

Primavera
OR,
THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

GIULIA GIUFFRÈ

Also by Giulia Giuffrè

A Writing Life: Interviews with Australian Women Writers (1990)

Who do you think you are? (1992)

Primavera, or the Time of Your Life

© Giulia Giuffrè 2011

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention. No reproduction without permission. All rights reserved.

First published in 2011

GAG Enterprises Pty Ltd

PO Box 30

Coogee NSW 2034

AUSTRALIA

www.giuliagiuffre.com

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Giuffrè, Giulia.

Primavera or, the time of your life / Giulia Giuffrè.

1st ed.

Includes index.

Bibliography.

ISBN 9780980690804 (hbk.)

Giuffrè, Giulia – Childhood and youth.

Giuffrè, Giulia – Family.

Italian Australians – Biography.

Australia – Social life and customs – 20th century.

920.72

Set in 10½ pt Berling

Printed in Hong Kong by Jade Productions

www.jadeproductions.com.hk

*For Mum (Marie De Lorenzo)
and the memory of Dad (Gaetano 'Tom' Giuffrè)*

All accounts which draw on memory are in some way legendary ...
Sheila & Celia Kitzinger¹



Mum, there's no point in doing it unless it's true.
Orlando Bailey, aged 16, about the writing of this book



Horace: *Ridentem dicere verum/quid vetat?*²
[What forbids a laughing person from telling the truth?]



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ~ On childhood and on writing about children	p. xv
<i>But what colour is it?</i>	
<i>What does it smell like?</i>	
1. <i>Real Magic</i>	1
<i>Colour: red</i>	
<i>Scent: gunpowder</i>	
Animated toys ~ Surreal logic ~ Childsplay ~ Make believe ~ Childhood places ~ Magic people ~ Adventures	
2. <i>Christmas</i>	39
<i>Colour: gold</i>	
<i>Scent: mango</i>	
Christmas in Kensington ~ <i>La famiglia</i> ~ <i>Whose turn is it?</i> ~ Rituals old and new ~ Christmases past ~ Happy Birthday to you ~ Catholic rapture and dread	
3. <i>The Cubbyhouse</i>	79
<i>Colour: orange</i>	
<i>Scent: dirt</i>	
Making one's bed and lying in it ~ Invention ~ The conceptual cubby ~ House as cubby ~ Wearable and miniature cubbies ~ The mystical cubby	
4. <i>Thumb-dance or Waving</i>	97
<i>Colour: mustard</i>	
<i>Scent: eucalyptus</i>	
<i>Buon anno</i> ~ Children defy gravity I ~ Children defy gravity II ~ Dressing up ~ Having the giggles ~ Start neat, end wild	
5. <i>Food</i>	117
<i>Colour: copper</i>	
<i>Scent: sugo</i>	
<i>What's cooking?</i> ~ <i>Ragù alla napolitan</i> ~ <i>Pastasciutt</i> ~ <i>Cucina alla nonna</i> ~ <i>Salina e sapienza</i> ~ Funny food ~ Cooking with Marie ~ The meaning of sweets ~ The lore of food: the recipe ~ Household hints ~ Feeding babies and children ~ Food: playful and serious	

6. *Words, including Questions* 153
Colour: silver
Scent: paper
 The language of babies ~ Naming the world ~ *What's your name?* ~ Malaprop and mondegreen ~ Rhymes and jokes ~ Found in translation ~ *Napolitan* ~ The Proverb ~ *Sicilian* ~ Auslish ~ What's the question? ~ Word play ~ *The things children say* ~ Insult
7. *Cuddles and Stories* 189
Colour: pink
Scent: cinnamon
 The cuddle ~ First stories ~ Picture books ~ Fairy tales ~ Humour and nonsense ~ Television ~ Play station ~ The book machine and life writing ~ The story, the self
8. *Reading and Secrets* 219
Colour: mauve
Scent: ink
 Learning to read ~ Reading: how and why? ~ Addiction to reading ~ Reading the world ~ Childhood books ~ A note on food, especially sardines, in children's books ~ Testing books ~ Comic books ~ Fact and fantasy ~ The riddle ~ Collect yourself ~ The collection of books ~ Writing I ~ Notes ~ Writing II ~ Secrets
9. *Baby Clothes* 263
Colour: rainbow
Scent: baby powder
 Nurturing ~ *Storge*, cluckiness ~ First clothing ~ Baby equipment ~ Keepsakes and relics ~ Hand-me-downs ~ *I do it, I do it!* ~ Choice of clothing ~ The photograph ~ Memory ~ Baby clothes: envoi
10. *Orlando's Birthday* 295
Colour: maroon
Scent: blood
 First trimester ~ Second trimester ~ Third trimester ~ Birth stories ~ Stage One ~ Transition ~ Stage Two ~ Stage Three ~ And the baby ~ The familiar stranger ~ Breast-feeding ~ And the mother ~ A birth story

11. *Sex, Love, Marriage & Weddings* 319
Colour: ariel
Scent: rose
 O-oh! *Sex rears its nasty head!* ~ There's a word for it ~
 Anatomy ~ Sex ed ~ The masturbatic sexual manifestations ~
 Sex games ~ Wildlife crossing ~ A girl's sexuality ~ *Sexing* ~
 Friday morning manifesto ~ Love ~ Early love objects ~
 The crush ~ Falling in love ~ Being in love ~ Staying in love ~
 Marriage ~ Types of marriage ~ Weddings ~ Wedding themes ~
 The wedding & fairy tale ~ Wedding slides
12. *The Body and the World* 367
Colour: blue
Scent: ozone
 Body image ~ Body knowledge and body memory ~
 Of gardening and shopping ~ Gesture, chiefly Italian ~
 Growth ~ Beauty and the body ~ Aging ~ Genetic
 vocabulary ~ Inventory of the body ~ *Aquae vitae*: birth,
 baptism and bathing, swimming, swimming the opposite of
 juggling for women, seansations, a catalogue of shells, the
 swimming pool, *that oceanic feeling*, dreaming, a note on ice
13. *Music* 409
Colour: purple
Scent: perfume, e.g. Ô de Lancôme
Prima la musica ~ Childhood music ~ The music of one's life ~
La canzon napolitan ~ Music of the '50s and '60s ~ The popular
 song ~ Music performance I ~ Opera – *Per non morir* ~ The
 Disaster Theory of Sublime Musical Performance ~ Music
 performance II
14. *Buttering Biscuits* 443
Colour: sage
Scent: bitter almond
 Adoration ~ Embarrassment ~ Apologise, apologies ~
 A window ... and then adolescence ~ Parents just people ~
 Teasing ~ This very book ~ Role-play ~ *Lucky bastards!*

15. *Girl, Boy; Brother, Sister* 467
Colour: green
Scent: squashed ant
 Difference ~ Girlsworld ~ Boysown ~ The rivalry of siblings ~
 School ~ The forms of school I ~ The forms of school II ~
 The forms of school III ~ The forms of school IV ~ The forms
 of school V ~ The forms of school VI ~ Teachers ~ The play-
 ground, the jungle-gym ~ The work of school, the world of
 school ~ In praise of nuns and nurses
16. *One of those Mothers who Do Cry* 501
Colour: lead
Scent: chocolate
 Rules for parents ~ Hints for parents ~ What is *naughty*? What
 is *good*? ~ Reward and punishment ~ House rules ~ Going to
 the limit ~ *You have to laugh* ~ Forgive us ~ Relationship ~
You can't have had enough. You're a mother! ~ *Magna mater* ~
 Mothercraft ~ Super Heavy Weight-Lifting ~ Mother's little
 helpers ~ Housework ~ Men, women and housework ~
 Our fathers
17. *The Sick Child* 543
Colour: yellow
Scent: antiseptic
 Kissing better ~ Feeling sick ~ Watchful waiting ~ The stations
 of the cross ~ Statistics and convalescence ~ Accidents waiting
 to happen ~ Not happy ~ Sick parents ~ A pain in the neck
18. *Interlude* (for Sophia) 563
Colour: parti/harlequin
Scent: fruitcake
 Questions and comments, opportunities for reader
 participation ~
19. *The Funeral* 599
Colour: black
Scent: cold flowers, florist
 Shadows of death ~ Dialogues of death ~ Deathday ~ Now
 and at the hour of our death ~ *In medias res* ~ The young
 dead ~ Good grief ~ The uses of death

20. *André the Dog* 621
Colour: salt & pepper
Scent: wet dog
 A brief tale, a metaphor
21. *Love and the Moment* 629
Colour: white
Scent: reader to supply
The sky's in love with you and vice versa ~ Now ~ This ~
Paradox ~ What is happy? ~ Adaptability and resilience ~
Wisp o' the will ~ Fear itself ~ The Neapolitan scialamm ~
The Sicilian equivalent of idealism ~ Pomegranate laughter ~
To tears ~ An accidental reminder

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xii
REFERENCES	653
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	664
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	688
NOTES [Reader's own]	691
INDEX	695

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover illustration: <i>Primavera - Flora gathering flowers</i> , from Stabiae, National Archeological Museum of Naples, photograph Luigi Spina	
Introduction: Giuffrè-DeLorenzo Family Tree	p. xviii – xix
1.1 Caricature of Giulia by Orlando 1993	11
1.2 <i>Fatty Boomsticks</i> 1991	13
1.3 <i>Designs for Wings</i> , Orlando 1992	15
1.4 <i>Houses, Girls and Girl-houses</i> , Sophia 1993	17
1.5 <i>Cortona</i> drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	18
2.1 Family photographs	42 – 52
2.2 Nonna's twin guardians, the <i>Madonna di Pompeii</i> and the <i>cornio</i>	66
2.3 Sophia's letter to the Tooth Fairy 1993	71
2.4 Religion assignment, Giulia 1966	75
3.1 Drawing of a Bower-bird, Orlando 1992	84
3.2 Pencil-case drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	86
3.3 <i>Humming House</i> sign, Sophia 1995	87
3.4 Photograph of <i>Corpus Christi</i> mat, Brigidine, Randwick 1945	95
4.1 Sophia's description of a trampoline game 1997 and photograph 1996	102
5.1 Marie's recipes	139 – 140
5.2 Cooking photos	148
6.1 Sophia's note on <i>naughty</i> words	163
6.2 Word play: letter from Adrian to Giulia 1973	178
7.1 <i>La cucchiareda</i> , Giulia with Orlando 1985	191
7.2 Word and silence diagram	195
7.3 Story steps diagram	198
7.4 Witch illustration	201
7.5 <i>Fish-tank Television</i> , Sophia 1996	207
7.6 Orlando's <i>Pattern</i> 1989	218
8.1 <i>A Book to Read</i> , Department of Education, New South Wales, compiled by the Infants' Reading Committee, illustrated by Katherine Morris, nd, p. 17	219
8.2 Signs of reading, Sydney c. 1960	232
8.3 <i>The Three at St Christopher's</i> , p. 184	236
8.4 Learning to write	250
8.5 Picturegrams, Orlando 1990	251
8.6 Incomprehensible list	251
8.7 Card for Tom from Giulia 1961	256
8.8 Cover of <i>Jagged</i> , Sophia Bailey 1996	259
9.1 Description of child-care, with accompanying photograph, 1987	266
9.2 <i>The gloves with the gloves</i> : photograph of Giulia and Brett, Katoomba 1992	269
9.3 Baby's layette	274
9.4 The fabric of memory	282 – 283
10.1 Antenatal record	296
10.2 <i>Mother and child</i> drawing, Orlando 1987	301
11.1 Anniversary card drawing	325
11.2 Yehudimenuiniana	341

11.3	Wedding photographs	358 – 362
11.4	Wedding cake drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	364
12.1	Photographs of Joe Bardetta at 14 and at 64	380
12.2	Birthday card Sophia to Giulia 2000	381
12.3	Photograph: not recognising yourself	387
13.1	Old 78 rpm record	416
13.2	Napoli panorama	423
13.3	Vintage record collection	427
13.4	Opera programme: <i>La Traviata</i> , Sydney 1965	432
13.5	<i>Grieg</i> music cover	436
13.6	Sharps & Flats <i>Clock</i>	438
13.7	Corrected music theory manuscript	438
14.1	<i>everything for Brett</i> , Orlando's book for Brett 1991	445
14.2	Sophia's testimonial for her parents 1999	446
14.3	The signature and the self	452
15.1	Boys and guns	474
15.2	Siblings: Sophia drawing 1991; Orlando and Sophia 1991	482
15.3	School system – bell times Hurlstone Agricultural High School 2001	485
15.4	The <i>libido aestimandi</i> of teachers	491
16.1	<i>I'm not coming to dinner</i> , Sophia 2002	503
16.2	Marie's map of Sydney CBD for Giulia 1966	504
16.3	Domestic contract 2002	517
16.4	Notes Giulia to Orlando 2002	518
16.5	<i>French nitting</i> note, Sophia to Giulia 1997	529
16.6	<i>Cleaning Objects</i> drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	534
17.1	Orlando's drawing of a sore 1990	547
17.2	Photograph of Giulia and Sophia 1987	561
18.1	Images to colour in: Hot-air Balloons, <i>Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow</i> , Gelato, Rainbow	566 – 567
18.2	The <i>Profile/Goblet</i> illusion, made famous by Edgar Rubin 1915	570
18.3	<i>Beautiful young woman or ugly old hag?</i> perceptual image adapted by W. E. Hill 1915	581
19.1	Illustration for Requiem Mass from Missal	600
19.2	Sophia's appeal to her parents 2001	602
19.3	<i>The Pompeii effect</i> drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	609
19.4	Aunty Thelma's funeral service programme	611
19.5	<i>Look at the Coffin</i> words and music	618
20.1	What puppies do	624
20.2	Christmas card for Magnus, Sophia 1996	627
21.0	White page for reflection	628
21.1	The Bundeena ferry	633
21.2	Kookaburra etching, Gaetano (Tom) Giuffrè c. 1935	635
21.3	<i>Fons vitae</i> drawing, Brett Bailey 2008	642
21.4	Welsh spoon and its pattern of endless renewal	642
21.5	Photograph of Belladonna 1998	643
	Back Cover illustration: Giulia (12) photo booth strip	

INTRODUCTION

- *What's for dinner, Mum?*
- *Food*
- *What are you writing, Giulia?*
- *A book.*



My children are now 25 and 23 and I have always kept notes on our lives together, no matter how busy I was, scribbling in odd moments – often at the oblique angle of distraction – on any bit of paper to hand. The notes themselves were a gesture of communication from those traditionally silent years of a woman's life, the ardent years when her children are young.

As a new mother I was told often enough: *You'll forget about this funny thing they used to do, or this thing that they used to say. They grow so quickly.* So with the tenacity of a writer, good material unexpectedly to hand, and like a latter-day Boswell to the children's collective Dr Johnson, I have tried to grasp some of the fleeting experiences of their young lives. (In doing this I have attempted to avoid the example of another literary figure: father of the ill-fated Tristram Shandy, Walter Shandy, who, while passionately involved in his theoretical study of childhood, neglected totally the actual needs of his real child.)

I know that you cannot freeze the time of childhood while it is happening; but I do believe that literature allows you to savour time afterwards, like the stored sunlight of a good red wine. I offer these fragments of childhood, not as pressed flowers, so dull and disappointing when compared to the real thing, but as an album of *scriptographs* which may empower memory and imagination to recreate your own childhood. The book is about three children, two of them now in their 20's and one much older. More importantly, it is about the complex, sustaining, often crazy relationships within a family. Implicit in my children's

childhood is mine. In living through their childhood I have been re-living my own very different one. I hope that this personal account will strike resonances in readers and remind them of their own child-self or children.

Before this I had written shopping lists, love letters, academic theses and literary reviews. But now I found I wanted to write something different. When I was studying in Oxford in the 1970s, perhaps in reaction to the prevailing Oxford Englit obsession with accurate but relatively useless detail, I had a recurring dream about a book that contained all sorts of things: sandalwood, household hints, odds and ends, a mixture of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the *Bible* and *The Times*, a heartening book containing criticism, bacon rashers, the totality of things needed! A book with a dense texture – *panforte*, not sponge. Years later, and while writing *Primavera*, I have had similar dreams about heterogeneous mixtures of different flavours – cheese, wood, peppermint! What does this mean? (Apart from Orlando's conclusion, *Mum, you're mad!*) Possibly that, unconstrained by genre and with head *and* heart, I wanted to write a veritable, impossible encyclopaedia of everything in my life that was important to me.

Je est un autre [I is someone else]¹ as Rimbaud put it, and consequently *Giulia*, young and old, must take her chances with all the other characters in the book. I have mostly used real names, but I would not say that the book is a work of unalloyed fact, or that there is no embellishment, selectivity and dramatisation. I will say, however, that though nothing has been invented, everything has been imagined.



Children are time visible. Their childhood stretches eternal and yet is over before one knows it. Each day is a century, each year is a second. Children connect us with the journey of life from birth to death, from one infinity to another. Babies and children make life turbulent and joyful. They unlock vast catchments of anger and tenderness. They make you think. They make you feel. They can give and inspire a love without reserve. By their nature they immerse you in the life of the body and bring you face to face with the intractable detail of reality.

Children represent hope and continuity. They are *primavera*, the spring, the perpetual renewal of the world. And just as spring in nature is not all sweetness, but can be a time of bruised skies and storms, surprising upheavals and stubborn growth, so too, children are complex – innocent and murderous, lovable and insistent.

Children have to grow up. But when they are young they act and feel and think as children. A few times in exasperation at some particular activity or omission I have said to my son, Orlando: *For goodness sake, stop acting like a child!* and he has replied reasonably enough, *Mum, I am a child.* And on reflection I would say, happy the child who can be a child and have a childhood. That itself is a blessing. One of my old textbooks had it that *Anche Dante Alighieri fu fanciullo* [Even Dante was a child once].² It is true that just as we are all born and all die, we are all young once, but childhood is another matter. Many do not have the privilege of a childhood.

There is a parallel realization that your own childhood remains vital to you yourself. Adults can often go cold and cautious. Children instinctively understand the value of play, spontaneity and enjoyment. How desirable to reconnect with the qualities of moderately happy young children! Always to keep that natural directness, realism, mad humour, imaginativeness, curiosity, poetry, *joie de vivre* and accepting trust in life. To remember feelingly exactly what it was like to be a child. Empathy, which relies on imagination, is all. It is that quality which allows us to understand our children when we do, and ourselves and others, if we do.

Childhood is precious because life is precious. Children are the distillate of life, the essence of the future. One more dream. When I was in hospital in 1988, recovering from a series of cancer operations, I had a dream that *in a Sydney with pavements of black glass, I needed children's toys to be sent to me, and that I needed to re-learn the language.* Looking back I understand this to mean that I wished to rediscover the playful creativity and the language I had once known of love and joy. When my life was threatened my psyche was telling me that I could find a path back to life by *remembering* all my children, including myself.

Coogee, June 2010



