

My sense of identity started to take shape while I was growing up in the politically charged Liverpool of the 1980s. So, from an early age, I developed a strong sense of social justice. My father was the son of a Liverpudlian who served in the Second World War and an Italian immigrant mother, who arrived in Liverpool in 1945, and raised my father among the Italian community of Liverpool.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a tough time for many. I noticed that my Italian family were happy, the children not focussed so much on their homework, always in the shops that my dad's siblings had opened, working in the family trade of sewing and selling clothes. Nan would sit me on her knee and chat away in Italian to me – I loved it. I asked Dad why he didn't speak Italian to me at home – he said he had been told by his father not to speak Italian. I detected a sense of shame and was confused. When he brought Nan to post World War Britain in 1945, Grandad would say she was French. I was surprised and asked my dad more about where Nan came from and how they met.

She found Grandad in a field on the family farm fighting for his life, after walking for miles in the Italian countryside with other soldiers who had escaped capture, in a desperate attempt to find their way home. As a local resistance member Nan knew what she needed to do to make sure he, and others like him, survived.

Men who were found to be helping these escapees were hanged in her village – I was astonished to read the Italian documents which verified her story and to see names she had mentioned as friends listed as executed for their brave efforts. Stabbed in the leg with a bayonet when questioned by the German police, she remained stoic and as you guessed, seven children and sixteen grandchildren later, here I am telling her story.