
Judge Paolo Borsellino. Claudio Fiore (nephew): “Faith helped him be that warm-hearted, joyful person I knew all along”

On July 19, 1992, the day of the bombing that killed his uncle Paolo and five members of his police escort right in front of his house on Via D'Amelio, Claudio Fiore, nephew of Judge and Magistrate Paolo Borsellino, son of Rita Borsellino, was 22-years-old. Fiore lives in the hills surrounding San Miniato, near Pisa. In this interview with [Toscana Oggi](#), he recalls those days with an in-depth portrayal of his uncle. **Claudio, your uncle Paolo was killed 57 days after the assassination of anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone. What do you remember of those weeks and what were the prevailing feelings in your family?** All of Palermo attended the funeral, celebrated in the St. Louise de Marillac parish church, right opposite his house... I then realised that I was not alone in my grief. In the weeks following the bomb attack on Falcone, I recall seeing Uncle Paolo looking visibly pained, his fatigue primarily caused by the painful experience he had had to endure: he had been the last person to see Giovanni Falcone alive, who had virtually died in his arms in hospital. He knew that the same fate would soon befall him. Over those 57 days he thus continued working at full tilt. He would often say: "I have no more time, I must hurry!" When he eventually found out that TNT intended for him had arrived in Palermo, he paradoxically seemed somewhat more relaxed. Those were very hectic and convoluted days, and I no longer met him as often as I had before then. I remember that my mother Rita was extremely nervous about the situation unfolding in our home... As if fearing the worst, she would seize every opportunity to visit her brother, whenever possible. In those critical days, we became increasingly aware of unusual activity outside the house. I lived on Via D'Amelio where my parents' family home was and where my grandmother Pia, Uncle Paolo's mother, also lived at the time. If we noticed anything out of the ordinary, suspicious vehicles or individuals, we would report it immediately. At that time, for security reasons, my uncle would hardly ever inform us in advance as to when he was coming to visit us. **I remember the controversy that flared up shortly after the bombing concerning the fact that there had not been a prohibition to park along Via D'Amelio.** We would ask this question to Uncle Paolo, and true to his nature, he would tell us: "There are people in charge of my security, it is their job". He trusted in the State and in the full respect of roles and responsibilities. That job, carried out in a spirit of service, requires a very strong respect for the assigned duties and for the roles and responsibilities of others, to the extent of entrusting your personal safety to the people in charge of it. **What do you remember of that July 19?** On that Sunday morning I left Via D'Amelio and drove to our family's beach house. My grandmother stayed at home because she had a cardiology visit scheduled for that same afternoon and my uncle was due to accompany her. We spent a pleasant day, until we were joined by a cousin who was vacationing near us, his eyes filled with tears. I remember my mother switching on a small portable battery-operated television and instantly collapsing to her knees in front of the TV screen. I tried to visualise something from that tiny screen and read the captions saying that my uncle had died. We rushed back to Palermo. In Via d'Amelio the firemen were still there, policemen everywhere and a huge crowd of people. We had a hard time making our way. My father wanted to reach the site of the explosion. I remember seeing him walk back shortly afterwards, his face and hands blackened, extending a hand to my mother: "I gave him one last caress"... I have a vivid recollection of my mother Rita weeping as she kissed that hand. **In a touching article, your cousin Manfredi, Paolo's son, describes your uncle's last days, specifically that last Sunday. The strength of mind and the courage of your cousin Lucia -detailed in his writings - who insisted on reassembling the remains of her father's body and dressing him herself at the Forensic medicine Institute in Palermo, is impressive. On the following day, Monday, July 20, Lucia had a university exam and she showed up to sit it in front of a board of examiners astonished by such strength of spirit. Whence came such courage?** Uncle Paolo was like that. I remember him saying jokingly to his children when they went out with their friends: "Tell me where you're going, and leave me a phone

number, because if I get killed how can I let you know?" In hindsight this is very inspiring: he had raised his children and accustomed all of us in the family, right from the start, to what would ultimately happen. He showed such sensitivity and sense of responsibility on many other occasions: for example, when he was provided with an armoured car escort, during his service at Prosecutor's Office in Marsala, he insisted on driving the car himself. The escort followed him in another vehicle behind him. In fact, he used to say: "Should any harm occur, I want it to involve the least possible number of people". In essence, he was knowingly offering those who wanted to kill him the chance to do so without harming anyone else. For instance, when he was at the beach he would secretly take his daughter's Vespa scooter, wear her pink helmet, and eluding the police escort, he would rush into the village to buy bread; and everyone in the village knew that Judge Borsellino went to buy bread alone. **So why did the Mafia attack in such a conspicuous fashion, with such emphatic violence, when your uncle could have been shot at any time in an almost ordinary way, given his routine?** There was an urge for power in those who killed him, as if to send out a message. In my opinion, their objective was to wipe out the collective memory of Borsellino, Falcone and with them the whole of Palermo. Yet at the time they achieved the opposite result, because Palermo had never seen such a massive response from the people as the one that followed the two massacres. **Indeed, the terror attacks of 1992 and 1993 sparked off widespread unrest within civil society. Thirty years later, does this responsiveness still exist within the general public, or has that spirit somewhat dwindled?** There is no doubt that that fervour diminished over the course of the past years, and that it lacked the full support of the relevant authorities, although it must be said that it was marked by a long-term impetus, lasting over twenty years. The political world, at least initially, was almost compelled, virtually forced, to manage that anger and the demand for truth and justice that came from civil society. But whenever the opportunity arose, it tried to confine its efforts to the commemoration process. There also is a chronological factor. These events took place thirty years ago, and many witnesses and key players from those days are no longer with us today. Every July 19, there are only a few hundred people commemorating the events in Via D'Amelio whereas thousands of us were there in the first years. **Let's talk about your uncle's religious identity... He was a proud Christian, with a deep-rooted but never flaunted religious faith.** I remember he would often go to confession at that time. He said he had to be prepared at all times. On Sunday mornings he would wake up early to go to Mass. Opposite his home stood a service entrance to the parish church. It had always struck me: to him it served as a direct and discreet access, to be used whenever he wanted to pray and find that much-needed serenity. I think that his faith also helped him to be that warm and joyful person that I knew all along. **What you are saying reminds me of similar stories I read regarding the civilised ways in which your uncle interacted with Mafia suspects: his respect, his kindness, his ability to reach out to the individual transcending the criminal labelling.** In my opinion, this also explains his successful investigations and why so many of those suspects wanted to talk directly to him and Giovanni Falcone. One story in particular still touches my heart. It's the story of Vincenzo Calcara, a Mafia hitman. During an interrogation Calcara told my uncle that he had been ordered to kill him. Any other person might have been frightened or shaken by that confession. Uncle Paolo was not. That confession was the spark of a sincere friendship between the two of them. I remember one detail: one day my uncle was scheduled to interview him. He found out that Calcara's birthday was just a few days before the day fixed for the interrogation, so he immediately arranged to meet him earlier and went to visit him on his birthday. He found him looking dejected, with a long beard. He told him that he had gone on purpose, not only to interrogate him, but also to wish him a happy birthday, and on that same occasion he invited him to shave, urging him not to let himself go and to take care of himself. This, as well as other episodes - he always brought him cigarettes, for example - touched the heart of Vincenzo Calcara, who eventually became a collaborator of justice. **Too little is said about your uncle's "guardian angels", the men and women of his escort who lost their lives with him. On July 19, 1992, my grandmother Pia was saved by firefighters and rushed to hospital. When my mother Rita arrived, the first thing**

my grandmother said to her was: "Don't stay here with me, go and find the mothers of his escort agents." The relatives of his police escort members gradually became like family to us. A very deep bond was created. I do not hear from them often, but when I do see them I feel as though they form an intrinsic part of me. Every July 19 is a celebration for us simply by being with them. **You have three daughters, one of whom is a young girl... What do you hope will remain and be passed on to them of the moral compass and courage of your uncle Paolo and your mother Rita?** The two oldest daughters knew and witnessed the commitment of their grandmother Rita, who bore witness and remembered her brother for years, especially in schools and then in politics. They now have a very strong connection with Palermo, even though they were born in Tuscany. The younger one, who is five-and-a-half years-old, is still too young. As she grows up, she too will learn the story of her uncle and grandmother Rita.

Francesco Fisoni