

VareseNews

“A Neverland that exists, but is suffering from indifference”

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“I was the director of the Isolino from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 2005. I was a  boatman, a cook, a gardener, an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter ... you just have to learn to cope.”

Domenico, “Nico”, Redondi is no castaway.

He was not thrown from a helicopter onto the beaches of the Caribbean, thrust into a situation that is as distinctly exotic as a dish prepared in Cologno Monzese might be.

Nico writes to us from Norway, to tell the tale of an island that we have in our backyard. While politicians are having difficulty in finding solutions for what is simply a unique place, it is worth stopping a moment and listening to the signs that nature and a sense of beauty can leave in the hearts of mankind. What the former director of the Isolino Virginia talks about is a heritage site that belongs to all of us; we could make it ours, but only when it is truly everyone's again.

I'd be really happy to describe how you live on a small island, right in the middle of the industrial triangle, where the pace of life is marked by the factory siren, but I think I'd go on far too long; I think it's impossible to summarise what happened to me in 8 years, in just a few lines. After moving to Norway, I began to write about some of the situations I encountered and my adventures on that small, 9000 m² triangle of land, on Lake Varese, but alas, it got lost in the memory of a mischievous computer.

Living on the island takes you back to a pace of life and difficulties that were encountered, I think, in the 1800's; despite the technology and all the rest, it is nature that decides and sets the limits for you to respect. Initially, it might seem harsh and exhausting, you are tested every day, even with problems that, on terra firma, are simple, and you have to learn to “read” the signs. On “terra firma”, if you run out of milk, you just get in the car and head for the nearest shop; on the island, this is impossible, you have to predict, because you never know if it will allow to you leave easily. Initially, the island is harsh, but once you get to know it, just like in an affair, it begins to open up and to show its numerous hidden treasures, fantastic flora and fauna and characters of the lake, the fishermen, hunters, and nature enthusiasts, who spend whole evenings telling stories about birds, boats, and so on.

It's impossible to describe the “characters” of the lake, you'd have to analyse them one by one, and still you'd forget something and someone; but there's something they all have in common, their gaze and their eyes. They have incredibly lively and curious eyes, that see even the slightest movement and change of what surrounds them, they resemble the curious, wary eyes of the animals that populate the lakeshore. The flora and fauna interact with you, gradually becoming less wary, even beginning to become a little invasive.

There are the “normal” encounters with swans on the beach, with a kingfisher, darting in front of the reed thicket, with its typical call, with a wagtail that, undeterred throughout winter, has continued to peck at the door of the restaurant and then fly to the window of my room over the museum. And the less common, like going around Gavirate with a duckling, after it had got lost, the family of hedgehogs that regularly, every evening, came to steal my beagle’s dry food ... and many others, such as the flapping of a gaggle of ducks that came to demand their meal beneath the window.

I often tell my two daughters stories of animals that actually happened to me, and they listen with fascination, and ask me where this place is and start asking me for details about the characters in the story.

You could say this is the island in the song by Edoardo Bennato, but this one exists; **it is there, but unfortunately, it’s serving a very serious sentence, that of indifference.**

It wouldn’t take much to bring it back to life, just passion, an affection for the area and a desire to get your hands dirty.

If you want to experience this island in all its splendour, you can’t postpone or appoint someone else, when you are on the island, you are alone, and you have to tackle your problems, hoping that, maybe, those who admire that masterpiece of nature understand the island’s needs.

In July, during my holidays in Italy, I decided to bring my “two pests” to the island, to let them get to know a piece of my past, and to see the place where the goodnight stories took place; I borrowed a small boat from a friend and we headed for the island; it certainly wasn’t easy to return to her, it was like meeting a woman that you once loved, and despite the time, the affection that binds you hasn’t changed in the slightest.

After going round the island, and pointing out the places in the stories, we took the boat and headed for Cazzago. After a few hundred metres, my 9-year-old asked me, **“Daddy, why did you leave the island? It’s wonderful here!”**

That evening, both of my daughters were busy drawing the island.

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