Chapter 18

Emma Morano – 117 Years and 137 Days

Bernard Jeune and Michel Poulain

The Italian woman Emma Martina Luigia Morano was the last long-living woman who was born in the 1800s. She was the longest living person in the world when Susannah Mushatt Jones died in New York on 12 May 2016 at age 116. Emma Morano lived in a little apartment in Pallanza in the municipality of Verbania on Lake Maggiore, about 100 km north of Milano, where we visited her twice (on 13 October 2015 and on 17 May 2016).

The following history is based on documents from the archives of the communes of Civiasco, Santhia, Verbania, Verrone, and Villadòssola; information provided by Emma Morano herself, her relatives, and her family doctor; as well as interviews with her and articles about her published in local, national, and international newspapers (see Note 1).

As was mentioned on her birth certificate (Fig. 18.1), Emma was born on 29 November 1899 in the mountain village of Civiasco (in the province of Vercelli, about 50 km west of Pallanza). She was the daughter of Giovanni Morano aged 22, minatore (miner); and his wife who was living with him, Mathilde Bresciani, aged 24, tessitrice (weaver).

Emma's parents married in 1897 in Santhia (in the province of Vercelli between Milano and Torino). Her father Giovanni Battista Morano was born on 15 May 1878 in Santhia and died in Intra (in the municipality of Verbania) on 15 April 1950 at the age of 71. Her mother Matilde Bresciani was born on 28 October 1875 in Mendrisio (Switzerland) and died in Pallanza (Verbania) on 24 April 1969 at the age

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Table 18.1 The family composition of Emma Morano

Parents:	Born	Died	Age at death
Giovanni	15 May 1878	15 Apr 1950	71
Matilde	28 Oct 1875	29 Apr 1969	93
Children:	Born	Died	Age at death
1. Emma	29 Nov 1899	15 Apr 2017	117
2. Edouardo	13 Jan 1901	23 May 1932	31
3. Quinta	22 Jun 1903	16 Jun 2000	94
4. Lucia	27 Dec 1904	24 Feb 2003	98
5. Carmen	26 Oct 1906	11 Feb 1994	87
6. Angela	16 Dec 1908	03 Jan 2011	102
7. Luigi	20 Jan 1911	4 Oct 1995	84
8. Ottavio	19 May 1913	20 Sep 1979	66

and Santhia) where their second child, Edouardo, was born in 1901. But shortly thereafter, the small family settled in Villadòssola, an industrial city about 50 km north-west of Pallanza where her father started working in a foundry.

Emma's birth was followed by the births of seven siblings, four sisters and three brothers, all of whom she survived. Five of them were born in Villadòssola. We have obtained copies of the birth certificates for all of her siblings. We found no younger children with the name Emma, which could have been the case if the first-born Emma had died as a child. As the births of her younger siblings were spaced about 2 years apart (max. 2 years and 4 months), it is impossible for her mother to have had other children between the births of the abovementioned siblings. As is shown in Table 18.1, most of Emma's siblings reached high ages, like their mother.

The siblings are all shown on the following Photo (Fig. 18.2) of her family. Emma is seen in the back row as the second from the left beside her brother Edouardo in the middle. Hence, Emma Morano had a big family living nearby, including 11 nieces and eight nephews, most of whom spent their childhood in Verbania.

18.1 A Short Summary of Emma Morano's Life Course

In the 1920s, her family moved to Pallanza (Verbania) because the climate in Villadòssola was considered unhealthy. However, it is possible that Emma did not accompany her parents at that time. We found evidence that she moved to Pallanza on 1 January 1925 from Tecate (in the province of Novara, west of Milano). It appears that her mother moved first to Pallanza after her parents separated, but was later joined by her father in spite of the separation. Emma Morano probably joined her mother in 1925, and lived all of her remaining life in Pallanza.

On 16 October 1926, Emma Morano married Giovanni Martinuzzi (1901–1978). As recorded in the marriage certificate (Fig. 18.3), Emma was aged 26; a tessitrice (weaver); and the daughter of Giovanni, a minatore (miner) living in Villadòssola, and of Mathilde Bresciani, a casalinga (housewife) living in Pallanza. Emma's

Fig. 18.2 Emma as a young woman with her parents and siblings

family name was erroneously written on the certificate as Bresciani, her mother's name; but her family name was correctly mentioned in the margin.

The marriage record confirms that Emma's parents were living separately when she moved to Pallanza in 1925 and married there in 1926. According to her niece Maria, Emma's mother forced Emma to marry her husband. Emma told us that her future husband had threatened her to get her to marry him. The marriage was unhappy. That may have been the reason why she did not have a child with him until 28 January 1937, when Leo Angelo Martinuzzi (Fig. 18.4) was born. Leo died on 8 August 1937, when he was only 6 months old. Shortly thereafter, in 1938, she separated from her husband. She later told a journalist from the New York Times that she had plenty of suitors after that, but never chose another partner: "I didn't want to be dominated by anyone".

For more than 30 years (until 1954), she worked for Maioni Industry (in a building that is today the library of Pallanza), a jute factory where she sewed potato sacks. At that time, she lived in one of the factory's apartments. She then worked for about 20 years in the kitchen of the Collegio Santa Maria, a Marianist boarding school in the hills of Palenza, until she retired at the age of 75. According to the magazine *Qui* of the local journal *ECORisveglio*, she liked to work and never complained of fatigue. At that time, she lived in an apartment close to the San Giuseppe church belonging to the boarding school. After retirement, she moved to a small two-room apartment close to the San Leonardo church belonging to the parish.

L'anno millesimovecento Parkii addì Sette di Mobio
a ore quindici e minuti _____, nella Casa Comunale
di Pallanza, aperta al pubblico.
Avanti di me Danielli Mobilo Chiusso Supplente
Singale dal Sindaco con atto del 7 febbraio millesimovecento
Esistite appresso

Ufficiale dello Stato Civile, vestito in forma ufficiale, sono personalmente compariti:

1.° Marinazzi Giovanni di anni ventisette,
e Spina, nato in C. Sestini/Astoria, residente in Pallanza
figlio di Sevoti, residente in _____,
e di Marinazzi Emma, residente in Pallanza;
2.° Bucconi Emma Martina, di anni ventisei,
e Furica, nata in Vigevano, residente in Pallanza,
figlia di Giovanni, Martino, residente in Pallanza,
e di Bucconi Spiride, casalingo, residente in Pallanza.

I quali mi hanno richiesto di unirli in matrimonio; a questo effetto mi hanno presentato i documenti sotto descritti, e dall'esame di questi nonchè di quelli già prodotti all'atto della richiesta delle pubblicazioni, i quali tutti, muniti del mio visto, inserisco nel volume degli allegati a questo registro, risultandomi nulla ostare alla celebrazione del loro matrimonio, ho letto agli sposi gli articoli centotrenta, centotrentuno e centotrentadue del Codice Civile, e quindi ho domandato allo sposo se intende di prendere in moglie la qui presente Morano Emma, e a questa se intende di prendere in marito il qui presente Marinazzi Giovanni, ed avendomi ciascuno risposto affermativamente, a piena intelligenza anche dei testimoni sotto indicati, ho pronunciato in nome della Legge che i medesimi sono uniti in matrimonio. A quest'atto sono stati presenti:
Pallotta Carlo, di anni cinquantotto, mercante,
Gramoni Antonio, di anni ventisei, libero,
entrambi residenti in questo Comune. I documenti presentati agli atti sono i certificati delle esposte pubblicazioni, l'atto d'apposizione di nota in Pallanza nelle due comunità successive chiarimenti e integrazioni sommate anno -
fatto il presente atto a tutte le intervenute l'anno
ed uno sottoscritto:
Marinazzi Giovanni Morano Emma
Pallotta Carlo Gramoni Antonio

L'Ufficiale dello Stato Civile:
Roberto Innocenzi

Numero 22
Marinazzi Giovanni
Morano Emma

Comune di Verbania - Ufficio Stato Civile
AUTENTICAZIONE
Al sensi dell'art. 18 TU 445/2009, si attesta che la presente copia è conforme all'originale e si rilascia in carta libera ai sensi dell'art. 47 del D.Lgs. n. 286/1991.
Verbania, lì 14 MAG. 2015
L'UFFICIALE DELLO STATO CIVILE
[Firma]
IL FUNZIONARIO INCARICATO
Ufficio dello Stato Civile
PROVINCIA DI VERBANIA

Fig. 18.3 Emma Morano's marriage certificate

Numero 20

Marinuzzi Leo
di Giovanni

L'anno millenovecento quarantasei addì due di agosto
a ore undici e minuti quindici nella Casa Comunale
Avanti di me Comm. Jac. Giovanni Cerasini - Jodeto ed.

Ufficiale dello Stato Civile del Comune di Ballarua sono comparsi:
Marinuzzi Giovanni di anni quarantasei operaio
domiciliat o in Ballarua e Marinuzzi Beatrice, d
anni quarantasei nona domiciliata in Ballarua i quali mi hanno
dichiarato che a ore dieci e minuti di tre
nella casa posta in Ca. Bernardino al numero ... è morto 9
Marinuzzi Leo di anni sei infante
residente in Ballarua nat o in Ballarua da Giovanni
operaio domiciliato in Ballarua e da Abbiglie Emma
operaia domiciliata in Ballarua infante

A questo atto sono stati presenti quali testigos:
Bonetti Margherita di anni sessanti impiegata
Beatrice Bonetti Bui di anni venti impiegata
ambedue residenti in questo Comune. Letto il presente atto a tutti gli intervenenti, hanno tutti
firmato lo stato civile

Marinuzzi Giovanni
Marinuzzi Beatrice
Bonetti Margherita
Bonetti Beatrice

Comm. Jac. Giovanni Cerasini
Ufficiale dello Stato Civile

(1) Si indicherà la professione o la condizione.
(2) Si scriverà: anni, mesi, giorni e ore a seconda della età del defunto.
(3) Se vedovo o maritato, se vedova o moglie, ovvero se celibe o nubile.

Fig. 18.4 The birth certificate of Emma Morano's son Leo Marinuzzi

18.2 Emma Morano in Recent Years

When we visited her for the first time in October 2015 (Fig. 18.5), Emma was sitting without support on her bed. Her sight was greatly reduced but she could recognise faces. Her hearing was also reduced – we had to speak very loudly. However, she seemed to remember both past events and more recent ones. She remembered that her mother was older than her father, but also who had visited her the day before. However, according to the journalist of the New York Times, “[H]er memory evades entire decades. Ask her about Mussolini, or the world wars or any number of current or past political figures, and she shrugs indifferently. Her recollections are mostly intimate”. She recalled that “my sisters and I loved to dance and we’d run away to the dance hall and then our mother would come looking for us with a birch stick”.

She appeared more frail and smaller than on pictures taken just 1 year earlier (Fig. 18.6). After half an hour she became tired and wanted to lie down, apparently because she had just been treated with antibiotics for a urinary infection. Since September 2015 she had been receiving home help provided by the municipality.

The wife of her nephew, Rosi Santoni, who was her caregiver and prepared her meals, told us that on a typical day, Emma ate one raw egg in the morning at 8 a.m. together with a “biscotta” and some milk. At 11 a.m., she ate soup (“minestra”) and raw beef (about 120 g) together with another raw egg. In the afternoon, she had

Fig. 18.5 Emma Morano on 13 October 2015 with Bernard Jeune and Michel Poulain

some fruit (mostly bananas and raisins) and a “biscotta”. At 6 p.m., she again ate soup, but this time the soup consisted of small pieces of pasta, a bouillon cube, and a little olive oil. Previously she had also eaten a boiled egg at dinner. After dinner, she sometimes ate chocolate and drank a glass of brandy. According to *La Stampa*, she had eaten raw eggs and raw beef since she was 20 years old because her doctor had prescribed these foods as a diet to prevent anaemia.

Our colleague Waclaw Jan Kroczeck sent us the following account of his second visit with Emma Morano on her 116th birthday on 29 November 2016: “Mrs. Morano’s mind remains lucid. Her answers to our questions were explicit and comprehensible. Her voice is strong. Moreover, Mrs. Morano has an exceptional nimbleness in her hands. Her appetite is great. We witnessed her eating breakfast which consisted of milk soup with cereals, a plate filled with small sliced pieces of meat, two bunches of grapes and banana. She ate all the meals one after another completely unassisted. The milk soup she ate using a spoon. The pieces of meat she ate with her bare hands. Then, she ate all the grapes (big ones) after peeling each. Mrs. Morano is weaker than she was in December 2014, when I visited her previously. However, the decline between the ages 115 and 116 has not been very significant in Mrs. Morano’s case. It has been noticeable, but not manifest”.

Her doctor, Carlo Bava, who had been visiting her once a month since she was 90, wrote to us after his visit with Emma Morano on her 116th birthday that she had

Fig. 18.6 Emma Morano in her apartment on her 115th birthday (29 November 2014)

“a good appetite” and ate “un piatto di minestra”, raw beef, and a boiled apple while he was visiting her. According to the Agence France Presse, “she marked her 116th birthday by offering to sing her favourite song for visiting well-wishers: ‘You know I have a beautiful voice, if you like I can sing *Parlami d’amore, Mariù*’”.

The priest Don Giuseppe Masseroni from the San Leonardo church, who had recently turned 90 himself, visited her every Friday. He told the magazine *Qui* that she had a strong and capable character (“*un carattere tenace and caparbio*”); that she could defend herself and would never surrender. She prayed very frequently using her rosary and reciting prayers to the local saints Giulio and Giuliano who protect against wolves, serpents, and other dangerous creatures. Her niece told us that the family members called her “Generale” (the general), a name that underlined her will to command.

When we visited her a second time on 17 May 2016 together with her family doctor, Dr. Bava, she was in better shape than when we visited her the first time in October 2015. She spoke fluently with her doctor and sang some local songs he asked her to sing. She was taking no medication for heart problems or high pressure, and was rarely using other drugs except for some occasional laxatives. She had never been hospitalised, as she had always refused to go to the hospital. Ten years previously she had experienced some gastrointestinal bleeding. Her doctor managed to give her a transfusion at home because she refused to be hospitalised. Although

she had fallen several times at home, she had never had a fracture. We think her doctor played an important role in her survival to such a high age.

In December 2011, she was awarded the honour of Knight of Order of Merit for the Italian Republic by President Giorgio Napolitano. On her 114th birthday she gave a TV interview on RAI. She received Pope Francis' congratulations on her 116th birthday.

We think that the documents that we have found, together with the information we have obtained from family members and from her doctor, are enough evidence to be certain that Emma Morano reached the age of 117 years.

Note 1

The above history comes from the following sources: oral information from Emma Morano herself; information from Rosi Mariella (Rosamari) Santoni (born in 1943), the wife of Emma's sister Angela's second son Antonio Sala (born in 1937); information from her niece, Angela's daughter Maria Antonietta Sala in Intra (Verbania) (born 14 February 1945); and information from Dr. Carlo Bava.

Additional information came from articles in magazines and newspapers, especially articles that appeared around her 116th year birthday; and when she became the world's oldest person on 12 May 2016, the date when Susannah Mushat Jones from the U.S. died ('Qui. Magazine di ECorisveglio', Supplemento no. 129, 2 December 2011, 'New York Times', 14 February 2015 'La Stampa', 29 de Novembre 2015, 'Agence France Presse', also used in 'La Parisienne' and 'The Guardian', 30 November 2015, 'ECorisveglio' 18 Maggio 2016, 'El Pais' 18 de Mayo de 2016, 'La Stampa', 15 de Aprile 2017, 'The Washington Post', 15 April 2017, 'The New York Times', 15 April 2017, etc.).

In October 2015, we also visited her sister Angela's daughter, Maria Antonietta Sala. With her help we went through the genealogy of the Morano family. Maria had collected a large amount of information, which she had made into a nice book. Michel Poulain took photos of the most important pages.

In the Municipio of Civiasco (about 50 km west of Palenza), we obtained a copy of her birth registration.

On 17 May 2016, we visited her again to learn more about her family and to get an authorisation to obtain copies of documents in the archives of the municipalities of Verbania, Villadossola, and Santhia. In the days that followed, we visited the archives of these municipalities, where we obtained copies of her parents' death certificates, the birth certificates of all of their children, Emma's marriage certificate, and the birth and death certificates of Emma's son.

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