

“In My Staying
Is Your Going”

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“In My Staying Is Your Going”
The Authorized Biography of Blessed Chiara Badano

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Chiara Badano Foundation

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*We have only one life
and it's worthwhile spending it well.*

Chiara Lubich

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A Simple Family

Chiara Badano was born in Sassello, [Italy], a small town on the heights overlooking the Ligurian Riviera, on October 29, 1971.

The consumeristic exaltation of the economic *boom* was already winding down. This would soon give way to revisionist fever and the gloomy, terroristic Years of Lead, followed by years of *honey* and of extreme hedonism, in which the verb *to appear* became more important than *to be* and *to do*.

Chiara's parents, Maria Teresa and Ruggero, were simple, down-to-earth people who had waited eleven years for her to arrive. From her earliest childhood they had planted in her heart solid human values, a moral sense based on the Gospel, and a love for truth and justice.

From her earliest years, Chiara appeared to be an unusual only child. She wasn't spoiled, she loved to play with her peers, and had no trouble making friends. She enjoyed nature and sports and, of course, her beloved Sassello: a handful of houses, narrow streets, chestnut tree forests, and small amaretti factories that are a specialty of the region.

She was obviously adored by her parents and relatives. She was a mix of both parents, having her mother's outgoingness, sweetness and great faith, and her father's sobriety, sense of duty, and love for the least. She was a lively but sensible and courteous little girl, accustomed to eating everything without putting up a fuss and not at all temperamental. In many ways she was the daughter that every parent would like to have, with the parents that all children would want.

Both parents were involved in raising Chiara, relying more on love and good example than prohibitions and reproaches. Chiara nourished herself on this wise cocktail of love and firmness, adding to it her own desire for freedom and attention to her neighbor that was decidedly unusual for a child of her age, a genuine *passion*, to put it bluntly, for the needy, the weak, the marginalized—in particular, children and the elderly.

In kindergarten, after watching a documentary about poverty in the Third World, she took her favorite marker pens to the teacher's desk and said to her classmates:

*Look here, from now on,
we'll take care of them!*

She writes about those childhood days:

*I went to kindergarten at the age of three
and never cried.*

*But when they started kicking me
and bothering me, I felt a bit sad.*

*Then Mamma taught me to defend myself
and from that day on they didn't hit me anymore.*

*When my Mamma would come get me,
she saw that I was happy, and she was happy too.*

I was a lively child.

*I still am now that I'm grown;
the teacher always says so.*

On April 14, 1979, she writes:

*Holy Week
reminds us of the passion and death of Jesus,
so we should be good and pray during this week.
Yesterday I went to the service
of the Holy 'Stairs',
and in the past few days I have been good,
so Jesus will bless me from Heaven.*

When she received her First Holy Communion, the pastor, Father Bazzano, gave her a small copy of the Gospels. From that moment on, it became her favorite reading and her inseparable travelling companion.

She came to understand that those simple phrases and those parables were not fairy tales, nor mere opportunities for more or less profound or stimulating thought. With simplicity and the elementary logic of all children, Chiara realized that those pages were a sort of guidebook that was able to give real meaning to her life. But one particular encounter cemented that conviction.

When Chiara was little more than nine years old, she met the Focolare Movement. The Focolare was founded by Chiara Lubich in Trent, Italy, during the Second World War. The Movement had already spread all over the world and included members of all ages, vocations, social classes, cultures and religions.

Along with Chicca, who soon would become Chiara's best friend, Chiara begins to share in the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, which is founded on two basic princi-

ples: universal unity as the ideal and destiny of humankind, and the path to that goal: a privileged and unconditional love for God who is reduced to zero, in apparent failure who, just before dying, cried out from the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

But other aspects [of Chiara Lubich's charism] also fascinated the young Chiara Badano, such as the Marian model it follows, the possibility of making the presence of Jesus palpable in our world, and the centrality of the Eucharist as essential nourishment to help us get through each day. Chiara's encounter with the Focolare was *the* turning point in her life.

In 1980, after her first meeting with the Gen3 (Focolare members between the ages of nine and eighteen), Chiara wrote to the Focolare foundress:

*We've begun our adventure:
doing God's will in the present moment.
With the Gospel in hand we will do great things!*

The friendship with Chicca, who was a little older than Chiara, grew stronger and deeper each day. It was nourished by a mutual understanding and quite a few common interests: love for the sea and swimming, music and dance. They spent as much time together as they could, not only playing and having fun, but also attending Focolare events. Moreover, they shared all the joys, hopes, and problems of their young souls.

On Christmas 1982, Chiara writes:

*Each of us is called upon
to prepare the way for Jesus*

*who would like to enter our lives, our families.
United together, we can commit ourselves
to welcome Him,
to love Him, to be no longer us but Him-in-us,
To help Him to create on earth
the new city, the city of God.*

Chiara was a Gen3 and her parents soon joined the large family of the Movement as *Volunteers*¹ which gave them a further opportunity to apply the concreteness of the Gospel at home and as part of a vast universal family that was an anticipation of the united world that Chiara Lubich foresaw as the future of humanity.

In March of 1983, Chiara attended a meeting and recounted:

*I got there a little tired and I
couldn't wait to go to sleep.*

*But when I went to my room,
there was no bed.*

*I wanted to get angry, but understood
that if everything had gone well,
I wouldn't have had the chance to love Jesus.
And so I was happy.*

1. The Volunteers of God is a branch of the Focolare Movement composed of men and women who freely choose to follow God in a radical way in the midst of society.

At another meeting that year she understood that she should:

Love the people I don't like.

On June 17, 1983, at her first Gen3 Congress, in Castelli Romani, Italy, together with many other girls from around the world, she grabbed a pen and paper and wrote to Chiara Lubich:

*This was the first Congress for me
and, I must say, it was a wonderful experience.
I have rediscovered Jesus Forsaken in a special way.
I felt him in every neighbor that passes me by.
This year I have committed to see Jesus Forsaken as my
Spouse
and welcome him with joy
and especially with as much love as possible.
Chiara, I have no words to thank you,
but I know I owe everything to you and to God.*

Chicca recalls: “I think that a video of Chiara Lubich that was shown to us when we were still little kids was a turning point for Chiaretta [as Chiara Luce was affectionately called]. At a certain point Chiara Lubich opened her heart as she answered a question from some of the Gen. She confided her secret to us: Jesus Forsaken. And she invited everyone who wanted to choose Him as the ‘first spouse’ of their lives, to raise their hands. And Chiaretta did it, like I and many others—right away, with a momentum that