

A Eulogy for Aldo Biale

By Wendy Biale

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On behalf of the Biale and Rossomando family, I thank you all for joining us today as we mourn, pray, and rejoice.

A few days ago I was visiting with my nephew Peter who scanned many albums of photos for a video presentation at the reception later, and he said to me: "Wow, looking at all these photos... Nunu really lived a long and full life." Indeed he did.

I didn't meet my father-in-law until just *after* he retired from his 31-year career with the City Public Works Department. And yet, I've never seen ANYONE work harder than this man. While it is typical of immigrants and their children to work with tenacity and zeal, Aldo was atypical in his genuine love for his *work*, and not just his paycheck. The chickens and pigeons and rabbits on his ranch were not merely livestock to be slaughtered, but animals whom he nurtured with great affection. Walnuts, prunes and grapes were not simply agricultural products to be gathered and sold, but the cherished fruits of his attentive farming. He reveled in his role as chief walnut-cracker, mushroom hunter, vinegar maker and Zinfandel vintner.

Farming was in this man's blood. He was born at the top of Mt. Veeder on the Gier Ranch, where he lived until his father bought property on the valley floor. But after his father's passing, Aldo, aged 13, and his mom Cristina were on their own to make this ranch provide for them. And they did, very successfully, which is a testament to their ceaseless hard work and strength of character.

I think the only thing he was as passionate about as his farming was his Italian heritage. In 1953 he traveled with his mother to Italy to visit family, and within three weeks of meeting the pretty girl who attended one of the dinners thrown for these Americans, Aldo asked for Clementina's hand in marriage. Three weeks later they were married, and the legend of this man's charm was born.

But there was no easy life awaiting Clementina in America, she had to work every bit as hard as Aldo and his mom. But he had chosen well, for she was up to the task, and together they grew their ranch through blood, sweat and tears, and raised 4 children who also know how to work, and then work some more. The children also learned the Catholic faith from their parents, a devotion to which has sustained them through thick and thin.

And while his work ethic is celebrated, Aldo also knew how to play. Every year he took the family for two weeks, or more, camping somewhere in the western US and Canada, or over to Italy to be a *real part* of the family there. In his later years, polka dancing became his recreational devotion. I remember times when Bob and I would work by Aldo's & Clementina's sides all-day long and then head home exhausted for an early bedtime, while *they* headed to Sacramento to go polka dancing! They would dance for hours and share true and abiding friendship with their fellow dancers. Their energy was seemingly limitless. I always loved the

image of Aldo twirling Clementina on the dance floor, wearing either a dress or jewels that he'd bought for her. He LOVED to adorn his bride with beautiful things; and when he gave her these things, you could see the depth of his love and appreciation for her, and his pride that she was his wife.

It was this tender side of Aldo which could take you by surprise, for *he* was the man who was strong as an ox with a personality that was straight-shooting and forceful. But it actually makes sense that a man who was so hard-driving in his work would be so loving in his relationships, for it is a singular passion which is the wellspring of both. He was quick to anger, but even quicker to forgiveness and generosity. Aldo was indeed a generous man. And he gave from his *need*, not merely from his surplus. Just the other day Sr. Philomena told me that when she first came to Napa 50 years ago, it was Aldo and Clementina who gave the Sisters of Mercy their first car. No easy gift for a farmer to give in those days.

His generosity is part of what drew so many of you to call him friend. And as his friend, you knew him to be without pretension, quick to laugh, and a true-blue *testa dura Italiano!* If you had the privilege to work with him, not only could you not keep up, but you benefited from his ability to think uniquely about any problem and bring all projects to resolution. Your friendships brought him great pleasure.

His grandchildren, however, brought him the greatest happiness. He could be a man of few words when it came to expressions of love, but the profound depth of his love for all five of you is undeniable.

His immense pride in his children was everyday palpable: in John, who died too soon but not before growing into a man of kindness and virtue; in sweet and gregarious Mark who took over the ranch on El Centro and its endless list of chores, but who still respected his father's leadership in how to get things done; in diligent and faithful Bob who helped him realize his dream of a commercial winery through which to share his beloved Zinfandel with one and all; and in Sandra, our rock, whose tenderness and skills as a nurse always touched him deeply, but especially in these last months as he became the recipient of her care.

And he loved the people his children chose to marry and bring *into* his family, for it is family that was ALWAYS the most important thing to him. That's WHY he worked so hard, WHY he *demande*d so much. Aldo died a happy man because he achieved what he wanted most from life: a large and loving family.

This is a really tough time of year to lose someone. And two nights ago Bob and I attended our daughter's choral concert. *Jingle Bells* and *Deck the Halls* were tough to tolerate, but then they just kept singing about their joy for the coming of the Savior "born unto us." The singers kept praising God and adoring Jesus; and eventually, the exquisiteness of their voices and the beauty of their message seeped into even *my grieving soul*. If Jesus is the reason for the season, the reason for Jesus is this. (point to casket) The Christ Child was born so that he might make eternal life available to us all. And so it is with confidence that we can stand here **on this day** and rejoice in the Christmas message. *That* for which *we* are *waiting* and *preparing* this Advent,

Aldo is *already* enjoying. I for one **will find** the joy this Christmas, as I am keenly grateful to our Lord that Aldo is now delighting in the fruits of his life well-lived in answer to the calling and promise of this child born in a manger.

It was Aldo's custom to end his prayers, especially those said with the family, by praying:
"Johnny, come walk with us."

And so today I end by saying, "Aldo, come walk with us."