



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

TRIBUTE TO SISTO MALASPINA

Tuesday 20 November, 2018

One of the privileges of being the Governor of Victoria is representing the people of our State on occasions that speak directly to the hearts of all Victorians.

This is such an occasion.

I have the honour to express to the Malaspina family, our heartfelt sympathies to them, and the affection and gratitude of Victorians – especially Melburnians – for their husband, father, grandfather and brother, Sisto, and all that he contributed so generously and joyously to our city.

And to express the community's sympathies too to his Pellegrini's family. To his business partner and friend, Nino Pangrazio, and the long-time employees who, so obviously, not only respected him, but also loved him very much.

I did not know Sisto, other than in the way that so many of us in this city 'knew' him.

I enjoyed his smiling and welcoming face, his friendly banter, and of course his flamboyant sense of fashion, whenever I was lucky enough to find a moment to sneak in to Pellegrini's for a coffee.

Just a month or so ago, an SBS Food article online described going to Pellegrini's as 'like taking a time machine back to the 1950's.' It noted that the now heritage-listed neon sign on Crossley Lane, the décor and the menu really hadn't changed since the restaurant opened in 1954.

May I just say that, for some – and I am one of them – it is NOT so much like taking a time machine back to the 1950's. I was actually there in the 1950's! For me, a visit to Pellegrini's is simply a return to my childhood.

Like many children of migrant parents, I have early memories of Pellegrini's, as my father sought out the familiarity of his own European background.

Stopping for some cake, a pasta or a bowl of gelati – preferably all three – while my parents enjoyed a 'real' coffee from one of the first espresso machines in our city, was a favourite treat. When someone called 'Ciao' to a patron on his way back out to the bustle of Bourke Street, it just seemed so exotic then.

It is no coincidence that Tony and I started our married life with a coffee at Pellegrini's on the morning after we were married! Having stayed in the city, it just seemed natural to head there.

Sisto Malaspina's story is an Australian story, and a particularly Victorian one.

Like my father and so many others, he came to a country of new promise for himself and for his future family. He appreciated the opportunities that it offered to him. And he prospered from those opportunities because he worked so very hard to enjoy the benefit of them.

In a recent interview, Sisto described how – across the almost 45 years since he had co-owned Pellegrini's – he had worked 70 hours every week.

In those long working weeks, he and Nino built not just a business. They built an institution. A community. And a family.

It would be rare to pick up a book on our city, either written or photographic, without a reference to, or a picture of their famous bar. It truly is iconic, held dear in the heart of Melbourne, and the hearts and minds of all Melburnians.

The stories about Sisto Malaspina, and the outpouring of affection for him across the last twelve days are, appropriately, so very much more about his life than about his passing.

Indeed, the mark of the man is that so much high praise had already been written about him, well before last week's terrible tragedy could ever have been imagined.

It was indeed a tragedy. And we need every voice to condemn such a wicked act, and the perpetrator of it.

But these are the times when we need to stick even closer to each other, to seek unity and not conflict, and to hold to our hopes much more closely than our fears. Even when it's hard.

We need to look to the genuine goodness that we saw on show in this city on that same Friday afternoon.

The bravery of our police. The efforts of the first responders. The kindness and help of strangers. And the tender care of the medical staff who have helped the two injured men, who – with their families – also feature in our thoughts as they recover from their injuries and trauma.

Consider the goodness in the heart-warming way Melburnians have gathered to comfort each other. Look at the way they have flocked to Pellegrini's to express their love – with memories and tears, flowers and heartfelt tributes – and of course, with a coffee, to honour Sisto.

And see how they have found shoulders to cry on and arms to comfort them, thanks to generous spirited volunteers from the Salvation Army and Red Cross.

In this role, I am lucky to see goodness throughout our State on a daily basis: people helping each other, caring for each other, generously stepping in to meet the needs of others, in the normal course of life, as well as in an emergency or crisis.

I can promise you that is the norm.

And you need to look no further than Sisto Malaspina himself to see how his goodness has been universally celebrated.

May I just say to Vicki, David and Ruth and baby Sofia, to Lisa and the wider Malaspina family, and to the Pellegrini's family too, that I am conscious that none of us in this magnificent cathedral, or amongst the millions of people in whose thoughts you are, can ever fully share your family's grief. But we do share your shock. We share the profound sadness at the wanton waste of such a good man. And we do want to wrap our collective arms around you at such a difficult time.

And we thank you for the generosity you have shown amidst the maelstrom of these difficult days.

Despite your own profound and personal grief, you have somehow managed to understand the impact on the broader community of the loss of your beloved Sisto, and you have thoughtfully managed ways to enable others to express their grief.

Sisto has been described this week as kind, open-hearted, generous, charismatic, enthusiastic, optimistic, humble, hospitable, a beautiful man, a gentleman and the sort of man you wanted to hug – along with every possible variation of those complimentary and loving terms.

There could be no greater epitaph for him than that he gave so much happiness to so many people.

We thank you for sharing him with us.

May the memory of his goodness live forever.