



FORLiBANO

A CEDAR OF A HUNDRED BRANCHES AND A THOUSAND SOUNDS

Story of an inexhaustible friendship between Emilia-Romagna and Lebanon

text by Giampiero e Romeo Pizzol

illustrations by Franco Vignazia

translation by Leila Zorkot

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UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

COMITATO ITALIANO PER LE AMICIZIE CON IL LIBANO

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PrefACE

Between the values of the Forlì community, friendship holds a place of utmost importance. Friendship and dialogue: between individuals, territories, institutions, communities. Aware of this profound soul, the municipal administration devotes great attention to building relationships, mutual knowledge, help and support. The 'Forlì for Lebanon' project, which over time has become 'ForLibano', is an exemplary witness of this. Thanks in the first place to the 66th Trieste Airborne Infantry Regiment of Forlì (platoon awarded 'Honorary Citizenship' by the Municipality) and to Colonel Marco Licari who, during the mission in the 'land of the cedars' that he led, opened a new path by launching an appeal to collect goods to cope with the humanitarian emergency in which they had to operate. There was a strong and enthusiastic response from the area, which saw numerous adhesions and the sending of many materials. An exchange of visits, with Lebanese students coming to Forlì and representatives of the territory received in Lebanon, strengthened the bond that is now stronger than ever. This publication seals the experience through words and images that recount emotions and perceptions. Kudos go to the authors of the texts, Giampiero and Romeo Pizzol, and to Professor Franco Vignazia for the illustrations. Commendable is the work of the many institutional and third sector realities that have contributed to the realisation of the projects in over two years: Committee for the fight against hunger in the world, Buonpastore-Caritas Forlì Listening Centre, Solidarity Centre, AVIS, Parishes of Grisignano and San Pio X, Accademia InArte,

No.Vi.Art, Lions Clubs, Fondazione Cassa dei Risparmi di Forlì and many others. Special thanks go to all the people who lavished commitment and skill on the success of the initiatives, translating the 'big heart' of Romagna into action. Extremely significant toward the importance of the relationship that has been established is the sign of solidarity that came from the Lebanese community, the American community of Michigan, which promoted a fundraiser in favour of the Forlì families affected by the flood of May 2023. These are facts that materialise what is evoked by the words of the soldier and the boy that you will read in the following pages and that tell the story of an inexhaustible friendship.



GianLuca Zattini
Mayor of Forlì

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Army, I had the opportunity, one of many, to operate in the beautiful Lebanon, a country linked to Italy by very close relations since Phoenician times. On that occasion, the 'ForLibano' Project took shape. It's an initiative that stems essentially from an instinct of solidarity proper to the human soul which, in its own forms and times, constantly seeks room to emerge. It's precisely because of this instinct, which is almost primordial and certainly fundamental for the preservation of the human being, that, as Commander of Task Force "ItalBatt XXX" based on the 66th Airborne Infantry Regiment "Trieste", within the framework of the UN mission active in southern Lebanon since 1978, I decided to seek support from those I felt were my friends. One of the tasks assigned to me in this operational context was to support a Lebanese community on its knees after years of conflict and tension, plunged into the most serious crisis the country had seen, in the hands of a state system no longer able to provide basic goods and services. The population was suffocating in total despondency. Immediate, concrete help was needed. I thought of what life had brought me together a short time before, the excellence of the Forlì reality, its great vocation for solidarity. Writing the letter was an impulse, as I said an instinct, which I am sure was shared by an extraordinary first citizen in his equally immediate and instinctive response. It was thus, without thinking too much about it, that the mobilisation of a City began, in all its articulations, generating a virtuous system of aid directed to Lebanon that has led the 'ForLibano' project to

achieve results far beyond our wildest expectations, in terms of relations, partnerships, agreements, friendships. A true model of solidarity espoused by an entire community, the realisation of a love for one's neighbour. A project that continues to grow, filling the heart with ever new successes, responding to that impulse that constitutes us and makes us better human beings. A renewed thank you to a territory, the one of Forlì, capable of building 'inexhaustible friendships'.

Thank you Forlì!

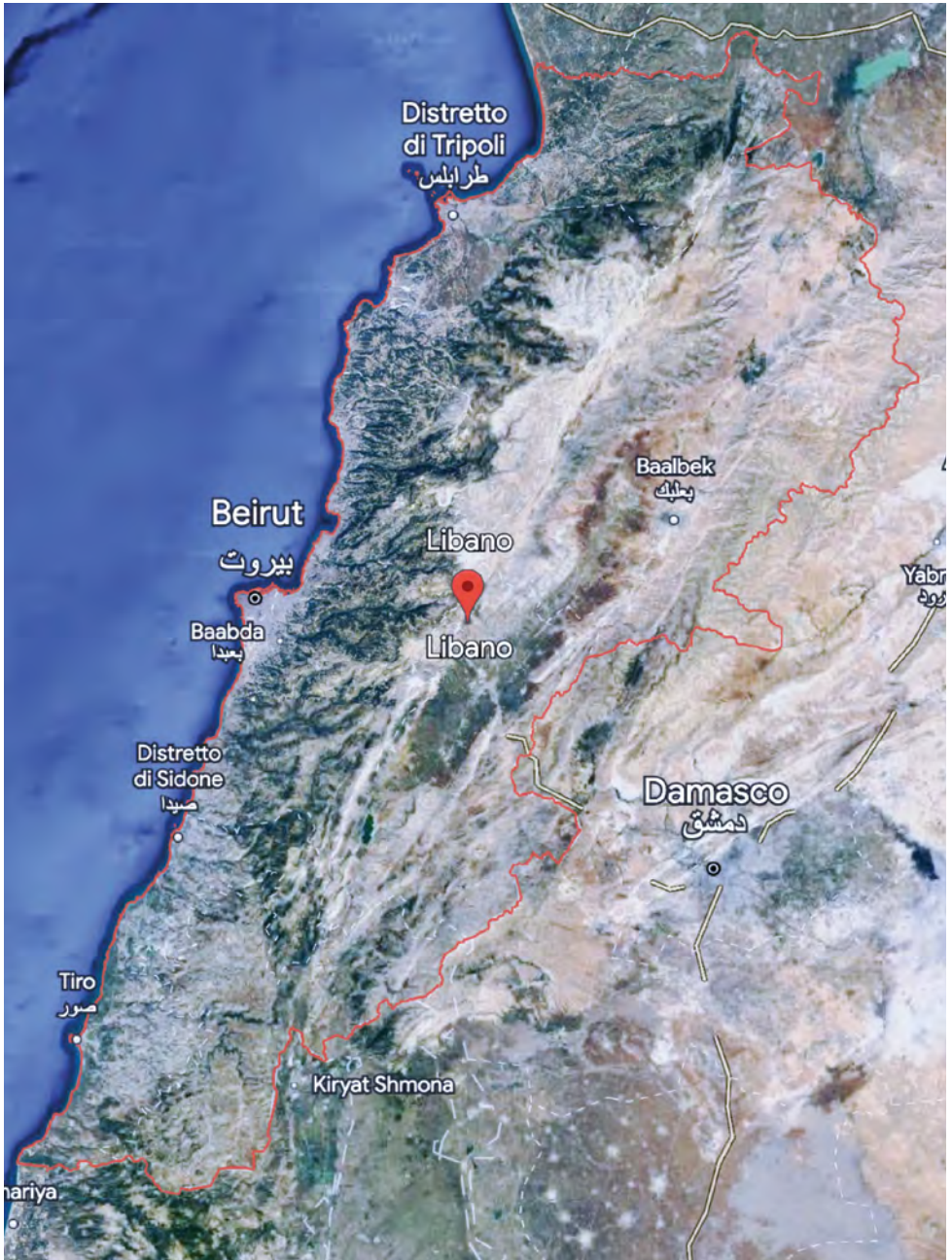
Col. Marco Licari
*Commander 66th Airborne Infantry Regiment
"Trieste" stationed in Lebanon*



Friends' Houses



Italia, Emilia-Romagna region
Google Earth, 2023



Lebanon

Google Earth, 2023

THE SOLDIER

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- Is it new?
- Yes.
- Why on the arm?
- You need arms to realise wishes.
- It looks like a Christmas tree! - my sister says while laughing, as she looks at that dark tattoo on my arm.
- It's a cedar.
- Get out of here! Cedars are big lemons and that is not a lemon.
- It's a cedar of Lebanon.
- And does it make the lemons that are sold in San Pellegrino?
- No, these make pine cones.
- But it's the pine trees that make the pine cones!
- Cedar is a species of pine that stands in the snow like firs
- And at Christmas they put it in the town square with lights?
- They don't put any lights.
- Ornaments?
- No ornaments. The tree just stands there.
- In the square? Alone?

- What do I know, maybe with others of its kind in a forest.
- You're still the same old loner! You could have at least tattooed a couple or maybe a cedar forest, a nice cedrata¹ !
- Stop it! In the flag there is only one.
- What flag?
- The flag of Lebanon
- Lebanon, Lebanon... You were there, you tattooed the flag and you told me nothing!
- There's not much to tell! A mission like any other...
- But you could have taken some pictures! Everyone takes lots of selfies even when they go to Bassona² or to the Potato Festival!
- It's not like the military walks around with their mobile phones in their hands! We already have the weapon, the backpack...
- And on his head Santa's hat!
- That was a special occasion. We were delivering gifts to the children...
- To put under the tree!
- What tree?
- The cedar of lemons!

And she runs off like a leprechaun humming *Jingle bell!*

That's how my sister is: ten years old and loose tongue. But she's right about one thing: I never tell anything. Yet I am not stupid, on the contrary, I am full of desires and thoughts that buzz in my head like a beehive. Of course, even fools think, they think

¹A classic Italian soft drink.

²A beach in Ravenna, an Italian city.



Vignetta
2024

nonsense. But I don't think only nonsense, or at least I think they are not nonsense, they seem to me intelligent thoughts but sometimes I doubt it. Also, because no one, including professors, has ever told me that I am intelligent. Or is it perhaps a useless intelligence? An unwelcomed intelligence?

After all, I have always disliked school.

As a boy I adapted to the bench like a dead man adapts to his coffin, with the difference that a dead man sooner or later gets used to the idea of being dead, whereas I was alive and full of ideas.

My grandmother used to put soup in front of me. But what's the use of eating when you don't know what life is? My eyes which I thank more than bread, thanks to which I lived, threw me into an avalanche of things. I saw that a man is an animal full of fear and courage, anger and awe. I saw that everyone wants to be loved, not only by others, but by everything: by the earth, the sun, the sea, God, the uncle, the cat, the living and the dead. In short, loved by life, loved by someone.

This is what I also saw in that tree I now carry on my arm. A cedar tree, which doesn't make lemons, but which is there. It simply exists, it resists, it lives.

The symbol of Lebanon on a background of snow, or rather against the backdrop of a flag slapped in the wind.

And I, too, existed, sweating all the unhappiness of my twenties, dreaming of accomplishing something important, of transforming the world, or at least of not letting it transform me, into a world where we talk more about nothing than about something.

So I said to myself: school is a prison, home is a prison, work is a prison, the weekend is a prison, the PC is a prison.

The barracks is freedom!

I chose it freely precisely to be free. Some will think: other than intelligent, this is stupid! In the barracks, obedience is everything, the rules are sacred, discipline is a must.

True! But it relieves you from the fatigue of keeping up with things, of stressing yourself, of thinking about them all the time. In the barracks you don't think, you do.

Or rather, you have a lot of time to think, but in the meantime, you act, you are useful. Everything is simpler.

And then the Army is important! Is there a flood? Call the Army! An earthquake? A war? Here we go to the cry of: *I dare to win!*

Ready to put some order in the world's mess.

No, I am not one who is fascinated by uniforms or weapons. The thought of killing kills me! You will say: then what the hell are you doing there?

I simply like to fight, to stand up for something, indeed, for someone. To do something good, something right, and above all something concrete like a bridge, a wall, a canteen. Yes, I like to hustle, to learn, to fix. Finding a place on the map and reaching it by driving the jeep on the dirt road.

And then the camouflage! Camouflage is freedom! It frees you from mirrors, from wardrobes, from combinations, from fashion. As soon as you put it on, it makes you a 'spotless and fearless' type because, being camouflage, you never find a stain on it, even if there is one!

In Lebanon, I saw a Franciscan who broke his back from dawn

to dusk trekking up the mountain villages. I thought that the uniform is not a habit, but the habit is definitely a uniform! It has the color of the fruit-bearing earth, brown with bright green. It's the symbol of one who puts himself at someone's service, gets dirty with mud, kneels in a bow.

If you show up in a uniform you know who you are and others know it too. Simple!

No, I don't talk that much. And I don't write. But I think. I think like crazy. And when in Lebanon our commander called for help, for a moment I thought the worst! But it wasn't an S.O.S. No siege, no incident or attack! We were in a base near Tyre, situation under control, quiet border. And we peacekeepers were in peace.

Then help to whom? Civilians.

And why?

We go out one day for a school inspection.

No electricity, no teachers because petrol costs more than pay, no internet because there is not a shred of signal.

And there I see a thin but tall boy who reaches into my heart. He plants his eyes in my eyes as if he wants to get into my brain. And he enters because it was me at fifteen, similar, with the same question: what can a boy do to really be alive? He and I, guests of an insignificant body and inhabitants of an immense universe that is meaningful but difficult to decipher. For him, who spoke Arabic, perhaps even more complicated!

I could hear that boy's questions hammering in my mind, the futility of the days, the failure of projects..., a city where every tomorrow is yesterday again and efforts to fly go no further than a hen's leap. And where even God is no longer an exclamation



mark but a question mark! Everything is wrong in this country, whatever you do is a mistake, how to do something right?

How do you do it when a doctor's appointment costs a month's salary? When the electricity sits randomly like a pigeon on the terrace and goes off on its own, when a bucket has to stay under the tap day and night because water mysteriously wanders in the pipes, and no one knows when and how it will come? When a country is overrun by millions of refugees, with the walls still cracked from a civil war, with the currency becoming wastepaper every day, and where death sits in your mouth like a dead tooth? And many families are jigsaw puzzles without a piece? How can you be intelligent? To believe in life? To look at the world with a high forehead? To see beyond the visible?

Some boys choose study, many work, some manage to emigrate. Others prefer the uniform, because the army offers a place to those who have none, a bunk to sleep in and friends to chat with. We visited a government barracks. Next to it was a vegetable garden with eggplants, zucchinis, beans. And the soldiers had a spade on their shoulder instead of a rifle because the pay didn't arrive and when it did, it was already devalued, and when it did, it wasn't even enough to feed their families!

I saw a soldier in a helmet, filled to the brim with red tomatoes! When you have seen this, you have seen everything. And you have seen nothing because I don't know what they know, what they have in their minds from the years of war. Years buried along with thousands of bodies, with death still creeping through the streets, because in addition to the reasons why war had exploded, other reasons emerged, capable of triggering new ones. Because the Middle East is a time bomb that has no

timer, no dial and can explode as suddenly as the port of Beirut exploded, wiping out hundreds of people.

So better not to think, but to let the river of things flow in through your eyes. And drink images: a mountain of rubbish under the sun, the filth of the world under the light tells you that life is beautiful even when it's ugly; women smiling on the market stalls when they find a piece of red cloth; an old man without a job watching the little ones do their job as children, playing in the street with a deflated ball; a one-eyed cat emerging from the dark and stretching, happy with nothing, on a stair; a feather falling on a blue wild thistle flower, half dead but also half alive.

Lebanon is a boxer on the ropes who doesn't give up. A loser who doesn't lose.

This is what I was seeing, trying not to think, not to speak, not to write, for fear of losing it, as it entered my eyes like a river.

But if nobody says anything, everything will be lost.

Fortunately, our commander also puts words into line. All he needed was a sheet of paper, ninety grams of white paper, to emphasize the present even from a distance.

He sent a letter to the city. Not to Beirut, no, further, across the sea, all the way home. A request, bounced immediately from one office to another and then around, between associations, up and down. That's the beauty of communications: nothing can stop them, they are alive. They travel better than planes, ships, locomotives. And it takes very little to get them going. A sheet of paper. A pen.

On those words a web of relationships, knots of friendships, associations, started to weave the threads of an unexpected

sharing. Everyone gave something and received much. And wishes flew to Lebanon like the wind flies through the branches of the tallest trees, to the cedars of the peaks. And thanks to the support of so many branches, we donated medicines, brought power back to the schools, gave toys and musical instruments as gifts.

One evening I heard a choir singing around the fire. War orphans gathered by the music. Many were little boys or girls crying in the middle of a song, others surrounded them with an arm. Perfect solitude and perfect company. Their eyes were fixed on a dream that lay ahead, as invisible as the music. The fire was within them.

And I had an acute attack of happiness. One of those attacks that, instead of words, makes you feel the beats of your heart. You can be wounded in war, but also wounded in peace.

And like a shotgun blast, my sister's voice bursts into my thoughts.

- What are you writing?
- Nothing
- You write nothing, think nothing, do nothing! Phew! It seems you grown-ups live on nothing? Let me read
- Don't you want the gift?
- There's a gift?! You didn't waste much time wrapping it, it's wrapped in a sheet of newspaper... It looks like a carpet!
- It's a prayer mat. Muslims often carry it around and kneel on it
- It's soft. What's drawn on it?
- A garden



- I like to pray in a garden, maybe there's your cedar of Lebanon!

- The great thing about carpets is that they have a forehand and a backhand. On one side you find a design, but on the other a tangle of knots, like life: a question is answered, an invitation is returned, those who were far away come closer, a thread becomes a bond...

- You know, big brother, you look almost smart! The cedars are good for you. I think you'll be speaking Arabic after a while. By the way, what's written under the tattoo?

- A motto from that Lebanese boys' choir... God has men...

- ..and women...

- All right, women too! God has men and women whose desires are His desires....

- Not easy! I will lay the carpet in the garden and think about it!

- If you think too much it will become a flying carpet!

She left flying on the wings of her big and small thoughts. Someone has said that to think is to suffer, that the cleverer you are the unhappier you are, but I believe the opposite. And smiling I stood watching her through the window as the wind went out to give the world a breath. I barely made it in time to unpack.

- Forlì Forlì station!

It was the crazy little sister again with a croaky loudspeaker voice

- Well, is the flight over the carpet already over?

- I preferred to take the train. Because there are two at the station!

- Of tracks?

- No. Your cedars of Lebanon. And they have been there for eighty years

- How did you find out?

- A little Internet birdie told me! And you didn't even know you had a piece of Lebanon at home!

- I must have passed by the station a thousand times but I never noticed it

- Looking is not seeing. You have to know what to look for! But if you want, we'll go!

My sister would make a perfect soldier because in a blink of an eye, she would be geared up already in the field, riding her bike, pedalling.

At the station, under the holm oaks of the avenue, on either side, like two sentries, are the cedars, dark, silent, huge.

- They have seen war!

- Even those in Lebanon saw it.

- Come on, now let's go to the Villa Park! There is one of one hundred and fifty years!

The one in the old park is as tall as a mountain, muscular branches reaching up towards the sky and a wide trunk that looks surreal.

- This one has a lot to tell: good and bad...

We sit under that tree as if we were sitting under the vault of a cathedral.

- You can pray in church as under a plant.

- Maybe trees pray better than we do! Leaves of words, branches of speeches, roots of thoughts.

Laughing, she gets up and runs towards the tree, to hold it in her

arms as a child. But the trunk is too big, more arms are needed.

-Come on! You see I can't do it alone!

So, I get up, stop thinking and I too embrace that tall, fragrant, dark wood. But even two of us don't take it all in one piece. Then I turn around and see a lady with a child. My sister has already started talking, clinging to the bark like a cicada.

-Do you know ForLibano? You know, this is a cedar of Lebanon! It doesn't make lemons, but we hug it anyway! And down in Lebanon maybe the other cedars feel the embrace!

The lady is puzzled. She looks at us confused. But the child runs towards us, puts his hands together with ours. He doesn't think, he smiles and has the time of his life.

After all, the world belongs to the children.



THE BOY

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It beats. Bounces. It touches. Turns head and lowers chin. He listens. He keeps time and meanwhile his foot dances and lowers on the spring pedal. The boy plays and doesn't think. He listens with his whole body to that combination of metal and wood vibrating under each stroke.

They are best friends, he and the drum. They have known each other since they were children, or rather since he was one. A primary school boy who heard a rock song for the first time. Was it Springsteen? Or maybe Celentano? He hadn't even paid attention. He was all about that sound, like a burst, a full roar, which from the drum, set the tempo for the whole song and built an invisible but real structure. It was a thunder, or rather thunderclap.

At that very moment, the child had met the sound of destiny. The boy plays, raises and lowers his hand. He's no longer small, but neither is he a man. And as he plays, without thinking of anything, a voice brings him back to the present.



vignettes, 2023

- Guys! Stop! It can't be heard!
- What?
- I said it can't be heard!
- Speak louder!
- Nothing can be heard!
- Nothing?
- Yes! I mean, no. You can hear the drums. But only that one!
It's too loud!
- I know! It's cool, isn't it?
- No! The volume is high! Play softly ¹.
- What piano? The piano instrument?
- Not loud! Softly! Softly!

And then the hand, with a sweeping gesture, stops everything. It's the director, he's the only one who can do it.

The boy bounces one last time and stops, also obeying that gesture. But he doesn't like to listen. He wrinkles his nose.

- You played that drum too loud.
- The skin is taut. The wood is hard. The sound is just that. Nothing can be done about it.
- It's not true. The hand of a man can do everything. Power, strength, but also grace... If you don't feel like trying, why are you at the rehearsal?
- It's my school that wants to. I didn't want to come.
- Do you even know what concert it is?
- Totò Cutugno, Ennio Morricone, Nicola Piovani... Italian stuff.
- Yes, and do you know who we will be performing with?

¹ Softly in Italian means piano.

- Boh.
- A Lebanese boys' choir.

- So what?
- So we play to build! We build with music a bond, between people, lands, cultures. So don't smash those drums. Play softly, like a normal Christian. Come on, let's start again!

Days pass. The musicians are excited. But the choir still doesn't arrive. It's travelling around Italy, it's late, it makes itself wanted. The boy doesn't want anything. He just wants to get this one out of the way too. And then get back to playing around at some party.

But then, one day, under the August sun, sweating in the rehearsal room, a new voice comes through the door. That of a woman, Lea, and behind her, the hubbub of many mouths chatting, laughing, vocalising.

They are the choristers, at least twenty of them. The boy watches them from behind a plate, speaking in a dialect he doesn't know, but which he likes a little. It's a musical language, soft, intense. Never heard before. 'It's Arabic to me,' someone says.

-Of course it's Arabic, you idiot!

The boy bounces his neighbour, then stands up and presents himself, his hand outstretched, to the choir. But the palm remains empty. A touch on the chest, lips and forehead. This is how the first of those Lebanese boys responds to the greeting.

-It's an Arabic way of introducing yourself to someone. It means: I give you my heart, my soul, my thoughts. Try it.

- Me?

- Come on, just a little touch. A light, light touch. Do you play the drums?

- The battery, yes. Why?

- It's the same. Hit yourself, slowly. As if to vibrate a sound. The heart. The lips. Then the head.

At that moment the window opens, and a scream comes from below. It's someone from the choir who has been locked out. Everyone laughs, the mood is cheerful. The laughter is already a first note, and immediately the rehearsal begins. Of course, after letting him in.

He taps. Bounces. Beats. And then the boy puts the sticks away. But this time he does it reluctantly. Today he played in a burst, a machine gun. This choir has pepper in its body, or rather Baharat, which besides pepper has cumin and cardamom. His friend, the new one, gave him a taste of it the other night when, after rehearsal, they all went to eat together up on the Hill. And to make it quicker, someone had slipped into the boot. But this is best kept quiet. The colonel would get into trouble!

The colonel is the one who follows the whole shebang. He's a soldier, of course, with two soldier arms that would be perfect for beating on a drum. He often goes around with them, I mean, with the choir, plus all the people of Forlì who follow the group and make it their own. It's quite a mystery, how does that group of boys from a faraway land make friends with everyone, without any pain. Is it because they sing Romagna Mia? Or because they follow Lea? Or perhaps because of the trail of laughter they leave around them? Or for the constant smile on their faces?

- Are you always happy?



Vignatiq 2013

- Who said we were happy?
- Laughing all the time.
- And do you have to be happy to laugh?
- Well, yes. That's how it works.
- Who said that?
- I don't know...
- For me it's the opposite. You don't laugh because you are happy, you are happy if you laugh.
- But you can't laugh at everything!
- Don't make me laugh! Of course you can!
- Even when things go wrong?
- Even when you die.
- But do you know what they say in Italian?
- What?
- Dying of laughter. It's said when you laugh a lot.
- Then I am dead!
- But no!
- Do you laugh?
- Not so much. But I laughed a lot before, when you were able to even pick up the mayor!
- He laughed too!
- I believe it! You gave him quite a ride!
- We teased him!
- You can also say that.
- And you? When are you taking a ride?
- Where?
- To Lebanon. Come to Batroun. I live there. It's not so far from Forlì.
- But aren't you all from Beirut?

- No, but Lebanon is small. Like Romagna, almost! Come on, what are you waiting for?

- All right, fine.

- You promise?

From that invitation made somewhat as a joke, in less than a year the boy soon found himself involved in his first big trip. Out of Italy, far from home! He taps on his bag slung over his shoulder. He's nervous, the plane is wobbling, and this is the first time he has taken a flight. He takes a breath. He imagines a musical pause. Then, with his memory, he starts to play a few tunes as the airplane takes off into the sky. He feels his body becoming light. The music in his head continues, grows, takes off, explodes in a riot of sounds when he's high above the white clouds and suddenly sees the streets, the houses, the fields of Romagna becoming patches of bright, vivid colours. From above he travels with his gaze and his thoughts and embraces an immense space in its entirety.

Seeing the world is the only way to understand how life is one, whole, shared by everyone: men and women, beasts, plants. Discovering that you are one creature among many is the only way to care, always, for that beautiful gift that is the present.

In Beirut he makes a stopover, then goes to Batroun and when he arrives, he moves his hand confidently and swiftly: first over his heart, then his lips, finally his head. He shows his friend that he has learnt it.

He enters the house, smiles, says hello. The family is there, but the house seems empty. Who is missing is his father, who died as a soldier. A mourning still alive and felt.

It's easy for a family to be orphaned in this strange, ruined, yet still, human land. And to be fathers to themselves, there are many young boys, caring for their mother, their brother, their sister. With difficulty they go on, in that war. Without crying, even laughing, to the point of tears now and then. In that house one lives without time. There is a chessboard, standing in a corner. The pieces wait on the field, for someone to make their move. The tap is open all day, while one waits, with a bucket, for the turn when fresh water will be dispensed. They pray to their mother in front of a statue, Saint Rita of Cascia, saint of desperate cases. In that land, it's indeed the case to pray. Muslims, Christians, Druze, but one prays and hopes. Everything is in ruins, not working. So many waiting, on their knees or standing. So many asking for intercession, different voices, different confessions. It sounds like silent music, like a pause with a crown, of uncertain duration, perhaps infinite. Only the Master of Life knows.

Then the boy hears it again. Rhythmic, decisive, loud and clear: it's laughter. It echoes in every house, square, street. And as he listens to it intent, absorbed, a ball lands on his face. His friend laughs. He's the one who threw it!

- Take it! Let's go to the camp, I have a reservation!
- What time?
- At six!
- But it's four o'clock, it's early!
- Of course! But it takes an hour and a half and the bus doesn't pass, because petrol is expensive! Let's take a walk!
- What the hell! It's six kilometers! Can't you stay at home?
- And what happens at home?

- You rest. And you wait for something to happen.
- It's an eternal wait. Nothing happens if you're not ready to move your legs! Think about it, you didn't stay at home. And if I had stayed here, we wouldn't have met in Forlì.
- All right, all right. You've convinced me, let's go. But walk slowly! I'm a drummer, a sedentary person, I'm not trained.
- Then let's take a moderate time!
- So, they walk, side by side, between closed schools and the ruins of abandoned houses. Souls who are gone.
- Why don't you come and live in Italy?
- And who will take care of the family?
- We will help you. You will be able to study.
- I already do. Alone without schools. But I would like to come...
- You can do it.
- ... and then return.
- Back to Lebanon?
- Yes.
- But it's in pieces.
- And I am one of those pieces. If the pieces leave, a hole remains. You must stay, build, help.
- I wish I could do something.

- What can you do?
- I can play the cymbals, the bass drum, the snare drum... it's all useless stuff!
- No, it's not. It sets the pace, it's always needed. It's like here, you see people smiling, waving, getting busy. Why do they do that?
- I don't know, it's a mystery.

- This is true. There is a mystery underneath, like a track to follow, a bass line, a countermelody, a tempo. An invisible, deep rhythm of life.

- Like the drum!

- Yes, like a drum that vibrates in the background and gives us strength, life, wind! We hear it and are ready to sing! It's a harmony, the world, a great concert. It's the echo of a God who lives now!

- Yes, but what should I do?

- Play.

- Do I play drums?

- Ring the bells.

- The bells?

- Yes, to meet everyone who will open up to you. We met because a soldier knocked on a door and it opened for him, and then from there it was a whole concert of open doors, letters, messages, words, music and journeys. But if nobody lifts a finger, not a fig happens. Ah, here's one!

- A finger?

- A fig. But it's empty. It's not the season.

- Too bad.

- But if there is one thing I have learnt in this blessed land, it's patience. A holy patience to wait for everything to find its way. It's early days for the fig tree and perhaps not the time for you to throw yourself headlong into a mission. First understand what your vocation is. And in the meantime, play...

- The bells.

- No, the battery.

- Now I am following you. I can do this well.

- Then do it. And pass me the ball.
- Are we there yet? Where's the camp?
- Down there. One kick away.
- Come on, shoot! Come on!

It beats. Bounces. It still beats. The hand rises and then rests as the boy takes his leave and goes home. An Arabic greeting, three movements, one time. Because every hello, goodbye, see you later is a song. In one voice, two, three, ten, a hundred! That rise to the rhythm of an encounter.

The boy flies, happy and tired, into the warm light of dusk. He leans his hand against the glass, behind which the world is seen like a mantle. his eyes close, his hand glides. As if caressing everything.



Vignati 2023

THE STEPS TOWARDS PEACE

1

THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

“As a boy I adapted to the bench like a dead man adapts to his coffin, with the difference that a dead man sooner or later gets used to the idea of being dead, whereas I was alive and full of ideas.

My grandmother used to put soup in front of me. But what’s the use of eating when you don’t know what life is? My eyes which I thank more than bread, thanks to which I lived, threw me into an avalanche of things. I saw that a man is an animal full of fear and courage, anger and awe. I saw that everyone wants to be loved, not only by others, but by everything: by the earth, the sun, the sea, God, the uncle, the cat, the living and the dead. In short, loved by life, loved by someone.

This is what I also saw in that tree I now carry on my arm. A cedar tree, which doesn’t make lemons, but which is there. It simply exists, it resists, it lives.

The symbol of Lebanon on a background of snow, or rather against the backdrop of a flag slapped in the wind.

And I, too, existed, sweating all the unhappiness of my twenties, dreaming of accomplishing something important, of transforming the world, or at least of not letting it transform me, into a world where we talk more about nothing than about something.”

From “The Soldier”





2

Part of the Creation

“Seeing the world is the only way to understand how life is one, whole, shared by everyone: men and women, beasts, plants. Discovering that you are one creature among many is the only way to care, always, for that beautiful gift that is the present.”

From “The Boy”





3

LIVING ON HOLD

“In that house one lives without time. There is a chessboard, standing in a corner. The pieces wait on the field, for someone to make their move. The tap is open all day, while one waits, with a bucket, for the turn when fresh water will be dispensed. They pray to their mother in front of a statue, Saint Rita of Cascia, saint of desperate cases. In that land, it’s indeed the case to pray. Muslims, Christians, Druze, but one prays and hopes. Everything is in ruins, not working. So many waiting, on their knees or standing. So many asking for intercession, different voices, different confessions. It sounds like silent music, like a pause with a crown, of uncertain duration, perhaps infinite. Only the Master of Life knows.”

From “The Boy”





4

PeACE is A COMPANIONSHIP

“On those words a web of relationships, knots of friendships, associations, started to weave the threads of an unexpected sharing. Everyone gave something and received much. And wishes flew to Lebanon like the wind flies through the branches of the tallest trees, to the cedars of the peaks. And thanks to the support of so many branches, we donated medicines, brought power back to the schools, gave toys and musical instruments as gifts.

One evening I heard a choir singing around the fire. War orphans gathered by the music. Many were little boys or girls crying in the middle of a song, others surrounded them with an arm. Perfect solitude and perfect company. Their eyes were fixed on a dream that lay ahead, as invisible as the music. The fire was within them.

And I had an acute attack of happiness. One of those attacks that, instead of words, makes you feel the beats of your heart.”

From “The Soldier”



Giampiero Pizzol

AUTHOR OF THE STORY "THE SOLDIER"

Giampiero Pizzol is a theatre actor and author of works in prose, music, monologues and fables published by various publishing houses (Giunti, Ares, Itacalibri, Mimep, Ed. Corsare). For the cabaret, after the Walter Chiari '94 award, he took his characters to "Zelig Off" in 2004 and to other radio and TV programmes. Winner of two editions of the Sacred Theatre Festival and the Eti Stregatto prize, he collaborates with various Italian and foreign artists and with the *Compagnia Bella* artistic ensemble.
www.compagniabella.com

Romeo Pizzol

AUTHOR OF THE STORY "THE BOY"

Director and screenwriter from Forlì, class of 1995. He holds a degree in Environmental Chemistry and a diploma in Multimedia from Officina Pasolini in Rome, with a thesis on screenplay with critic Steve Della Casa as supervisor. He is the author of texts for theatre and cinema, including the feature film "Potevo farmi santo", on the figure of Don Pippo, a priest from Forlì. Since 2022 he has been editor for the magazine Gagarin Orbite Culturali, for which he writes articles on theatre and art.

Franco VIGNAZIA

Painter

Born in Bogliasco (Genova) on 1 December 1951, a retired art teacher, he lives and works in Forlì.

Married to Rosangela since 1974, they have three children: Lucia, Giovanni and Laura, and grandchildren Caterina, Alice, Francesco, Eleonora and Mattia, Gabriele, Ilaria and Federico. From an early age, he expressed his inner world through Art. He has taken part in several exhibitions and art festivals and has held several solo shows centered on the Human and his adventure in Life.

Franco's activity is not limited to painting on canvas or board, but through different forms and expressive techniques he contributes to enriching various worship places, both in Italy and abroad, such as the Church of San Giuseppe Artigiano (Forlì), the Sanctuary of Nossa Senoa de Fatima y San Bento de Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro, and in 2022 the Dar Al-Majus Community Home-Pro Terra Sancta Cultural Centre in Bethlehem (Palestine).

Franco's life, his family and his work as a teacher have enriched his experience as an illustrator, which he has carried out for Italian and foreign editions through history, fairy tale and educational books, putting his talent at the service of educational tools and creating images full of humanity and meaning.

Afterword

LIBRETTI DA VISITA: SO THAT FRIENDSHIP HAS NO END

The series of illustrated short stories 'An Inexhaustible Friendship - The Forces that change history are the same as those that change the Heart of a Man' stems from the living relationships that St Catherine of Siena ETS and its associates have forged and nurtured over the years. In these pages, writers and illustrators have portrayed the testimonies of six communities from complex and/or conflicting contexts to tell what allows them to live positively even where it would not seem possible, and to discover that the forces that change the Heart of a Man are the same ones that also change history...

We like to call these publications 'libretti da visita', images and fictional stories freely drawn from real friendships, stories of friends of friends, friends not to be missed.

But what is the small contribution each of us can make to build Peace? We have discovered that preserving relationships and relations is a real business: friendships met 'by chance' but which determine our history, friendships that do not leave us alone, friendships that force us to come to terms with our human stature, in a work that becomes an adventure and a responsibility to commit to ourselves every day, because the one who tells us 'Be with me' is the Only One capable of this inexhaustible fidelity.

¹ In Italian, intended as booklets used in a way that a meeting becomes an opportunity, an opportunity to see each other again and forge a long-lasting relationship.



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ForLibano

A cedar of a hundred branches and a thousand sounds

Story of an inexhaustible friendship between Emilia-Romagna and Lebanon

texts by Giampiero e Romeo Pizzol

illustrations by Franco Vignazia

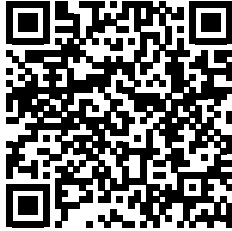
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ForLibano

Un cedro di cento rami e mille suoni

Storia di un'amicizia inesauribile tra Emilia-Romagna e Libano



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of an inexhaustible friendship...



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