



Vic Heissl

25-12-1932 to 26-07-2016

Many of you will have heard or read the story of how in 1978, during a meeting of the St. Peter's Italian Youth Club committee, it was suggested that the committee should look into the feasibility of staging an Olympic type event, whereby all UK based Italian associations or organisations would be invited to enter teams made up of their youth membership. This was how the OGI games came into being and the rest, as they say, is history.....



As with most ideas it was never going to be simple, there were hurdles which had to be overcome and problems which had to be resolved. Some were simply a matter of logistics, where, for example, would 120 Scottish Italians which were about to descend upon us from Glasgow be housed while they were competing in the games, or how were we going to fit all the events for almost 1000 competitors into the three days at our disposal? Others, however, were far more problematic and possibly more relevant, namely where would the money be found to stage such an event?

As always, turning the dream into a reality required a dedicated team working behind the scenes. These committed people were led by someone who was stubborn and single minded, but whose selflessness and 'never say die' attitude led them to their ultimate goal. Vic Heissl was that person. He never once doubted the ability of the people around him.

Vic was the President of the St. Peter's Italian Youth Club committee and he immediately saw the merits of the idea which had been proposed. With his usual vigour he set the committee the task of delivering these games to the Italian community, and not just delivering them at some unspecified time in the future, he wanted them to take place within two years!

As was always the case with Vic, he never allowed an obstacle to get in the way of his goal, and as far as he was concerned, from that point onwards, the games were always going to happen. It is a testament to both Vic and his committee, whose members were all under 25 years old, that on the 24th May 1980 the dream became a reality and the first OGI games took place at Barnet Cophall stadium.

For Vic however, these games were not just about winning medals, they were far more important than that. They were a way of giving young people the opportunity to make friendships which would continue throughout their lives. They would promote a sense of community and shared civic pride which would encourage young people to get involved and ultimately give something back to their community.

For Vic it was our community's way of showing that everyone was welcome and it is for this reason that he insisted, from the very start, that all young people should be encouraged to participate, regardless of their sporting ability or more importantly their nationality.



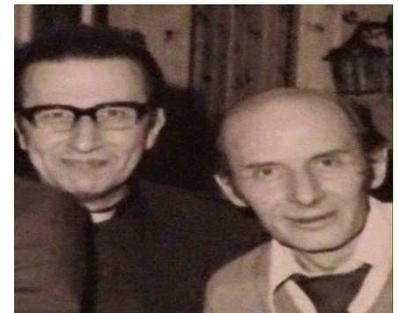


The younger generation, as much as the older members of the Italian community, enjoyed meeting at the youth club. They were encouraged by Vic to bring along their friends and many of these young people came from a variety of nationalities and backgrounds. Many would become involved in the day to day activities of the club; working behind the bar, helping at the procession and sagra or serving at the many dinner dances held at the club. For Vic it was only right and fair that they should be made welcome and allowed to compete alongside their Italian friends, after all Vic himself was an Austrian. He didn't want OGI to be a closed shop, he wanted the Italian community to showcase their event to all, he wanted us to be open and proud of our achievements and his beliefs and ideals have continued to be a cornerstone of OGI's ethos.



During his time as OGI President, Vic would open the games, only reappearing again for the closing ceremony to congratulate all who had taken part. The rest of the time he could be found back at the club making the sandwiches for the competitors lunch or preparing the dinner on the last day, in readiness for the competitors return and the raucous St. Peter's OGI team party. As long as things were running smoothly, Vic was happy to take a back seat in order to allow his committee to be the face of OGI and to take the credit for the event.

In 1985 Vic passed the baton of the Presidency over to Les Rickard. This was the start of a new era in OGI's history. A new committee, independent of St. Peter's was formed. Although OGI had moved on, Vic continued to be involved regularly attending committee meetings, and as always worked in the background, printing the brochures and preparing the food for his beloved St. Peter's team or the OGI committee members. He even found time, together with our other friend, supporter and Honorary President Padre Russo of the Chiesa Italiana, to make his way to the stadium where you could find him berating some, encouraging others but always congratulating everyone.



On 2nd April 2001 after the death of Padre Russo, Vic was made Honorary President and one of his first requests to the committee was that "We remember our friend" by renaming the OGI Winner's Shield, to the Padre Roberto Russo Shield. This request was accepted and the shield renamed for the 2002 games.

As the year's progressed Vic's enthusiasm for OGI never diminished, although his involvement in the day to day running of the games became less, nonetheless he kept himself informed about what was happening at committee meetings and continued to make his pilgrimage to the games, where he would happily present medals or deliver a speech, otherwise he would join the spectators and parents in the stands or visit the control box. Inevitably once the competitors realised he was amongst them the chant of "Heissl, Heissl give us a wave" or "There's only one Vic Heissl" would resonate around the stadium.

Many of those chanting were possibly too young to know Vic personally or even understand what an integral part of the games he had been, but it was clear to them that he was held in such high esteem and affection by so many people that even they recognised the legend that was Vic Heissl. And once the games were over he would make his way back to St. Peter's to soak up the atmosphere of the OGI party, finishing the evening off with his customary shouts of "Raus!" to encourage people to leave and go home.



I remember speaking with Vic in 2011 while doing research into his life. The Italian Club was about to celebrate its 50th anniversary and we had a plan to surprise Vic by staging a "This is your life" at the celebration dinner. Inevitably we got onto the subject of OGI and having not been at the famous meeting of '78, I didn't know the full story and wanted to find out more, so I asked Vic what the committee's reaction had been to his proposal? "Livio" he replied "It was never my idea, I never suggested it to the committee, it was Rob..... Rob Verbini who first came up with it". He could have pretended that it had been his idea, after all I would have been none the wiser and I doubt if any of his old committee members would have contradicted him. But that was Vic all over and why he commanded such loyalty, he never wanted or courted credit, especially when it wasn't his to have.

We suspected something wasn't right when, for the first time, Vic sent his apologies and failed to make his customary appearance at the stadium for the 2016 games. He did, however, make an appearance at the club on the last day, for the St.Peter's team party but unlike previous years left before it ended and sadly on the 26th July of that year he passed away. While, for many of us, it was an end of era, it is a testament to the hard work and dedication of a much loved and admired man, that his dream will live on. Vic may no longer be with us but his spirit will live on forever in the OGI games.

Finally, I leave you not with my words but the words of an ex competitor and St. Peter's Youth Club member, Marilyn Kumon, who wrote the following after she heard about Vic's death:

My kids are asking me why I am crying. I am sad. Thank you Vic for taking me under your wing and guiding me through my teen years when I needed help the most. Thank you for creating my family up the club who I needed so very much. Thank you for being the force that kept that family united. A truly special soul who will be missed but never forgotten.

RIP

