

“We Remember” and Siamo Uniti (We are one/Tous Unis)

by Paolo R Siraco

Siamo Uniti is a fitting title for an event that took place in the Senate chamber on Parliament Hill on Friday, 5 November 2004 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Canadian army's Italian Campaign during the Second World War - in recognition of the sacrifices (almost 6000 casualties) and many wounded in liberating Italy from German occupation. It was a fitting tribute because since their liberation, Italians have had a special place in their hearts for Canadians, a fact being recognized with increasing frequency and fervour by the many surviving citizens of Italian towns and cities such as Cassino, Rimini and Ortona. In 1999, Canadian veterans of the Italian campaign organized a successful reunion of the soldiers who fought on both sides of the war, a reunion that took place at Ortona.

The song “Siamo Uniti,” written by a young group of proud Italian-Canadians Pierangela Peloso Pica, Antonietta Peloso Beraldin, Claudio Peloso and Marisa Peloso Radulescu. (The song was composed in May of 1997 for National Education Week; soon it became a theme song in schools across Canada and overseas; the Peloso family decided to raise funds with it for the Children's Wish Foundation; few months after it was launched it was also used to raise funds for CHEO, the Cancer telethon, the Kidney Foundation and ALS as well as the Santa Claus Toy Parade and the promotion of Canada Day for several years), was quite appropriately featured at this ceremony as sung by the choir of the Italian Canadian Youth Formation Centre. Pierangela herself and Paolo Siraco helped in the singing as a background to the choir. Its simple but evocative words “So come on and take my hand we can walk side by side, we'll share all of our dreams, together we are one” were reflected in the remarks delivered by the Minister for Veteran Affairs, the Honourable Albina Guarnieri, and by the youth representative Anthony Carricato, a Parliamentary Guide and son of Italian-Canadians residing in Sault Ste Marie, who recounted, in Italian, moving stories told by his parents about the Second World War.

As the children sang the national anthems of Canada and Italy, the emotion on the faces and in the voices of those assembled were noticeable. The children were awed by the imposing physical surroundings, by the musical tributes and by the stories they heard. They paid respectful attention to all the speeches - a period of time not usually reserved for their age group. On behalf of the Italian Ambassador, Minister Counsellor Alessandro Cortese paid warm tribute to the Canadian veterans and concluded his speech with a heartfelt “Grazie, grazie for the sacrifice that Canada made for the liberation of Italy and for the gift of democracy”.

The Speaker's reception that followed in the beautiful, historic entrance to the Senate chamber saw the nine members of the children's choir mingle with dignitaries and decorated veterans, asking questions about the colourful portraits of British monarchs surrounding them and taking in the moment as a memorable learning experience.

Many thanks go to Mr. Terry Tobin, Director-Canada Remembers, Veterans' Affairs Department, for having had the foresight of inviting a children's choir from an Italian language school. It could not have been a more appropriate mix for an occasion that provided these children - and their chaperones - with an opportunity to experience first-hand, the significance of the words: **“We Remember”**.