over the world. All specialists. What I can say is that compared to six years ago, the race to get quality at low prices has become even more nerve-wracking. We need people who know the world. I've gone around the world to get specialists. We've hired people from New Zealand, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Spain. At Persico Marine, we speak English and Spanish."

Given the present situation, what will the future be like? Persico answers: "Either you step up the level of your business, grow in size and are good at industrializing your work, or you are finished. We have to be in China, the USA, here.... If we are able to step up the level, we'll have a future. Today, you can be out of the market just like that, in a split second. You can't allow yourself to get distracted I don't know when this crisis, this hardship, this insecurity are going to end. It's going to be a world where you have to stretch your resources. The fact of the matter is that the world is equalizing. Our excess of wellbeing is going to end, and whoever is eating a bowl of rice today is going to have a bit more tomorrow. It's only fair."

What's more, relationships with banks have changed. "Since September 2011 the world has changed," Pierino explains. "Banks examine your company with a fine-toothed comb before lending at the minimum rate. Persico has grown nicely in spite of everything, but we have to grow even more. After all the troubles we went through during the first two years of the crisis, we've moved forward. Last year our sales revenue rose by forty percent and so we've made up for the pri-

or twenty percent drop. The problem is that payment is deferred too far into the future and our company needs a large portfolio of liquid assets to be able to hold on. Suffice it to say that VAT on exports is reimbursed by the government a year later...There are times when I think that Italy is a country bound for deindustrialization, a country where the manufacturing industry is no longer viewed as a national resource. However, my instinct drives me to take on increasingly greater challenges, as I'm well aware of the responsibility I have to my collaborators, their families and mine. And especially to my three sons, to whom I'm leaving an important enterprise, operating in a world filled with problems that will be far from easy to solve, in the short run and in the long term. It's a world where we cannot rest on our laurels and live on interest earned on our past results."

Bergamo, January 2013

FIRST DAY

A very hot day
at the beginning of July 2006.

*Talking about the meaning of this book and about the
little boat of Signor Renzo Guidi of Castiglion
della Pescaia and the wind that at the beginning carries the boat
far away and in the afternoon takes it back to the beach.*

FIRST DAY

"You see, the fact is...that you can't stop. The fact is that if you've done something in a certain way, it doesn't mean you have to continue in this way for ever. After a while I get tired, I feel on edge, uncomfortable, out of time. Overcome. For that reason I have changed so many times in my life. But I have continued to be a model-maker at the end. I changed without changing. At the beginning I created my models with wood, now there are computers and machines for that. Everything has changed, nothing has changed. We had to adapt ourselves to remain ourselves, for not to be overwhelmed with time, for not to be surpassed by progress, technology, other people. Isn't that right? I have seen excellent model-makers, real masters, model-makers "with moustache"¹ get clambered over, left behind, lost. I tried to ride the changes, sometimes to anticipate them. It has not always been easy, not at all. But, so far so good." Pierino Persico is wearing a blue polo shirt. He is embarrassed, in this small office of his Company, words come out with effort, sometimes crooked, staggered, sometimes sound as empty shells. We'll spend days inside here. Why? Persico takes a deep breath, nods his head and says: "My company is 30 years old. My family and I thought we could do something to give this birthday a special significance.

We could give a party, organize a trip for our best clients, make a calendar with our major creations... so many things. However we wanted something small, but with its own significance. Not just a celebratory event. Therefore we thought of a novel, to tell how everything happened.

¹ Excellent (person or thing - *idiom*).

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Because, inside this novel perhaps there is something interesting, something that could be useful. You see, sometimes I dream of a boy reading this little book, from the beginning to the end, to the last page and be inspired, daring to invest in his own resources and abilities. Somehow he could desire to start his own business and never give up and do something very good for himself and others.... Then I wish that some good ideas can come to his mind from reading this, from my story."

Pierino Persico is the owner of the company in Nembro, well known, and not only in our region, to be the manufacturer first of the keel of the Moro di Venezia and now of Luna Rossa, the super high-technology sailing boat, famous for participating in the America's Cup competition. Outside is very hot, a July to be remembered, every day the temperature goes beyond 30 degrees.

Pierino Persico looks out of the window. A book is a story. Born from memory or imagination. Born from memory and imagination. Facts of life just come about and when they come they are all significant, but then they fade away, swallowed by obscurity, by what we call "the past". A book captures the facts, crystallizes them, saves them from forgetfulness. Persico closes his eyes for a moment. He says, "You see, one day in a hotel in Castiglion della Pescaia, I met a man. We started talking. He was elderly, he could be in his 80s. He told me about his life in Castiglione, in Punta Ala. He told me that, long ago Punta Ala wasn't always called so, but when Italo Balbo (the marshal and aviator of the Italian air force) saw it from the sky, from his seaplane, he liked it and thought it had the shape of a wing. So he bought that small piece of land, at that time wild and uninhabited, and he named it Punta

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Ala (Wing Point). The elderly man continued to talk of his life, of his journeys across the sea, it was 2 in the morning and I didn't even realize it. He told me when, as a child, he had his first tiny vessel, with no sail. A fisherman suggested that he use a beach umbrella. He learned that in the morning a certain kind of wind would push him to a nearby coastline and in the afternoon another kind of wind would take him back to the coast. And he told me of his very first sailings, by himself to Montecristo, as far as the Maremma coasts, which at the time was lost and wild.

He told me of fishermen, of the Montecristo guardian...When we parted he gave me a small book containing his life story, his memories. I read it breathlessly. Then I considered the idea that to mark our thirty years, rather than a big, elegant, celebratory volume, loads of pictures and coated papers, we could create just a small book full of meanings. You see, when reading Mr. Renzo Guidi's little book I felt something inside, I followed him during his life phases; I could understand what loving the sea means. You see, I built the hull of Luna Rossa and of many other boats, but I am a mountain man, I know nothing of the sea, and even less of regattas. That meeting was necessary to comprehend a few things. For instance sea and mountain are not that different. Sensations generated by the blue immensity, felt among the rocks of a seashore, not yet invaded by tourists are very similar to the feelings you get when standing among the rocks of Presolana mountains, motionless, to watch the Coca pond with its deep cobalt color. There is not much difference between a sailor that wants to explore an island, that wants to reach a remote port and a hiker that, having arrived at Rifugio Coca, wants to go further up, to the pond. And once he has

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arrived at the pond he sees the Passo, straight above his head then it could be great to journey there.

Go to visit those rocks, touch them with his own hands, wondering what can be seen from up there, wondering if there are animals or plants that can live at that altitude with that climate.”

Pierino Persico sometimes becomes animated, words come out fast, sometimes slow down, stops and his blue eyes start searching through the windows and look intently toward Selvino, in the direction of Monte Rena, as words could be inspired by the woods covering the sides of the mountain. Woods that Persico knows well, that he has climbed so many times since he was a child.

SECOND DAY

Same hot July.
Same office.

Talking of a father coming back home in the evening black from the smoke of the foundry, of burned olive twigs, of prayers aimed to avoid the fury of storms, of fish and shrimps caught in the Albina river.

SECOND DAY

When he was a child, how did this story start? The story that would lead to the creation of this huge machining Company guided by powerful computers. Persico says: "Being an industrialist can be like climbing mountains or sailing seas. If you are a good industrialist you have to explore hidden paths, go through new lands, you must never stop. It can be exciting, can be adventurous."

The adventure started 60 years ago. Persico says: "My mother was to marry my father's brother. They were engaged. If life was smooth maybe I wouldn't be here now. Quite the opposite as there was the war, my father's brother had to leave, he was sent to Russia, with the Armir. He never came back. One year later, my father Giuseppe started to court my mother, Palmira. My mother declined, she was thinking of her fiancé dead in the snow and turned down my father's courting, until, one night she had a dream. She dreamt of my father's brother telling her to end this dismay and to marry Giuseppe. Consequently my mother changed her mind, she accepted my father and they married. I was born on the 8th of October 1947. I was named Pierino after the uncle I never met."

Pierino Persico carries on, on this sticky day, in this unadorned room. It's not easy for a person from Bergamo to talk about himself, even more so if he's from the mountains. At the beginning the memories lack color, but tag along and they start to outline a world. Pierino carries on, "My father used to work in the foundry while my grandparents were farmers. They were in Piazza neighborhood, in Rochel, above Villa Honeger, near the Albina. Their farm was saved and also the meadows because they were the property of Milly Honeger and the landlady was fond of countryside and she didn't want buildings, she didn't want to speculate on land; a real environmentalist before her time. Therefore the Cà di

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Fade can still be seen. I spent most of my childhood there and I think that rural mentality defined my character. I helped to pick the grapes and the wheat. I remember the arrival of the huge combine harvester. I was attracted by the array of devices, the tractor with its belt equipment transmitting movement from the engine, many transmissions creating different actions. It was magnificent, it was fascinating to watch everything moving. Of course they were other times."

They were other times. The whole Bergamo region was poor, although Albino was a pretty "happy island" with its Honeger cotton factories and houses for their workers, with the innovative and advanced administration of that Swiss entrepreneur family.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the Bergamo region started an authentic industrial revolution, the rural class was living its last moments of a poor but wholesome life. Farms started to empty. Also in the valleys young people didn't work in traditional agricultural activities but preferred factories, migrating to Milano and to Switzerland.

Persico explains: "I remember in courtyards the big wooden tables with silk worms, the rooms with wall shelves and mulberry tree branches on the tops. I remember that when a cow or a horse died it was like the loss of a person. In the house you could breathe a sense of loss, of tragedy. Ermanno Olmi described this condition very well in his film *l'Albero degli Zoccoli* (The Clogs Tree). In the family no one would speak about it again. I remember very well when my grandmother at the arrival of a thunderstorm would take the blessed olive twig and all together went out and said the Credo and burned the twig and deeply pray that the tempest could stop and save the crops. Then, after the tempest, we would go out in the fields to verify what happened, collect the fruit

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from the ground, so as not to lose them completely and then feed the pigs.

But it was painful. I remember my grandparents expressions, the silence, giving all that fruit to the pigs was a shame. But we didn't know any better use.

In the farm we did lots of things, the farmer had different skills, he was also bricklayer, mechanic and vet. And I think that all this has been very important in my life, the ability to look in different directions, not to confine myself in just one occupation, always the same one, but to consider different skills connected to a unique profession"

A farmer's life was hard, exhausting and painful. But there was another side and Pierino Persico remembers when as a child he followed his grandparents for hay-making, adults cut the meadow and children followed them barefoot to gather the hay with a rake. The beauty of being outside in Autumn on Saturdays and Sundays to husk the maize. Persico says: "In those activities there was a sort of deep-seated serenity - maybe due to the fact of being all together. Rural life was patriarchal, everything was lived within the group. In a group we went for the hay-making, in a group to husk, all together to hoe the already tall maize, to tear down the weeds, the "roesla" stifling the field. There was a kind of harmony. And perhaps also a kind of relationship with nature that gave us enjoyment. On some summer afternoons, when it was terribly hot like today, I went with a friend to the upper part of the river Albina to catch fish and prawns and in the evening my mother cooked them. My uncle Albino was disabled because of the war, he was appointed guardian of the springs that refilled the Bergamo aqueduct; he took me to those galleries, I remember the source, springs

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with bubbling water. I remember the purity of that water. In the river Albina there was life. The massive construction on the uplands of Selvino, often with inadequate sewage pipes, led to a deterioration of some strata and thus

of some sources. But at that time we went fishing with small nets, we lifted the big stones and trapped the fish. Two times a month fish was eaten at home, it was an important element in our diet.

Fishing was like hunting. I do not remember that we went hunting for the pleasure of killing, we just went so that we could eat birds and polenta (maize porridge). And with the same disposition we went to pick up chicories, wild strawberries, mushrooms and snails. Of course it was a different world. I remember the noise made by the snails when my mother put them in boiling water, it was as if they cried. It was normal. As it was normal to watch cutting chicken's throats and ducks with their heads off walking for some meters or to watch pigs being butchered, crying like a human being. It was normal. Now it would be embarrassing to show children such scenes.

It was another world. I remember the lowering of voices when talking about a pregnant woman. As if talking of forbidden words, unacceptable. Or talking of some secrets...

Once, a wasp stung my ankle. Nothing would have happened if, as in other circumstances, I did not complain. But I did complain and my mother went to the chemist: they gave her some ammoniac. Before going to the factory she took me to my auntie who was her sister and Albino Birolini's wife, my disabled uncle. It was a beautiful family with three children and I often stayed with them. My mother told her to put some ammonia on my ankle. So my auntie soaked some gauze and

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wrapped up my ankle.

I felt it burning and my auntie said it meant it was good.

I felt it burning for hours. In the evening when my mother came back from the factory and removed the bandage, she saw a big blister: consequently the blister mended in three months leaving a deep scar on my ankle. Well, modernity had arrived, but we did not have enough knowledge to face it.”

His grandparents symbolized the world of farming, nature, countryside. But Pierino Persico’s father didn’t belong to this enchanting world any longer, this world was fading away.

Now, half a century later, in this orange colored office, a glass of Coca Cola helps to fight this heat. Persico remembers: “In the evening, I sometimes brought soup to my father at the foundry, in a small saucepan. You could enter with no problem.

In theory my father had to come home by seven, but frequently work ran late and then we had to go and bring him some food.

Entering the foundry I felt like being at the entrance of hell.

At the Donati Foundry entrance you couldn’t see ten meters in front of you because there was always a sort of fog.

Then you noticed the sparks, the dust. Entering you were hit by the heat and the black that was all over the place. Workers did not wear anything appropriate, no gloves, no helmets, no masks. They had an apron on and clogs on their feet. Sometimes my father returned before my mother, who was working on night shifts at the textile factory. In that case he would pick me up at my uncle Albino’s, the aqueduct guardian. Sometimes he tried to help me with my homework.

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It is fixed in my mind the day I had to make a list with ten personal first names. My father dictated his brothers names: Celo, Nilde, Sunta, Milia, Nuto, Ginia... all Bergamo dialect names. At ten in the evening my mother came home from the factory, read the homework and ripped the page off; I had to do it again the next morning. I have my father's figure coming home in the evening in my eyes, always covered in black dust, red faced from the intense heat he had to bear. He looked like a black man. Every evening he bathed in the tub with hot water that my mother prepared for him if she was home, otherwise he would prepare it by himself. I often asked myself why daddy worked in that inferno and why he didn't remain with my grandparents in the countryside. But that was how it was.

The truth was simple: you could not live anymore on what the earth provided, instead, factories offered a guaranteed salary. But life was extremely hard.

I didn't intend to be an industrialist because I grew up from there, from the countryside. I witnessed my father as a worker and because I lived through the 1970s and the principles of social equality, I didn't want to take advantage of anyone.

But anyhow I became an industrialist."



Sunbathing when obesity was still unknown.

THIRD DAY

Still on this
very hot afternoon.
The same office.

*Where we talk about the construction of the house,
the surveyor dropping the lever, Master Rizzo
who teaches how to write with lemon juice,
and the model-makers "with mustache".
A fundamental truth: every object comes out of a model.*

THIRD DAY

Egalitarian principals were also rooted in our family life.

Persico says that the word solidarity did not exist in their family vocabulary, there was no need for it, solidarity was within the enlarged family, it was the matrix, it was a natural condition within the relationship between grandparents and relatives. Persico says: "I spent a lot of time with my injured uncle and his three children, he was independent and he didn't have any economic problems. After elementary school they sent me to secondary professional school (avviamento) because my uncle said he would pay for the school expenses. My uncles helped my father to build his own house too, asking for financial support, obviously.

This was also schooling. Like many workers in Albino, my father built his own house in his time off, on Saturdays and Sundays. He did his best and I followed him and helped him. I watched him tackling various problems: from master walls to stoneware, from pipelines to waste pipes, to electric systems....

Daddy helped uncle Giovanni, twenty years younger than he was and a very skilled bricklayer, he was the building site chief. Fundamental rules were settled by a civil geometer. I still remember it. The geometer arrived, took the lever, an iron instrument very similar to a jemmy, dropped it on the ground like a lance and watched it, to see how deep it would go into the earth. If it went too deep they had to excavate more.

The point was that house foundations had to reach a rocky ground, a firm base.

I learned that stair steps had to measure seventeen centimeters. I car-

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ried mortar buckets, I was the 'bocia' (the young boy), they ordered me to take this and that and uncle Giovanni treated me harshly, as all the 'bocia' were treated, woe to the one who made mistakes..... I remember lighting fires in the house under construction, in winter time, to prevent the just poured cement from freezing. I didn't have any fondness for this job, but I was aware of its complexity, the countless rules necessary to produce manufactured goods, products. And I learned how much work and effort and accuracy was needed."

Pierino Persico was a young guy with lots of questions: he wanted to know. He was fascinated by the unknown. He wanted to learn. And so, on this African afternoon he is reminded of his primary school then of the secondary technical school. And between a glass of Coke and a lemon tea, he shakes his head admitting he never liked air conditioning. Therefore he stands up and switches it off, opens the door and starts talking again. He says: "In the first four elementary classes I had a very strict teacher, an ex fascist boss' wife from Albino. I didn't like school. Fortunately during the fifth year a male teacher arrived, an extraordinary teacher.

His name was Rizzo. What a teacher! At the end of the year none of the forty students failed. Do you understand? At that time a large number of students failed...Yet he was very demanding and all of us respected him.

What a lot of punishing homework!

So many verbal conjunctions to repeat!

Yet, he inspired in me a love for knowledge, for school. I remember when he made us write with a nib dipped in lemon juice: nothing came

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out. But if you scorched the page slightly then words would become visible. It was magical to us, in truth there was a precise reason.....

I remember he made us play the 'carbonari' (groups of secret revolutionary societies with patriotic goals founded in the early 19th century in Italy) emulating their gestures that had secret meanings, in order to comprehend what secret societies were. He took us into the woods to teach us about trees and the cycle of nature..... I fell in love with school. I went to "avviamento" the technical secondary school. At that time secondary school wasn't unified and after five years of primary school you could choose between secondary school (for rich families, it would prepare students for lyceums), commercial school (for future clerks and accountants) and school for an introduction to work, preparing future skilled workers and industry technicians. They taught technology, design and mechanics. Attending this school meant breaking with the rural world, with just my grandparents remaining at the farm and all my relatives leaving the countryside - it was clear that industry was the future. At this stage, even if I was in love with the countryside I understood that this couldn't be my future.

And I had a project in my mind, an aim, just like many of my school-mates. Our dream was to become skilled workers, we wanted to become good turners and milling machine operators.

To be the best skilled workman of the workshop. And we, all young guys, longed for a job in workshops rather than being bricklayers, carpenters or plumbers. To us, it seemed more important, prestigious... During the professional course I was lucky to meet Professor Parri who literally made us fall in love with smithery. Or at least, I did.

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Anyhow, I always fall in love with things I do.

If I was a dustman I would have loved cleaning cities and maybe invent a machine to wash stairs.

Milling, turning, the ability and talent to remove material. Get rid of bits and pieces from wood or iron to get the shapes you want. When Persico started working, millers and turners were much in demand, they used machines manually and the better skilled ones, the so called turners or millers "with the mustache", could achieve precision to a tenth or even a hundredth of a millimeter.

After finishing professional school (avviamento), Persico found a job in a foundry in Albino, the Valmet.

It wasn't the one his father use to work at. His model-making career started from there. He explains: "It was 1961. I was working with the warehouse keeper and the foundry supervisor, I had to modify and repair the wooden molds needed to create the mechanical parts of tool machines.

What most people didn't know, is that model-making was fundamental in the industry production. You made the project, drew an engine with its pistons, cylinders, jackets, connecting rods...

You made projects of beautiful car bodies. But how could you get to industrial production of those objects?

For everything you needed to make a model first. Let's take a car steering wheel: the model-maker, starting from the drawing, with milling machine and lathe, had to create a perfect wooden model. The

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wooden model is used to create the mold and once you have the mold you start the chain of production.

And today it is still the same.

Except nowadays, the model-maker often does not make wooden models, but more often plastic models which are made and produced by computers. The computer, according to the loaded program, directs the milling machine and lathe. But the mold is still necessary. That's why I've fallen in love with this job, that's why I always wanted to become a "modeler with mustache". Objects had to be first of all "created" by the model-maker; with a lathe for round items and with a milling machine for all other shapes."



Rochel's house.



Model-maker Pierino Persico at work in 1976.

FOURTH DAY

Persico's office.
The same high temperature.

*Talking of the Franchioni model-making workshop in
Baioni street and of the "masterpiece" test.*

The awe of Signor Alfonso.

A contradiction regarding Marxism.

*A truth emerges: necessity to learn,
to understand... is a good spur for business.*

FOURTH DAY

Days march past in this hot summer of 2006, this July reminds us of the record one in 2003 and the worry is legitimate: the greenhouse effect is not just an hypothesis, it is has been proven as reality. This is the reason why the Orobie glacier melted or has been reduced to pieces. Pierino Persico very well remembers the Orobie, Redorta, and Gleno glaciers, to mention a few.

Small glaciers, peaks that you can still see, but reduced to half of their depth compared to what they were in the 1970s.

The days of the calendar march past, meetings go by in the big shed where the huge lathe, guided by computers, "hollow out" models for yachts' hulls and the smell of varnish and paint fills the air.

But, as we travel by Memory Time Machine, we go back to those remote years. Yuri Gagarin was the very first human being to step into the space. Pierino Persico was in the foundry.

He recalls: "I soon realized that at Valmet I couldn't gain any knowledge. I knew that in Vertova there was the workshop of a certain Gusmini di Fiorano who was a self employed model-maker. I asked if I could go and learn from him. I used to finish work at five, go up there by bicycle, arrive at five-thirty and work with him until seven-thirty. I just couldn't stay at Valmet, I wasn't happy. I needed learning, more knowledge of this work. Meanwhile I joined a course at the Esperia school on Saturday afternoons.

The professor I had there, had a friend who owned a good model-making factory, maybe the best one in Bergamo, at number 29 Baioni Street, in town. It was Alfonso Franchioni's model-making factory.

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What I had learned from the model-maker in Vertova, plus what I had learned in Esperia, together with a 'good word' given by my teacher, opened doors for me.

Signor Franchioni was an awesome man, he was very strict.

Before starting his own business he worked as a model-maker for Rumi, a motorcycle factory.

He had a big family with thirteen children: none of them followed in their father's footsteps to become model-makers.

Talking and laughing was not allowed in the workshop, all workers were busy, focused on what they were doing.

When I arrived there, I had to make a 'masterpiece'.

This is what the model was called that you had to make as a test and which the owner used as a basis to decide whether to employ you or not. I remember it as if it was today.

Franchioni gave me a raw piece of wood and told me to 'square it and smooth it all'.

It was a tough job, to be performed completely by hand, every single side had to be perfect, absolutely perpendicular, the two sides of the board had to be perfectly flat and leveled...

We worked with set square and hand plane. I worked for an entire day and I succeeded. The second test was a supporting model for textile machines for the Reggianis. This was even more difficult.

I found barriers I couldn't surmount, I should have found a model-maker to enlighten me, but they were all so reluctant and unwilling to talk about their knowledge... in the end between two lunch breaks and going out a couple of times after my shift in the evening, I found the

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essential advice I needed. I passed the 'Masterpiece' Test, I was taken. When he told me I could stay, in his crude way, I answered I didn't want to stay there to varnish, but I wanted to make models. He looked at me gravely and puzzled, saying in our dialect:

"M' vederà chèl che te savrét fà." ("I'll see what you are able to do").

You see, the last one to arrive was the shop-boy making the less important things, the less fragile stuff.

But in my mind I still wanted to learn: therefore I asked if I could focus my work on models straight away.

Franchioni approved. I still remember him walking among the tables to check on our work. When he was nearby, my heart started beating fast and I sweated like at school when I knew I had to be interrogated. When something went wrong he just said: 'Pierino, osterial!' (typical Bergamo dialect expression).

It was so mortifying to me, but I didn't give up. He never smiled, he was severe, but he knew I was willing to learn and work.

It wasn't easy to learn, in truth model-makers were jealous of their skilled knowledge, they wouldn't teach you, they were bothered. But I did develop an excellent relationship with Alfonso Franchioni, in fact he often came to my company to greet me for many years afterwards.

And on his 90th birthday I was invited to the restaurant for his family reunion. He truly was a great man. But I didn't stay with him for many years because in 1969 I moved to work for Cramas, in Curasco, where they made models in resin and aluminum instead of wood. I understood that it could be a further innovative step."

There was something new to learn. Something new to learn. It is Pieri-

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no Persico biggest torment, the foundation, the common denominator of his job. Something new, a new frontier.

And in this, Pierino Persico is really "a child of his own Time", the reconstruction era, the economic boom and man landing on the Moon.

In 1968, Pierino Persico was a military service soldier, a "carabiniere" in Milan earning little money. One and a half years between conflicts, demonstrations and order duty. He had to face the violent side of protest which to some extent he partially identified with.

Outside the thermometer reached 35°C, inside maybe 32.

Persico pours himself a glass of Coke, looks intently at the forests growing up toward Selvino, saying: "I am familiar with all those pathways, I have walked along all of them.

I was looking for any narrow valley, also the ones with no footpaths, how can I say it...I had the exact sensation to be 'out of the world'. And I looked for all the grottos, the gorges of these hills...

In the sixties I was a carabinieri.

It was a way to earn a salary.

But my political ideas were not reactionary at all, I was an activist in "ACLI" (Catholic Association of Italian Workers)

I identified myself in a Catholic tradition, in Church social doctrine, especially with regard to solidarity and the working class world.

That's why, after joining the Workers Political Movement (based on the experience I had in the ACLI with Livio Labor),

I lined up as an independent left wing supporter.

The facts are clear that, when tested at election, the Movement proved to be a failure. But there were lots of excellent ideas inside

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those groups. When I made up my mind to be an entrepreneur I felt out of touch with them.

There was the matter of exploiting working class labor, there was the topic of capital gains derived from Marxist philosophy, private property legitimacy, of production equipment. Nowadays you don't discuss capital gains.

By becoming an entrepreneur I would have taken advantage of my worker's labor so I would have 'exploited' their work. I had to find a solution. I started with some hesitance but then the natural answer arrived.

When I worked for Franchioni, I didn't feel 'exploited', he put his talent at my disposal, his skills and ability. At both mine and the company's disposal. Of course the company made profits from the workers labor, but also from the work, competence and sacrificial spirit of the entrepreneur.

A capable entrepreneur was necessary to have a good business company that could guarantee salaries for workers and a good working environment. I started realizing that it could be possible to be an entrepreneur without being an exploiter. Indeed, considering my experience, some of the entrepreneurs I worked for really helped me. I could be like them. I could pay attention and consideration to the human side of work, I could do something to encourage, to promote my employees. Nevertheless, I could have been an exploiting entrepreneur, there were lots of this kind and still there are. It is a matter of choice, character, nature. I hope, I have never been one of them, an exploiter." Pierino Persico made the jump from employee to business owner in 1976 when, the 1960s movement calmed down, when the equalitari-

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an and libertarian idealistic movement came to an end. Regrettably a distorted heritage of it was left behind, a violent inheritance, leading to “the years of lead”, leading to the unending chain of homicides by the Brigade Rosse and Prima Linea. And also to the terrible mass murders by terrorists certainly not of the left political stream, terrorism somehow linked to the extreme right of society; but that never featured strongly. The massacre culminating with the slaughter at the station in Bologna on the 2nd of August 1980, an attack in which 85 innocents died, only guilty on that morning to be sitting in that waiting room, waiting for their train.

But let’s go back to the end of the 1970s. When he came back home from military service, Persico applied for a job at Ismes, a company with a good reputation and fame, specializing in experimental testing for building prototypes with exposure to extreme forces, for example earthquakes, very heavy weights or high energies. Recalls Persico: “The manager of Ismes called me and told me I was chosen. I returned home in high spirits. And I was at home in my house in Albino when, that Saturday afternoon, a chap came, saying he was Ismes’ head model-maker.

I looked at him puzzled. He said he knew about my engagement. He tried to discourage me. He told me he was going to start his own business soon and it was unwise to bury myself in a public company. His name was Gino Beretta. He was an extravagant and outgoing person. I was thunderstruck. I had my big occasion to work for the great prestigious Ismes and here comes this gentleman to tell me to refuse. And I let him influence me, I let him persuade me and I accepted to go and

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work for him. I declined the offer from Ismes.

In fact when the Beretta model-making firm started, we made very interesting pieces, for example we created the model for the Mondadori headquarter in Segrate. Stability tests were made on our model. It looked like a shoe box suspended in water inside a network of columns.

An unusual building, pleasant, designed by Niemeyer, the same architect that planned Brasilia. I created the wooden model used afterwards to make the mold in negative; resin was poured into the mold in order to create the new model necessary for structural assessment.

There were just a few of us, four or five people and Beretta straight away made me the head of the group.

I stayed there until 1972, the year in which I got married."

Then a change once again. The same dynamics.

Persico says that at Beretta he hadn't got much to learn anymore, he had to experiment, to face something new.

He left Franchioni's because of excessive traditionalism, no change, no accepting of the resin models that were starting to become established. Now he left Beretta's to begin in the model-making department of a new foundry in Albino, the Faro, foundry with great ambitious aims, with the intent of creating high value products.

Outside the sun strikes mercilessly, inside this small office the phone rings, Persico picks up the receiver, then switches the mobile off. Time travelling needs concentration.

Voices start talking again if you find a tow-hook that leads you back into memories, showing you people and faces, making you breathe odors and listen to the sound of well known voices once again.....



Pierino Persico in his first workshop.

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Persico's office.
The tropical heat of July doesn't give up.

Where we talk about the start, about that special year of 1976 in which the Persico Company was born in a room under the stairs of wood decorator and turner Lorenzo Carrara, about the importance of family, about motorcycle firms, about the 1980s revolution and about the work for Alenia Space and the Montisola wooden boat.

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"Then I considered starting my own business. I already knew how things went, the dynamic of my thoughts was always the same. I needed a new stimulus, different experiences. I arrived at a crucial stage, a turning point, but in January of 1976 I took the big decision and I started my own business. Actually, I was making things on my own since 1972. In the evenings I created things by myself, operating in Carlo Acerbis' carpentry workshop, he was Franco Acerbis' brother, who at the time was a young man, racing motorbikes for SWM. In those years, between 1974 and 1980, in Italy we had at least 30 factories making motorbikes, all of them just above handcraft level, excellent brand names. None of them grew into an actual industrial organization. The result was that ten years later just five of them survived and Japanese motorbikes started to throw their weight around. Here, there was a sort of handcrafted mentality where you had to be able to do everything, every single part of the motorbike.

I can say this because I often had to make motorbike models.

It was a pretty well known world to me. In that January of 1976 I shared the Acerbis' basement in Albino, a vault once used by a wood turner. I stayed in that basement for two years, alone at the beginning, but after six months I had a skilled worker and two trainees working with me. We worked hard and working harder than my employees helped me not to feel like an exploiter.

For two years I stayed in that basement, then I asked Giovanni Raimondi to rent me the carpentry workshop."

At this stage of the story Pierino Persico is 29, was married and al-

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ready had two daughters. He says: "I've always worked hard, that's true, but I do not think I neglected my family.

I have three children, I never forgot I had them, I have always returned home at night, unless I was far away, which seldom happened. I tried to close work out of the door on Saturdays and Sundays to stay and play with my children.

This is fundamental, work must not be placed ahead of loved ones, especially when it regards your own children."

Persico smiles, he sips a glass of icy tea.

Beyond the large glass windows you can catch a glimpse of the cycle path climbing to Prato Alto di Albino. A cyclist dressed in red and white fights the heat.

Persico starts talking again about his job.

"You see," explains Persico, "the big change took place around the end of the 1980s.

Till then my company was, generally speaking, a traditional kind of model-making plant. I started my own business, we grew, but basically, it wasn't much different from how we use to work in the '70s. By the way, I think that very few people, non familiar with this job, realized that, for example a car was first of all made entirely by hand.

The wooden models replicated every single piece, from the steering wheel to the rear-view mirror, going through the doors and the knobs and the brake pedals and the engines... Everything had to be created with wood, and from that wooden model, usually made by sticking pieces together one by one, steel molds were made allowing mass production. The designer gave us the plans and we, the model-makers,

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transformed them into models. Every piece of the engine had its own basic model. In the 1980s we worked a lot for Mazzucconi foundries, we made the models and afterwards they molded them.

Mazzucconi made engine block castings, exhaust manifolds and alloy wheels for Fiat and Iveco. So we become acquainted with the world of cars.

If an engine block model or a cylinder coat model wasn't perfect, production would have been affected as well.

A model-maker with 'mustache' could guarantee precision of a tenth of millimeter. Yes, a model-maker had to be talented with great manual ability. In this period we worked for architects, we made models for type writers, toys models for Mattel, such as Barbie's camper. This means that there is a wooden model which is the base for all the molds and therefore all Barbie's campers which exist in the world.

The Mattel factory was in Arona.

There's an American lady who projects and draws all the objects regarding Barbie's world, she gave us the sketches and we made them real.

We were working for Prandoni and Mivar making television apparatus, we made models of electronic switches and lamps for Gewiss, electric control panels, Giugiaro's phone booths.....

Yes, you make everything with wood, even the tiny function key, the small button.... It is better to make several models, because transforming drawings into realistic projects helps the designer to understand that sometimes the final effect is not exactly what he had figured.

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In this case Giugiaro would have changed his design, on the basis of the real mold. The final model is an exclusive, unique piece. There's no chain production in a model-making workshop, we just make unique pieces. In this moment in our model-making workshop we are preparing two hundred models, from small objects to internal equipment for the new Renault Kangoo and satellite components for Alenia Space... Prestigious tasks for Alenia. Their technicians are extremely punctilious and scrupulous. If only Alenia's administrators were as consistent in making payments...."

Persico laughs...but that is another story. The clock tells us that it's late, we finish our conversation, outside the sun drops down behind the hills and shadows stretch out onto the forests that climb on top of Zuccarello. There's still a torrid heat. Persico stops in the hall. There's a beautiful wooden sailing boat with its sails spread behind the reception desk.

Persico explains: "This was made in Montisola, a few years ago. A Master Carpenter constructs them with an adze, in the traditional way, like they used to, one hundred years ago. It is beautiful, you see? It's not written that you have to change against your will, it all depends on what you are looking for. The hull of this boat, built of wood and not of carbon fiber, gives this boat a special and exceptional beauty. Technology goes fast, you cannot stay behind. Yet, you don't have to forget the past!"

SIXTH DAY

A burning day in July.
Sitting next to the coffee machine.

*Where we talk about the need for technological evolution,
the arrival of computers and
the five-axes milling machines that worked making a loss
but that also opened the door for us
at Alenia Space and Moro di Venezia.*

SIXTH DAY

"It was 1989, my Italian clients kept telling me I was a fool, that the investment in computers connected to machines was too high, that it wasn't worth it. But I was aware of the fact that this was the new frontier. Fiat was not working in this direction either, still content with hand modeling. But I well knew that German car companies were ahead and I did not want fall behind. A technician arrived, a mechanical expert named Gianbattista Ravizza, at the time he was 28 and he was very good using 2D CAD, a program that at that time was in its first steps. In 1990 I bought a powerful computer, loaded with two programs, one for CAD in three dimensions and one for the milling machines scheduling.

Ravizza created the mathematical models and processed the programs with the instructions to use milling machinery.

The time Ravizza needed to use the appropriate program concerning that specific model was longer than the time spent by a traditional model-maker, making the same model with wood. For a while, I was clearly making a loss. But I felt that it was a necessary luxury, that it was the right way.

The floppy disk produced by the computer was then inserted into the programmable milling machine to obtain the model.

In that period Nuova Pignone, Fiat Auto, Iveco still did not use 3D CAD systems.

In that period we created the new bus model for Iveco, obviously in parts.

Starting from drawings on paper, we transformed the project into 3D.

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We had a milling machine able to produce pieces of six meters by two meters and a half meter in height.

We prepared the models for the plants used by Nuova Pignone in Firenze for the big Siberian gas pipes.”

And here we are again, in the orange color painted walls, of our office, telephone off, mobile off, torrid climate, worrying about the drought, the river Serio is now a heap of stones.

Outside the glass windows, woods climb up to the Mount of Nese and Selvino, woods covering the ancient road of the Merchants, the one rising to Salmeggia, then Trafficanti and descending from Val Serina, passing into Val Brembana climbing up to Passo San Marco then going down to Valtellina to join the Grigioni. Centuries have passed, so much water in the Serio has flowed, thousands of people that inhabited our villages left, emigrated.

The Past. Persico remembers: “Until the 1970s we worked manually: planes, files, gouges, pantographs. Then at the end of the '70s started the era of hydrodynamic mechanisms: man still directed it manually but less effort and energy was necessary.

Later on the era of electronics arrived: an electronic tester would memorize the model surface for milling the mold.

Yet all this was still done mainly by hand. The real revolution took place in 1990. At the time I had several model-makers ‘with mustache’ who were looking snootily at innovation. Maybe they feared it. I tried to ride it.

Do you see... to what progress leads us? Today it is possible to send a digitalized, mathematical model to China.

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They mill it and make the solid mold, then send it back the next day by plane. That's incredible but true. It was 1990 when I introduced the computer combined with the milling machine and I could guarantee precision of hundredths of a millimeter.

I knew that the Japanese and Germans were already moving forward utilizing CAD and CAM systems. Yet, still in 1994 my friend, ex manager of Cantieri Riva, went around the Italian naval shipyards, to inform me later that they told us we were crazy to follow this technological direction. They said that actually, Timber Masters' precision was satisfactory and manual work was cheaper than digital. But today, just twelve years later, the use of computers is standard procedure, also in the naval field. In actual fact, in the last five years this specific field has grown rapidly: in 2000 everyone worked by hand, today ninety per cent work with the help of computers. Now I'll have to find new ways,

I'll have to focus my attention more and more on competition boats otherwise the hulls we supply won't be sufficient, we'll have to supply something more, offer complete boat prototypes.

At present, it is too simple to prepare only the model."

But the turning point was in 1990. It was a growth period for the company, Nuova Pignone in Florence would call Pierino Persico during the design program phase, requesting models at an early stage. "But the world was changing," says Persico, "and I was aware of it."

Persico fills his paper glass with orange juice. Upstairs there's a well furnished cold drinks vending machine, nearby there's a coffee machine. Generally, it's better to avoid coffee from these automatic ma-

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chines. Persico says: "It happens that I met a Mr. Dordoni, who worked for Jobs, in Piacenza.

This Mr. Dordoni used to go to model-makers offering them a particular kind of machinery, Jobs was already supplying companies in the aerospace sector such as Augusta, Aermacchi and Aeritalia with this machinery.....

It was a five-axis milling machine, no longer the traditional three axes, it could guarantee exceptional work results. I immediately fell in love with it. And I mean it! Or better I was enthusiastic, I had trust in it straight away.

I understood that this could be the opening to high technology markets.

This solution combined milling machines with a computer, they would become a single apparatus. I bought it. I remember we had to carry it to Nembro by 'special transport'. It was a big investment. Just for the concrete support, to insulate it from vibrations, we spent 50 million liras (the currency of that period). The machine cost 800 million liras. It was one of the very first of its kind and it wasn't perfect. In fact, we progressed with difficulty and after five years we returned it to its producers in exchange for a newer and more highly developed one. Anyway it was important. I remember that day in December when I went to examine it, together with our Mazzoni, a perceptive guy, one with great ideas. I was positively influenced by that visit and I knew that they had already supplied BMW and Mercedes. This is how the Germans worked, they gained more market shares, expanding in the automotive field."

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For the Persico, apart from business, at a certain point, good reputation and fame arrived. It was when Cagliaris, an engineer working for Raul Gardini, arrived at his factory door. Persico goes on: "Raul Gardini had the idea of making Il Moro di Venezia to compete for the America's Cup sailing contest.

Cagliaris came to us because he knew we had this big machine with quality control. To be honest I wasn't interested in competition at all. But I was captivated by the idea of preparing something very different, advanced and difficult.

From an economic point of view, the financial account didn't balance. The fact was that there were so many steps to carry out, the required working time was too long, traditional model-makers were quicker. I remember very well my accountant discouraged me from buying that marvelous machinery. I bought it anyway. If I took note of the number of parameters I would have left that machinery in Piacenza. I listened to my instinct instead, my accountant telling me I was a fool, repeating over and over that the working cost per hour was excessive and I couldn't afford it. But I thought that even losing while money each hour, the company would go on anyway and that was the connection to the future. I very well knew that such a precision could have never been achieved by traditional model-makers. And yet I can certainly say that it was thanks to the traditional model-makers work, that in the early 1990s, it was possible to maintain and make this investment."

The purchase of the five-axis milling machine was a significant step in constantly improving the working process. Another big step was the fax. Persico explains: "I bought the fax in 1985 mainly because I had

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to communicate with the United States regarding the trading license obtained for the rotational molds.

Lots of faxes arrived unreadable and drawings were a real mess, a real problem. But it was clear that progress went along that way, it was clear that the fax was to become essential, indispensable like photocopiers."



The Moro di Venezia keel and bulb assembly.



A view of the modeling department in the former Pesenti Paper Mill.

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Persico office.
Thunderstorm shadows
on a sticky afternoon.

*Where we talk about his first journey to the United States,
lost baggage at the airport, running on the
landing strip trying to catch the plane,
the freezing journey by taxi for seven hundred kilometers.
But in the end, rotational molding technology was acquired.*

SEVENTH DAY

For the Company in Valle Seriana it was very important to acquire a particular technology, necessary to produce complex concave and curved objects.

It was rotational molding technology. Pierino Persico, wearing a plain blue T-shirt tells us: "I obtained the license for the rotational molding system in 1984. I went to the United States to get it, I travelled by plane, I landed. I didn't know a single word of English. If I only think about it now When they greeted me saying 'Hi!', I thought they said 'Ahil!'; in other words, something was wrong..... and I thought: 'Damn! Just arrived and already something's wrong....' In short, I was nervous.

I decided to go to America at the suggestion of Acerbis.

Acerbis from Albino knew this American Company, from which he used to buy the molds for motorbike tanks.

This is how it went:

Acerbis started the project, I made the models with wood then sent them to this American company. They prepared the mold shells in aluminum and then sent everything back to Acerbis.

Their molds were clearly of a very high quality level, in Italy at the time, nobody could reach that level.

I was determined to pick up the technology for the production of these rotational molds, needed to create spherical objects like balls or motorbike tanks. When I arrived in Milwaukee they told me it was the first time someone had asked to buy that technology.

But I knew that if I bought it I would be the first one to have it in all of

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Europe..... I remember I was alone, I embarked on the flight from Milan to Zurich, then from Zurich to Boston and finally from Boston to Milwaukee, which, if I'm not wrong, is in Wisconsin, in the north, near the Great Lakes area. I didn't know a single word of the English language, I took a tiny dictionary with me, do you know? The little green one, that you can carry in your pocket, with the plastic cover? I landed in Milwaukee and I stayed there at the conveyor belt and waited for an hour. When all passengers left, with their luggage, I stayed there for another while, feeling more and more out of place. Where was my luggage? How could I manage to explain myself? But my suitcase wasn't there so I had to go to the person in charge with my little dictionary and explain to him that I was there without clothes.

I succeeded somehow! A representative from Acerbis, at that time based in San Diego, California, had to come to Milwaukee to take me to the rotational mold-making company.

But he missed the plane.

I was completely alone.

I rented a car to get to the hotel, for the first time I became acquainted with the Holiday Inn chain. The car had automatic gears, I had never used automatic gears before then and I realized I just had two pedals instead of three. At the beginning I stopped by using my left foot, jamming on the brakes and bumping against the steering wheel.

My left foot was used to using a clutch so it was too heavy on the brakes. You can't believe it if you don't try it: try to stop using your

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left foot instead of using your right, you'll see! That night I bought everything necessary to change and shave.

The following day my assistant arrived and together we went to Kelch. We went directly to the president of the company, Denis Tronca. He was a nice person of Italian Abruzzese origin;

his grandfather left the country to emigrate to the States.

But that was not the only Company we visited while we were in the States. After Kelch we went to Ohio and Michigan.

I remember, I couldn't sleep for three days, then my friend Acerbis and I jumped on a plane to go to Toledo, in Ohio or Illinois, I don't even remember. As soon as the plane took off

I fell asleep and my friend also fell asleep. He suddenly woke up, startled and shaking me shouted, 'Pierino, we've arrived'.

With my eyes still half closed, I took my luggage and we got off the plane, entering the airport building. Outside there should have been the representative of this company from Toledo waiting for us.

My friend took out a folder and showed it to a guy at the airport, he looked back at my friend shaking his head: we were not in Toledo, but in a town called Kalamazoo. It was a stop-over.

My friend and I rushed onto the landing field, on foot, to catch the plane again, we waved but the airplane was already moving on the runway and it was taking off..... Police officers were chasing us...like in a movie. The plane took off, it wasn't like a coach.... and we remained on ground, we were firmly reproached but we got away with it. The fact was that it was late afternoon and the following morning we had an

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appointment in this firm in Toledo. It was terribly cold, I remember the piles of snow on the edges of the landing field, the grey sky.

What could we do? There were seven hundred kilometers between us. Outside the building there was only one taxi driver.

We asked him if he could take us to Toledo. He looked at us distrustfully, stared at the steering wheel and told us the amount he wanted. Payment in advance. We didn't have any other choice. He took the dollars, let us into his car and then went to a friend's home to substitute his car for a better one. Finally we left, on that freezing evening. Our driver was in his vest. And he kept the heating switched off; we asked him to turn it on, but he pretended he did not understand. It was a memorable cold, for hours and hours. At a certain point I remember he stopped at a service station, he got out of the car without saying a word and we were left there in the dark. I still remember the noise made by the lorries' compressors in the parking area. He came back after half an hour, by then we thought he had run off.

But the following morning, precisely on-time, with bags under our eyes, pale after four sleepless days, re-energized by an American coffee, we introduced ourselves to the Schilling company an important mold maker in Toledo; the owner was the President of the American Model-makers Association."

Pierino Persico's American Journey was in fact a great success.

A license contract with Kelch was finally signed.

Persico says: "The first price they proposed was enormous, unaffordable. I told them, no way. So they reduced it, it was reasonable. In the end we agreed to pay half of the amount straight away and the re-

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mainder through production royalties. After ten years I ended the contract paying them a bonus. Meanwhile the president Mr. Tronca was kicked out of the company together with other managers because of a shareholders 'coup de main'."

The relationship between Pierino Persico and Kelch finished for the same reason why he changed job so many times.

He says: "In 1992 I went to Kelch, I complained because they were doing nothing to improve their technology, it was getting outdated. Do you know what they answered? They asked me if I knew Coca Cola. I answered yes. They told me that their method was like Coca Cola, it wasn't going to be changed, it was always the best."

Pierino Persico kept an excellent relationship with Mr. Denis Tronca, they even saw each other recently with their families.

But how did it happen that Persico could end the license to produce aluminum rotational molds, terminating the agreement with Kelch?

Another glance to the woods that start from Nembro and climb up the hill, in the air trembling from the heat.

Then Persico says: "To tell you the truth, I can't stand air conditioning, neither in the office nor in the car. I'd rather keep car windows open with air drafts. Certainly these days are terribly hot. It would be much better going up to Selvino where I bought a house, I always go there whenever I can.

Of course when I was a child, Selvino was something completely different, it was so green, with beech trees, birches, meadows and now plenty of small houses and villas. But anyway it's still a beautiful place."

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Sure, Selvino is a beautiful place. Sipping cold tea Persico says:
"We found the courage to break the contract with Kelch because one day a fellow wrote us, he was American, he assured us he had developed a brand new technology to improve aluminum castings. The man's name was Bob. He came here to Nembro and brought us his new technology, we learned the different steps of these solutions. Except, after six months Bob disappeared.

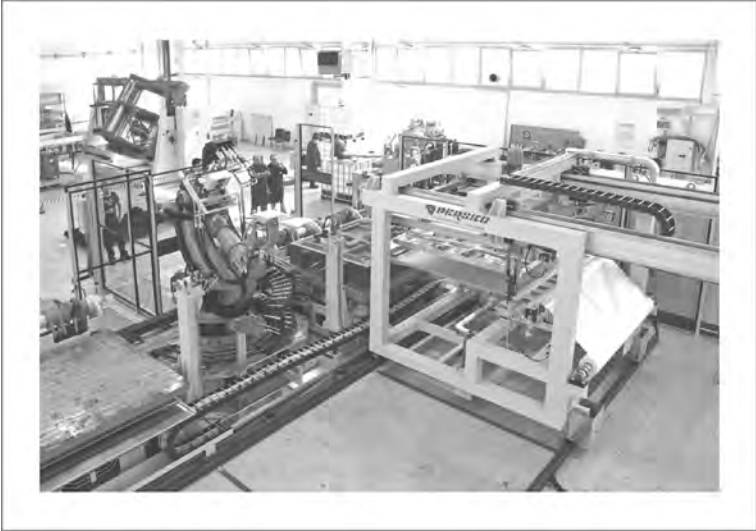
For the time being we had learned enough and our technicians could complete this technology development anyway.
Do you know what happened?

Three years ago, with Ilario Nanna, I was in the neighborhood of Minneapolis where we stopped our car in a small town, we were in the hall of our motel when I came face-to-face with Bob. Yes, precisely Bob. We greeted each other, he was affable, I asked him why he had disappeared, why he never answered us. He told us he became vice-president of a foundry working for Lockheed. They were drawn into a top secret project and for that reason he couldn't have contacts with foreign Countries.

We asked him if we could go and visit. And he welcomed us and took us to the company working on castings for military airplanes and helicopters, incredible things, we discovered metallurgy at stratospheric levels. It was a memorable visit."



Compressor cylinder model made of wood for Nuova Pignone, 1989.



Partial view of the Automotive Interiors Department.

EIGHTH DAY

Ruffrè, Trentino.
A rainy day in August.

*Where we talk about a passion for mountains,
of the Dolomites, of panoramic trekking
pathways where one is alone by himself.
And where we talk about Luna Rossa,
the high-technology sailing boat taking part
in the America's Cup.*

EIGHTH DAY

Now today the climate has completely changed.

When we left each other after meeting in that small office outside was that typical July dusty and hot air.

Today we are here in Trentino, Pierino Persico wears a red wind-proof-jacket, behind and around us just green woods and the sky is dark grey and rain is going to arrive. It is breezy.

Pierino Persico starts telling us about his house in Selvino and he once again tells us about his great passion for mountains, explaining that always, on Sundays, that he used to go on short and long walks with his wife and children.

And here too, in the Dolomites, despite the rainy August, he has climbed up two via ferratas on the magical faces of Mount Sella. He says: "I had the guide in front of me, then he disappeared, hidden by some rock ledges, he has sixty meters of rope advantage. You are alone, against the stony climbing wall, attached by a karabiner and you can see your hand touching the stone, you can feel the essence of it. Even if, in the month of August, you come across crowds of people in the Dolomites, there is still solitude and you can listen to the wind and, above all, listen to what you really have in your inside." Pierino Persico inherited a passion for mountains from his father, who climbed up the footpaths leading to Selvino with his children. "We used to go up to Cantul, light the fire and picnic. For us children it was wonderful, even just making a fire was a memorable experience.

And so, I went up along the same footpaths as well, with my own children, in summer and winter.

I remember one day, it was the 11th of March 1984, my son Marcello's

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birthday. He was two years old. We climbed up to Poieto and I first carried Marcello in a rucksack and then dragged him in a bobsleigh. My wife and my two daughters, who at the time were almost ten, were walking in front of us. When I reached the top, Luca, my wife's brother, who was thirteen, jumped into the bobsleigh and so did my daughter Claudia. Marcello sat in the middle and so off they went, down the slope. After about twenty meters, the older ones got off and the bobsleigh almost ended its run.

Then, suddenly speeded up again and turning left, into a deep gully, a kind of gorge that led towards Ganda. I desperately ran after him with my camera hitting my chest but the bobsleigh was extremely fast, impossible to grab. Other people were running after me as well, trying to help, aware that something terrible was going to happen.

Down in this gully there was a large hazelnut bush, the bobsleigh bumped right into the middle of it. Marcello flew over it, landing on the other part. I saw nothing, I was just running. Surprised, I heard a cry and in that moment I felt such a happiness I could never describe. My son was there, behind the bush, his mouth full of snow, but he was alive."

Persico loves talking about the mountains, in particular here, under the Mendola pass, under this thundery sky.

He tells us of Albino valley, of the two grottos you come across walking up to Selvino.

"We went up to Selvino so many times, with the kids, without taking the mule-track but walking up through the woods and valley instead. Then you can see amazing scenery with no one around. Going up to the woods and valley you can still see remains of dry-stone walls that

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farmers built in past eras to create terracing that could permitted cultivation even in these inaccessible places. The Valqua of Albino is fascinating, so remote, with its cracked rocks, it rises up until Ama, it is so incredibly sheltered. I have covered all Bergamo's mountains, from the Pizzo di Coca to the Redorta, to the Diavolo, but my favorite spot is Scalve valley with Pizzo Camino and the Cimon della Bagozza mountains.... Perhaps because those peaks remind you of the Dolomites, where you can still see amazing flowers blooming..... And also because this valley is still uncontaminated, where building trade, holiday housing, have not spoiled its landscape.

Think of what happened to the water springs in Albino because of the uncontrolled expansion of Selvino during the Fifties and Sixties, when sewers were not built together with the houses"

Some rain drops fell, Persico pulls up his hood, the story goes on and from the mountains we jump to the sea. From past to present and maybe to the future. Persico tells of Luna Rossa, of the exciting activity, the adventure, into the most advanced technologies of the sailing world. In the world of these 100 million Euro boats, two hundred milliards of the old liras, the same price for a space probe launched for Mars.

Persico says: "This adventure with Luna Rossa was really something important, an opportunity that in some aspects took me back to the old times. A good occasion to meet smart people, people working with enthusiasm and passion.

You see, I've always trusted in personal relationships; to me, a client was very often also a friend, something like it once used to be with

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family doctors: we became friends and money was put in second place. Sometimes it happens also with your trustworthy mechanic: what matters, first of all, is to solve the problem, to find the damage, before the payment.

But over the years, our jobs have become more and more industrialized and so became impersonal. Relationships with clients are consequently poorer. You see, I confess, sometimes a client of mine would contact another supplier: I suffered personally and not just for economical reasons. The creation of a model was directly connected to the continuous dialogue between the purchaser and the model-maker. Today, price is dominating the market.

I admit this atmosphere upsets me, I don't belong to all this.

Am I old? Or there's something wrong in this new industrial world? However, in the 'product' Luna Rossa, passion is dominant and I love it.

Everybody is drawn in, everybody is working to allow teammates to achieve the best results, all of them are focused on only one precise goal: to create the best possible sailing boat. Nobody is bothered by the numbers of working hours, money is really in second place. What a fervor!

You see, so many times I wish it was the same in Persico, like it used to be. It seems that things must change when you become bigger. It's true we are not competing for the America's Cup but we have our daily competitions to win too!

This job is a constant battle if you want to keep afloat. And if we all had the same passion..... but to think that two hundred employees, can all have my same enthusiasm for work, is perhaps utopia. I remain of

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the idea that together we must suffer or altogether we must celebrate. All of us. And I get angry when I see someone just 'cultivating his own little garden', just doing his individual little task...."

Seeing that the rain drops are turning into a heavy shower, we decide to change our base of operation, a short walk along the lane and we are under the roof of a "maso", a typical old rural stone house.

Rain hits the roof tiles, the thermometer indicates 12°C.

Where has the torrid heat of July gone?

Persico continues: "Luna Rossa came by phone. It happened approximately one year ago. The designer Maletto phoned us, he is the director of the technical office in charge of Luna Rossa.

I suppose Maletto called us because he already was part of the Moro dei Venezia team. The previous Luna Rossa, the one that achieved wonderful results and not only during the America's Cup. It was built in the traditional way by British shipyard employees at the Luna Rossa base in Grosseto. Maletto asked to meet us, he asked if we were interested in this enterprise. We were interested.

We met, we discussed, we thought of how we could create this huge sailing boat model, for which extremely high precision was required. I proposed to avoid the model and create the mold directly. Luna Rossa technicians were interested, they approved of my idea. But with what kind of equipment would we make the mold? Antonio Marrai, the coordination and logistic supervisor of the construction phase, also took part in the meetings.

He was from Livorno, a professional sailor and crew member of the second Azzurra, who took part in the America's Cup in 1987.

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An engineer, Gillis, the technology supervisor for the Luna Rossa construction, also took part. The objective was to maintain a tolerance of error of a tenth of a millimeter, a very low margin of error, considering that the boat hull was approximately twenty-six meters long. We decided to construct the hull in four parts, in carbon fiber. During those meetings there was a great atmosphere, it was very constructive.

You could feel that everyone sincerely tried to think about and discuss only what to do for the best. There were no personal interests, envies, obstructions or will to prevail over the others. We also discussed the tests that the technical staff made on the small prototype mold placed in a water bath, where we studied the hull reaction to water flow, we studied resistance, forces... something like a wind tunnel for cars. We had meetings and with a handshake we laid out the agreement. We didn't sign any paper, nothing, in the old way.

A few days later the managers of Alinghi, the Swiss boat entering the America's Cup, phoned us. Their general head-quarters is in Genève. The Swiss asked us if we were interested in hull construction... We answered we weren't, we answered we already had an agreement with another America's Cup group, that is another team, another crew.

And do you want to know something? One month later the manager of +39 team also called, the other Italian boat preparing for the America's Cup as well, the one sponsored by the Sicilian Region. To them also, we had to answer no."

The America's Cup is well-known as a sort of sailing boat world championship.

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In August 2001 its "Jubilee" was celebrated for 150 years of competition, on the island of Wight, in England. The first event was held on the 22nd of August 1851. It was called the 100 Guineas Cup, won by the schooner called America and from that year the Cup history started.

The trophy is always the same one: 69 centimeters high and about four kilos in weight. It is the most ancient Cup in sports history, forged by the Garrard jewelers of London in 1851.

That regatta took place around the island of Wight over a distance of 60 miles. It took the schooner 10 hours and 35 minutes.

One hundred and fifty years later, the commemorative regatta, over the same distance, was won by Luna Rossa, in exactly five hours. One hundred and fifty years and great technology have passed. Persico talks with the sound of the rain falling on the roof: "These sailing boats are difficult and expensive enterprises. You have to estimate one hundred people working for three years, full time. Yes, in fact it reminds me of the incredible effort needed for space enterprises. I confess, I never understood anything about boats. I am a mountain man, I travel along footpaths. But when you enter into that kind of world you are enchanted. Yes, I repeat it: basically there's not much difference between the solitude of the sea and mountains, from sailing far away by sea or climbing up a hidden footpath in a wood...."

Perhaps we seek for the same emotions, a close contact with nature, the smell of the sea or the scent of pines, with wind blowing in the sails or with buzzards flying around fir-trees.

Blue water, grey and silver rocks, silence... in short, I've fallen in love with this enterprise. Maybe it's because I always fall in love with what

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I do... but Luna Rossa is, without a shred of doubt, a great challenge. I would really like to get more involved with it but I can't. So many things to do, too many. When we were smaller I could manage anything... and I liked it, I admit. Now I have to hand over, to delegate obviously, and I'm sorry sometimes, I still would like to manage everything.....

My son-in-law, Andrea Rottigni, is personally dealing with it, he is an engineer, he is very competent and unlike me, he is very fond of sailing boats.”

Two of the Luna Rossa boats were constructed in the huge shed in Nembro: one was delivered in March 2006, the other one in December.



Mountains are Pierino Persico's great passion.



Persico Marine: model and mold of a 20-meter-long boat hull.

EIGHTH DAY/2

Ruffrè, Trentino.
A cold and rainy day.

*Where we talk about the other half of the story,
the Persico story from the point of view of Pierino's wife, Isa,
also deeply involved in the
company.... Until when, her son Marcello,
then seven years old, asked his parents a specific question....*

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"I always encouraged my husband to go on, I was aware of his enthusiasm, his talent, I realized he couldn't stop and stay where he was. Sometimes he was hesitant, maybe worried about the necessity of having debts. I encouraged him." Isa has delicate features. She wears simple clothes, of good taste, on this rainy day, in this mountain family restaurant. Isa wants to give her contribution to the story, to the piece of writing on the Persico, of these thirty years of work, of business but above all of life. Isola Colombi married Pierino Persico on the 3rd of June 1972, in the middle of the most problematic and creative epoch of the post-second world war period. In addition, Isa was marrying a 25 year old boy, who didn't let the "68" period pass smoothly like soap under a shower. Not at all, she married a young man that believed in the new ideas concerning emancipation and protest movements.

It was the new generation defined by the *beat*. This meant, of course, justice and ideas of egalitarianism but also freedom of ideas within the social sphere. Disapproval for hierarchy and formalism, with point-less constitutions, rituals to maintain detachment and coldness amongst people.

Youngsters of that age were *contesters*, demonstrators, they wanted change. Each institution was critically appraised, including marriage.

Who said that marriage could represent the only possible union between a man and a woman? That family should have only this as the example and heart, the married couple? That family and a couple

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should be closed within themselves, not open to new personal and sentimental relationships?

Isa explains: "Those were years full of struggles. We got married in church, by tradition. In addition to Pierino being involved in politics as town councilor in Albino, he also became local assessor for Sports and Youth. He was very busy.

I didn't want to study after the fifth year of primary school, despite my father's complaints, I most wanted to work. My father wanted me to study because, having brothers in Canada, he was aware that education would offer new opportunities, open new frontiers. But I was in love with the art of shirt making; seriously. Later on I attended evening classes, for three years of secondary school. Meanwhile I wanted to be a shirt maker. I worked for the Follis Company. Then in the evening I went to a tailor to be trained. I really liked it. When I got married I was working for Follis. But when my first daughter Claudia was born, in 1974, we decided that I should leave my job and continue making shirts in one of our aunties' houses, just in the afternoons. At that time, Pierino was working in a foundry in Albino, he moved here also to stay near the family. But when he came home in the evenings, he wasn't happy.

I remember it very well. He told me he didn't like his job because he was working on things which were too simple and easy, things that didn't stimulate him. He wanted to make more difficult models. Therefore he started working by himself in the evenings. It went this way. One day, coming home from work, he told me that he

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had found out that there was a '*paradur*' workshop vacant. It used to be a drapery, where they prepared garments for religious and solemn ceremonies and for funerals from houses.

Renzo the draper also left all his carpentry tools. Pierino was hesitant. I was excited, I told him he should take it, not to worry about money. Then Pierino rented the basement. He was coming home late in the evenings, but happy.

During the day, my father gave him a hand varnishing the models and I helped them to deliver the models to clients by car. We worked hard, I left my previous job. We realized we had plenty of work coming in. Therefore in 1976, when Alessandra was born, Pierino started his own business. I remember that at that time you could conclude a business contract just by shaking hands. Then a job from Innocenti arrived, the motor-car company, and a handshake wasn't enough anymore.

In 1976 our company was this: Pierino made the model, he took an apprentice, his cousin, my father varnished and I delivered the finished work.

I learned some book-keeping (I attended courses on accounting, banking reports, etc.)

We had lots of things to do. Too much.

Our two little girls, the business...then it happened that some orders came along, of big models, so big that we couldn't manage to take them out of the basement. It was necessary to find another place and in the same time period we also moved house.

We joined a co-operative society of Camenduno, settlement of Albino, until then we had lived in rented houses.

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I remember that Pierino used to work till very late at night and I used to bring him some food down in the basement, with my first little girl in the pram and the other one in my womb....

During that time I fell ill, I suffered from bad colitis and my body temperature reached 41 and a half degrees....

In brief, before and after the move I was in bed with a high temperature and I still remember my two little girls jumping on my bed... what a period! Too much pressure and stress.

It took me a few years to recover completely from that colitis. It would have been 1978 when we found out that another carpenter, Remondi, in view of the fact that he was retiring, was leaving his tool shed, a nice little workshop to rent.

It was very good for us. It was the best choice, there was plenty of work and my husband needed more space. Of course we were worried, we had to borrow money, be in debt, ask for the support of banks. It wasn't a simple decision, particularly with our cautious and conventional mentality. But we needed more space, it was necessary. We ended up with a mortgage to pay plus the rental fee for the workshop. But we had plenty of work.

We rearranged Remondi's carpentry workshop, we created a kind of upper floor where we placed the office. I worked there in the office for four hours a day, my sister Loretta worked for the other four. She left her previous job where she worked as an employee to work with us.

We, the Colombi, are four brothers and sisters, Loretta, Fausto, Luca and me. Fausto and Luca also work here with us.

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Fausto is a mechanical technician and he is in quality office control; Luca is also a mechanical technician (but his passion is the flute: he studies it at the Conservatory).

These were times of great concern, demanding with lots of hard work to do. When we finally moved to Remondi we already had seven or eight workers employed plus some relatives helping as well. Pierino at the time travelled around in his car, visiting his clients. He left home while it was still dark in the morning, perhaps reaching Florence and then on his return taking a different road to meet up with another client. And in the evening he always came back home. To some extent to save money but also because he was very fond of his own family, his children.

Eventually all this driving for hours and hours caused him some inflammation problems and then he had to control himself.

Our financial position was good and debts were high but we had a lot to be optimistic about. Pierino has always been uncomfortable with accounting but he always had good intuition and hardly ever made mistakes.

He was interested in his work and that work went well, it would be done properly, as it should be.

I remember that he never wanted to come to the meetings with bank directors, it was always and only me.

Sometimes he seemed to be impolite, but that is his way.

He is careful, particularly of investments not related to the business.

I remember the arguments we had because of a piece of land next

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to our house that I wanted to buy. Pierino said it was an excessive cost and we would have the burden of even more debt. To be exact, he'd rather invest in the business. At the time of this piece of land he said he had to buy a new milling machine.....(but in the end we bought it). Another time, later on, we had the opportunity to buy two small houses behind ours..... I thought it was a bargain. You see, when a big investment had to be done it was necessary to ask for bank loans and our house was the guarantee.

It didn't like it at all. If we had other houses we could give them as a guarantee instead of risking our own house.

In this kind of milling work a lot of time is often needed, a model necessitates many hours of work, sometimes days or months to be completed and therefore payments can drag on. So you can be short of money and thus banks become essential. The time of the two small houses was a battle, however I succeeded. He is for business investments.

He took over firms already in deep water, trying to absorb their most valuable employees or who among them had important personal problems. Pierino has always been sympathetic and caring to this kind of problem..."

Isa Colombi talks with pleasure, she is different from Pierino, as women are generally different from men: they find pleasure in conversation, they open themselves deeply, showing more interest and need for dialogue. An American survey states that on average, a woman uses 20 thousand words a day, while a man speaks just 7 thousand.... Isa speaks without pausing, willing to help, on this rainy day of August, in this lonely mountain bistro with its tables made of fir wood.

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Isa says: "Before the wedding, we went to a nun who was a psychologist, and we did a test to see if we were compatible.

At the end of the test she told us that we had two very different and not easy personalities as a result of which our partnership could blow up or produce extraordinary results.

It's not for us to say if we have obtained extraordinary results.

Of course interesting lives are not easy and smooth, and there have been many battles between the two of us.

I've always admired his ability and his passion for his job,

I could see our clients satisfied, I always trusted him. I think of when he decided to leave the milling firm in Curnasco and come back to Albino to work in a foundry.

I was happy because he was near home again, because he could come home for lunch. He didn't have to eat food cooked in the pan the previous evening from his lunch-box. He used to set off carrying his box, wearing his always perfectly clean overalls, the brown model-makers overalls. I made them for him.

The overalls had to be washed every week because glue and varnish and plaster would cover it with all colors.

I loved to send him to work clean and tidy and he was happy about it too. But, in truth, only two days after he announced he would leave the milling firm in Curnasco to come back to Albino, his boss came to our house. It was midday.

I found Mr. Beretta outside the house, at the gate. He told me to wait for a minute. He went to his car and took out a huge parcel: it was a TV set. He arrived out of breath. We lived on the third floor, he brought it

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up, sweating. I asked him why he had brought a TV. Once he arrived at the top he said: 'I'd like to convince Pierino to stay with us. However, in any event, this TV is a present for you!'

At home he was a loving father, on Sundays he always took us to the mountains. Of course in the first years he was not always available and I had little time as well, considering I didn't have any help at home either. Then Marcello was born, our third child, it was the 11 of March 1982.

Pierino took us to the mountains but, being him, he is never satisfied. If we went to a particular mountain hut then he wanted to go further up to a different meadow and once we arrived at that meadow and put down our backpacks, looking around he would say: 'Let's go there, that's better'. So off we went once more.

After the third time I sat down, refusing to move again.

Then he said: 'Here we are, we always have to do what you want!' Can you believe it? Pierino is like this. But this is what has spurred him along. He is never satisfied, he looks ahead.

For instance when he goes to look for mushrooms, he always looks for unknown tracks, leaves the paths, tries to find new sites. Positive, if you go to the mountains with Pierino you can be sure that, to reach a particular place, you'll take the wrong way and it will take much, much longer, but you will see new places and things you have never seen before. He tries not to take the same road he already knows a second time. In these thirty years our Company took important steps forward, some of them I would say necessary, unavoidable, otherwise we would have disappeared. I can say that the big leap was done during

these late years, with the nautical industry.

There also, everything started because Pierino is never satisfied, always looking for news, for challenges.

He has another very important quality, he is humane and caring.

Pierino is fond of his job but also of people. He always establishes a personal relationship with his clients, beyond business. For him, to conclude an agreement a handshake is enough. In fact, during exhibitions and meetings where he meets lots of people, nice friendly relationships start, reinforcing their business rapport.

That's what happened with the American company that gave us the license for the rotational molds. During a trade fair he met the vice-president Denis Tronca ... we are still good friends. Pierino also wanted to find an agreement with the other Italian model-makers. He wanted to find a way to avoid excessive and disloyal competition to the detriment of costs, stealing each others work... you see, he has a great ability of involving people, he can communicate his enthusiasm. Sometimes I think he would have been a great parish priest. Or even a good politician."

Then Isa talks about Denis Tronca, she says that that journey to the States opened a new horizon for Persico.

"If I remember well," says Isa, "we were at the trade fair in Dusseldorf, Pierino met this American and he understood the importance of this new technology. You see, the way he does things is catching. So Pierino initiated a friendship becoming familiar with this Mr. Tronca. When our children went to Milwaukee in Wisconsin for months to learn English, they stayed in Denis's house and Denis and his family came to Albino.

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I remember that time, when their grandfather was with Denis and his family, specifically Denis's father. He could still speak Italian and helped his son to translate. We all went to visit our relatives called Carrara. Ercolina Carrara, my mother's sister married Alberto Carrara who always had a great passion for music. He is in the choir of the Scala di Milano and his daughter teaches music in school.

That evening on the piano they played the American National Anthem, so Denis' old father stood up with his hand on his hearth and started singing. It was fantastic. Denis' father was from Abruzzi but he left when he was extremely young....and he made his fortune. Well, in 1984 we came out of Val Seriana and I registered at Shenker to learn English, how my father always advised me...better late than never."

Isa tells me that they were not short of problems, life has not always been easy and the Persico's have fought many battles.

"In 1985 we built our own house in Albino. Another move with three children and a busy husband. But I had help for house work. 1989 arrived, a difficult moment with unfulfilled payments, a car industry crisis. We were at home eating, Pierino was lamenting, I was listening and talking about other problems.

Some work pieces which were badly made, were rejected by clients. Our daughters were growing up, Pierino would like to see them more involved in our work, in the company, I told him it was a matter of time. It was their time to study and they had to carry on with their own world.

But he was keen. That evening at the table, my son Marcello, who was

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seven, looked at us saying: 'But daddy.... is everything always so bad at work?'. Yes, maybe that was the moment that changed our life, it caused a crisis period for us.

Was it really going all wrong? Was it right that the family should live in such an atmosphere? Was it right that work should master all our arguments? No, it wasn't right. We decided to change, I left the company, I decided I had to stay home more, follow my husband on his business trips, just to stay near him and keep the family budget.

We finally decided to take on some suitable staff, teammates, as we realized that it was impossible for us to do the whole lot. And I thought about the future. Suddenly I became conscious that everything was in Pierino's hands and that if Pierino stopped working the entire thing would collapse. We had three children all very young and it was an unacceptable risk. Then I suggested him to take out life insurance. Pierino was deeply upset but in the end, thanks also to our accountant's advice, he accepted.

That stimulated him to decentralize his responsibilities so that some capable managers could join in. I think, this is another positive step that we have made. I think that in the end, Persico improved and our family life improved too.

We had time to think and do other things which were not only work. And our children also benefited from it, having their problems of course, but slowly getting closer to the Company."



Isa Colombi Persico with her granddaughter Martina.



In the mountains with son Marcello.

NINTH DAY

Back to the small
orange office at Persico.
A beautiful September day.

*Where we talk about those marvelous,
terrible Seventies born from the hope of the Sixties,
the opening of the Council declared by Pope Giovanni,
from the willpower of a new society based on freedom
and on new human relationships.*

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If in the Sixties Pierino became a man, in the Seventies he matured his vocation to become an entrepreneur and he chose his specific way through work. Persico started the Sixties when he was thirteen and just finished Technical school.

In 1970 he was 23 and he was already was a very skilled model-maker. When he started his own business, in the basement, it was 1976: he was 29 and already married. His formative period was concluded, accomplished. But those years are cherished in Persico's heart.

When he talks about it he has sparkling, almost teary eyes. It's nostalgia for youth but also of a historical period of great significance, full of troubles.

Says Pierino, many years later, in this orange painted office, in the nautical department of his company: "I would speak to the Council. To me, as a catholic, committed in the parish and in the oratory group, the Ecumenical Council announced by Pope Giovanni, has been fundamental. The Council placed in us adolescents a sense of hope, a sense of changing in an open direction.

That is, the opening. We could feel our minds opening, widening, embracing new opportunities. In Albino we lived the Council passionately, mainly thanks to two priests of the oratory, don Domenico Gianati and don Pierino Corvo.

At the beginning of the Sixties we all used to go to the oratory, we used to play soccer, we used to listen to doctrine. In the Seventies things changed, new opinions developed, participation developed,

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young people's critical presence was stronger. In 1965 Don Domenico Gianati started the Youth Town Hall with its chairmen: for Culture, Bible, Sports, Theatre and Cinema.....we organized film clubs, meetings, excursions and camping... young people had the leading role, they performed, organized, considered...

You see, to understand the transformation we have to analyze what was the church at that time. We felt, let's say, like spectators. We listened, obeyed, stopped. With the Council, we the believers, started to be protagonists, to really take part. There was a sense of a new way of breathing, deeper. Don Gianati was a cultured, capable and thoughtful person, he was informed and read a lot. There! I think I've been extremely lucky to meet him and extremely lucky to have been born in 1947, to have the possibility of living the Sixties in full. We had grown up fully between 1964 and 1966, a route toward a major consciousness for each of us. The beauty of the future was being outlined. It was the period of 'God is dead', the time of Guccini and Nomadi songs.

God was dead but then He was raised again. I remember a big cover of the magazine Panorama with that title. And we firmly believed in that resurrection, in a new world.

Then Don Domenico left, don Pierino Corvo took his place, becoming the new oratory director, following his steps. Another great priest! Don Pierino had to struggle with the most difficult period for the Youth Town Hall, the Seventies. I felt perfectly in tune with him.

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Unfortunately that sense of happiness and opening was slowly fading away. Hippies were also fading away, the flower children.

For so many reasons. Instead, strong and extreme left wing political beliefs were rising, with alternating periods of rage and violence. Jesus and Marx were put on the same level.

Inside the oratory you could also feel this same sensation of change. Many young people entered, what I used to call, the 'no frontier', no, always no. Everything was bad, everything was disgusting. Opponents of everything. I didn't agree. I remember, one time a gave a lift to a friend of mine, it was 1978, arriving in Bergamo, at the Valleys roundabout, a Porsche drew up alongside and then overtook us at speed... he said if he had a nail he would have scratched it properly and I asked him what on earth he was saying. But he told me that it would have been good to have a machine gun to wipe out a great deal of these people....

I was deeply impressed. At that point the beauty of the Sixties and Seventies was over, at that point we started facing the Plumb times. It would be very interesting to understand why the utopia ended, why the joy exploded with the Council, with Kennedy, with Khrushchev, with Guccini and the hippies and Pink Floyd ended.

Because everything ended up in violence, on the one side, and political apathy and a return to the private sphere, on the other. In 1966 I was a union delegate of the Aclista Youth. We put together a well organized program: a journal to send to our emigrants abroad, a petition to receive the second RAI TV National channel in Albino, the gathering of Christmas presents from shops, to distribute to poor

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families, excursions to the mountains, to Venice, to Lugano.....

My commitment continued in politics and in the local administration, I believe it was in 1971, I registered as independent in the Christian Democracy Party list. I was voted in, I was chairman of Sports and Youth. It wasn't an uplifting experience, I confess. Perhaps because I had so little time, perhaps I just wasn't skilled for it. I was trapped in the politics and bureaucratic machinery. I remember with pleasure the PFM concert, the Premiata Forneria Marconi group, that we organized, free of charge, in the theatre of Albino. It was a great success. Together with a sociologist, we also organized a survey of the teenagers of our town, but everything was shipwrecked in piles of sheets, loads of papers. We built up the project together with the teams for the indoor sports arena. Well, I was often in disagreement with my DC colleagues and, at a certain stage, I realized I was there just 'to warm up my chair', nothing else. No, it was not a positive balance. Perhaps I wasn't cut out for politics. In fact, in 1976, I walked out of the political world. Many young friends of mine, joined the extreme left wing party, some of them the PDUP, Proletarian Union Democracy Party, some of them Proletarian Democracy, some of them the Manifesto groups.

I left politics and started my self-employed job and maybe this was indeed my personal purpose, also from a social point of view. Indeed, I believe that an entrepreneur could be positive for society, I believe that to embark on a new economic activity is fundamental: to do it well, to do it with responsibility and duty is essential for all the community.

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In the last forty years, there have been improvements, indeed.

Above all from a material point of view, the average level of life has been raised, improved. Almost everybody owns a car, a telephone, a washing machine, a pair of shoes. We used to walk around with broken shoes, a car was a dream.

And this is a matter of fact. Improvements have been made, perhaps also toward opening hierarchies, perhaps also concerning authority. On the other hand I see many negative aspects as well; less humanity and concern, for instance.

I mean: we have all become bourgeois, to a certain extent shut up in our own private worlds, impoverished of altruism and of the spirit to communicate, to stay with the others. Listen, when I used to go camping in the early days, we needed just two days to make friends with people nearby. I stopped to go camping, in San Cassiano a few years ago, but the atmosphere had changed, that sense of group, of mutual help, had vanished.

Everyone by himself, everyone with a world of his own.

I don't like it. As in the mountains. Once, in mountain huts, we used to sing, along the paths we greeted each other.

Today, greeting is not a rule anymore, no singing in mountain huts anymore. As we say, too many snobby people.

No, from a humanitarian point of view, we haven't had the expected growth we dreamt about in the Seventies.

We imagined a beautiful future, a participating future of joy, participation at any level, social, political, ecclesiastical. We dreamt about leaving a certain closed sensation, of the detachment of which the old

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world was really soaked in. The church too. The Council was for us, a moment of opening. In fact to see the priest celebrating Mass with his face to the believers and not his back, has been a great change.

I remember the songs of those days, the outburst of Viva la Gente, for instance.

Now I believe we need a new drive toward positive change, toward responsible participation.

Yes, I believe that today, people, the common people, have an even greater responsibility concerning the future, because we have lots of opportunities at our disposal and there was a time when we didn't. At any level.

It happens also for my children, at a business level.

I started from nothing, I had nothing, I was responsible only for myself and my family.

Now I have to be responsible for the lives of two hundred families.

I think that in the future, from a working point of view, participation will be more and more important, the development of workers' involvement, the development of intellectual and intuitive capacities. We'll need less and less arms and more and more heads. Workers just pushing button will disappear. We'll need to be more skilled and creative to stay afloat because simple products will all be made in less developed countries.

You see, I think that each skilled worker in the future must be really motivated and be well trained. He will have to be continuously updated. The mentality of swiping timecards at 6 p.m., immediately when

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the shift finishes, will be a loser. I strongly believe in participation, in involvement, the emotional involvement of each worker, to guarantee us growth. In future we'll have to compete with all countries, with the market, with the famous logic of globalization. It is reality. The world market is merciless and we Catholics regard it unfavorably, that's true. But this is the market that permits us to buy computers for six hundred euro, no longer at two thousand. To buy a pair of jeans at ten euro, of course not brand names. However, in this situation it is necessary to keep our eyes wide open, otherwise we'll be swept away by the market. We have to be present all over the world, smelling carefully what's in the air, improving all the time, without pausing. If not, then within two years you are obsolete, out of date.

In our area there are positive and negative signals.

Positive, because there is still the will to do something and diverse experiences to apply.

Negative, because of our very weak infrastructure and inappropriate youth vocational training:

for example, it is very hard to find able and skilled mechanics.

It is hard to find guys who believe in their work. I know I'm leaving my children a great responsibility. Even though I feel immense pride to leave the Persico company well off and respected. Not for a matter of profit, only for growth, for quality and for what we represent in the region and for people."



Persico Automotive Tools Department.

TENTH DAY

Persico's big meeting room.
At the long table.
A beautiful September day.

*Where we talk about the encounter with daughters
Claudia and Alessandra, telling us of their "volcanic"
father and his extraordinary intuitive capacities.
And where the words of Pierino's brother, Angelo Persico are shared.*

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Let's look for another piece of the story, a new view of the Persico event. We are still in the nautical division, this time in a large meeting room, the wide windows facing the Sanctuary of Zuccarello. This time, it is Angelo Persico talking, Pierino's younger and only brother. Angelo is 55, he wears eyeglasses, he has, over time, lost his hair, he wears a checked shirt.

Beyond the windows, summer is fading, but the green is still alive with bright sunlight. Angiolino says: "I was working at Graphic Arts and above all committed to the trade union CISL.

I followed my brother's steps in social and political commitment.

Then, when my brother started his own business, he called me in, asking me several times to go and work with him. I refused because to me, the trade union commitment was too important.

I joined Pierino in 1985. I made this decision mainly because a certain phase of the union was finished, the idealistic phase, the phase that was most linked to the values promoted in the Seventies. The trade union was changing and I felt free to go.

Then, I came here to the rotational department, I went to the USA, in Wisconsin, to Denis Tronca's factory, to learn. I stayed there a little while, too little. Anyhow, it wasn't like today, we had to work straight away, bear fruit without delay from what we learned.

Of course, if I had stayed in the States for a few months I would have learned better. But here, in our foundry, we had to start casting this is how I came here.

Now I am responsible for the production of the rotational division. I get on very well with my brother. Yes, he is a volcanic guy. When an

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idea comes into his mind he wants to go ahead with it, at any cost. He follows the development of his idea carefully and he is very demanding with people working with him, as he is with himself. But he is also a friendly person, cordial.

Managers sometimes reproach him for being too indulgent. His 'being too good' is due to his interest in the human side, in relationships with people. Yes, he is a volcano and he has great willpower.

I remember him, still at the professional school, he would have been twelve or thirteen, after school he used to go working in a dark and humid place, with rats..... It was a carpentry firm in Albino. It was under the old spinning-mill, I remember the water flowing through the small channels.

It was quite picturesque.

My brother used to weld iron.

I remember that at the time I was a child and one evening he came back home with red eyes almost coming out of his head.

My mother put slices of potatoes on his eyes.

When he started his own company in the basement in Carotti Street in Albino, where a decorator had worked for many years, he had to bring some equipment into the place. The problem was that it couldn't go down the staircase, which was just one meter wide..... we lowered the chair and the bench down with the ropes that I used for climbing. Of course, I helped him.

Even at that time we were very close. I think this sense of family comes from the example given by my father, my mother, my uncles and aunts.

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There was always solidarity between all of us.

Like my brother, I believe in this spirit. And like my brother I can get enthusiastic with things I have to do. My mother comes into my mind. We were poor, but she passed on to us the idea that everything was all right, that we were fine anyway. She inspired us to be positive concerning reality, concerning life. And in my opinion, being positive brings passion, curiosity, research."

These adjectives used by his brother Angelo are reinforced by his daughters, Claudia and Alessandra who also work in the factory. Volcanic. Claudia says: "My father doesn't understand much about technology, of machines. But he is intuitive. And he thinks continuously and he creates relationships between the most disparate things. I think passion for his job is the engine. I will explain.

In June we were in the United States, we had half an hour free and it was pouring with rain.

In a shopping center I bought a pair of little shoes for my daughter Martina and my father bought a pair of boots.

The usual passion for the mountains. But do you think he needed to buy boots in America? We were close to Cleveland, in Ohio.

All of a sudden, under the arcade of this huge shopping center in the open air, my father spots some kind of particular vases, pots for plants.

They looked like if they were made in cast aluminum.

He wanted to buy these pots and bring them back to a client that dealt in these sorts of things. But they were too big, too heavy, impossible to carry on the plane. But my father was already imagining how

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to produce the mold with our rotational molding method.

We came back home. Three weeks later, we had those pots in our factory and my father proposed them to our client.

He is always like this.

And another example, the time when he saw some bricklayers use a special tool for making holes..... he wanted to propose it to a client and produce it...."

Alessandra nods her head, smiling, in this big meeting room in Persico, when August is already past and work has already restarted, September slides towards Autumn with its lovely days.... "For our company, my father's presence is still fundamental even if sometimes it looks as if he wants to distance himself a little. My father hasn't got his own office, he goes around the divisions..... his intuition and experience are very precious to us. He just needs to touch a casting to tell if it is well made or not, better than any technical control. There was a period in which our castings were not so perfect.

Therefore, he decided to have the castings made by our competitor!

He told us that by doing this he wasn't serving his own immediate interests but he was teaching our workers a lesson.

He was right. He is like that.

Recently he has hired our most skilled German competitor for management consulting, whose company had been absorbed by a multinational.

This fellow has come and he is now overturning our company organi-

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zation, causing us some distress. Daddy is unperturbed, he doesn't fear being 'betrayed' by our old competitor, having instead, confidence in the company reorganization. He is man of change, a man searching for new pathways. He never stops. He is like this."

Claudia and Alessandra took up their duties in the company gradually. Claudia today is responsible for the rotational division together with Angelo Persico. Alessandra takes care of the automotive division, specifically mold production for car interiors, made with raw material, rugs, polyurethane and polyurethane foam.

Alessandra says: "My job is rather interesting, but the most important aspect of it is the human one because in the long run one gets bored of molds. But if you have an aim in mind, if you feel you are part of a group, if you are fond of all these people ...then everything changes, molds turn out to be interesting too." And Claudia concludes: "Earlier, I was telling you about my father, of his aptitude of connecting situations, seemingly so far apart.

Another characteristic is to take nothing for granted. For example, recently he went to Japan. Do you know why? We are making a machine to make rotationally molded products automatically, to be precise concave shapes like canoes, tubs, tables, chutes.... In Chicago, at an exhibition, he saw that a Japanese company is also producing something very similar. That's why he made an appointment and he flew there to see firsthand, to understand what it is all about, what stage they are at, if they really are our competitors, if they are forward or backward, if it would be possible to work together.....

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There you are, he's always looking for contacts, cooperation. He thinks he has always something to learn from situations, from competitors. Another component: from one hundred negative things, he picks up maybe single one that works and tries to add value to it. He is like this."

ELEVENTH DAY

Briccoli's molding workshop.
One mild morning in September.
His father's home. The same day.

*Where we talk about the art of molding and engineering,
gouges and planes. And where we meet his elderly father,
who, selecting his garden green beans, says calmly:
"Being poor has been our fortune."*

ELEVENTH DAY

The noise of milling machines, the noise of planes, pleasant smell of wood in this Nembro workshop, a short distance Persico.

Inside is Mauro Broccoli and his molding workshop employees. It was started in Bergamo, in Via Pignolo.

Before Mauro, these people worked for his grandfather then for his recently deceased father Abele.

Here there are machines controlled by computers, but there are also lathes and handmade work. Special and detailed wooden models are made, even huge models, amazing structures made of wood that make you understand how model-making is a combination of art and engineering. Mauro Briccoli, 44 years old, and all covered with white power, says: "Here you are, these are the drawings. This for example is a big shovel that we have to make. A kind of propeller shovel, with its particular shape, do you know what a propeller blade is? It has a kind of triangular shape, but its surface goes up and down forming a curvature, how can I describe it, a sinusoidal curve.....

It doesn't exist at the moment, it exists only as a project.

In order to produce it, its mold must be made.

We make it in wood because it is still very difficult to make it by computer. Wood and hands. In these circumstances we have to make the shovel sticking together different pieces, following the measurements and design....." Mauro Briccoli walks through his workshop, workers are fixing and filing and a pleasant smell of wood invades our nostrils.

He stops in front of a big structure, which must be more than two meters high and says: "This will be a valve. The model is ready; the shape is a combination of a cylinder and a cone, can you see? A mold

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will be made, starting from this fir tree wood model. What interests the foundry worker is the exterior of the model, but in order to keep the wooden parts of the mold fixed together, we had to create another structure inside its interior..."

Artists and engineers. Pierino Persico smiles, gets closer to the old worktable, grabs a piece of wood, puts it in the vice, tightens it, then he inserts some kind of pegs into the proper holes of the same bench. Persico explains: "These pegs keep the piece steady, model-makers call them legs.

This wood is cembra pine wood, excellent-quality, solid on the piece. There you are, you take a wooden cube and with a plane you start giving it a proper shape..... Very often, the model is made by assembling many different little pieces with glue, the templates, naturally worked into their proper shape.

We work with plane, gouge, file, lathe.... I was seventeen when I butchered two of my fingers, you see?." Brain and hand work. Mauro Briccoli explains that to work properly, absolute concentration is necessary.

"I can't stay at the workbench; I'd rather be the 'bocia', the supervisor. Since it is not possible to work on a model and answer the phone, to talk to the clients and check an invoice.

No, absolute concentration is necessary." And Pierino Persico nods his head. He nods his heads also when Mauro Briccoli says with some resentment:

"Once, clients used to follow the model from its birth, they wanted it to be accurate and well made, they came in to check....

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Now, price is the only thing that matters.

Nobody is checking on anything anymore. What's important is that things will be all right, one way or another.

Often, it happens that I have to make agreements on models and prices, dealing with the purchasing office managers that don't even know what a model is..."Just before leaving the model-making workshop, on the door step, Mauro Briccoli blows us down with compressed air saying: "It's the only way to remove the white dust." We go up to Upper Albino, to his elderly father's house on this mild September morning. Pierino Persico gets out of the car and says: "Here we are, this is the house we built when I was a child and I used to come and work as a 'bocia', the house that my father and my uncle built in the evenings and Saturdays and Sundays. You see? Here my father used to keep his complete vegetable garden. Now there's just a little piece left.

And in this place a stream used to run, forming a little waterfall. Now is all covered." We go up the stairs of a house of the Fifties on this beautiful September morning.

The Polish lady helping in his elderly father's house opens the door saying: "He is in the other room, working." Pino Persico is in the kitchen, the room is full of light, he is 91 years old and stringing his beans.

He looks at us with surprise, we introduce ourselves sit in the living room and have coffee. Pino Persico is perfectly lucid, and when he is asked about his sons he answers in a baritone voice: "I've never had any problem with my children. You see, there was no money and this is

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a fortune. They told me they wanted to go to the cinema, I told them to see if someone would let them in without paying, gratis....

I always tried to spend most of my free time with my children. We used to go into the mountains, always, even when it was raining and snowing

Off we went, to Selvino, always. Short and long trips. Sometimes we came back home for lunch, sometimes we stayed out, picnicking. We went walking, looking for mushrooms, asparagus, flowers, snails.... We never came home with empty hands."

Pino Persico has been a foundry worker all his life.

Pierino said that in the evenings he used to come home looking like a black man. Sitting in front of his coffee Pino says: "Yes, I was always all black with soot. I used to bathe in the barrel but in the morning after I got up, my grey print was still left there on the bed sheets.

And my wife had to do the washing, down at the washing-place at nighttime, because during the day the place was full of women washing their clothes, therefore it was difficult to find space.

When we stayed out all day, she used to come as well, with me and the children into the mountains. We brought food with us.

I remember one time when we brought a saucepan with spaghetti. When we were ready to eat, we realized we had forgotten the forks! So I took out a 'podetì', the curved folding knife that I always had with me in the mountains and from some twigs I made the forks we needed." Pino Persico talks with satisfaction; he tells us about pears and apples growing near the Serio river in the Luio valley and about his vegetable garden. And his children. "One day, when Pierino was young,

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he was maybe fourteen, he came home telling me 'Daddy, at the factory, they always make me paint. I learn nothing. I want to change my job.' And the idea of becoming a model-maker took shape. I thought that when model-makers arrived at the foundry their shirts were white, I thought that it was brain work more than hand work. Then I was happy for him."

So mum and dad gave Pierino a hand. Pino Persico nods his head: "When Pierino wanted to start his own business we were happy about it. We lent him some money, he borrowed the rest from the bank. To lend him the money, the bank placed a lien on our own house because he lived in a rented one. And I now say that we really did the right thing."



Foundry Department: liquid aluminum is poured into sand molds to produce molds.



Mold made for the manufacture of hydraulic plant connectors.



June 2012 - Pierino Persico and his wife, Isa, celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary with their grandchildren: Giorgia, Tommaso, Martina and Pietro.

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How does it happen that an employee at a certain stage of his life decides to start his own business and create a company? And how can it happen that this company, starting from a basement or from a small warehouse, grows to become such an important company working all over the world?

This is the captivating adventure of many companies in Bergamo, especially those started in the 1960s and 1970s.

And it is also the adventure set forth in this book – the adventure of Pierino Persico, his family and his company, starting thirty years ago in a small workshop in Albino.