

## Experiences from the early times

# The first companions of Chiara tell us

## The people saw us happy

*In January 1985, some Gen 4 asked Dori, one of Chiara's first companions: "Dearest Dori, (...) we know that you, many, many years ago together with Chiara and her first companions, helped people in need. The people of Trent said that you were like the first Christians. Since we are Gen 4 and we want to live like you, could you tell us something about this? »*

*And Dori answered in this way:*

«Yes, we, that small group of girls around Chiara in Trent, loved one another so much, much more than if we were sisters.

We had given or sold everything that we did not need directly, to give it to the poor, even the fountain pen, even the mirror of the handbag or a few rings. We also had only one pear, divided into two or three pieces.

The constant alarms warned us of the danger of the bombings and forced us to spend hours and hours in the shelters.



There we would stay in a corner, standing or sitting on the floor, listening to Chiara telling us about Jesus, the first Christians, or reading a little page of the Gospel. People saw us happy and did not understand why we were so happy, even if we spent so many hours there, without having anything to eat, in the cold and dampness.

Sometimes, if we had a piece of bread and some biscuits, we would offer it to those around us inviting others to join us and we would keep on talking about the discoveries we made in the Gospel: the love of Jesus for everyone, even for Mary Magdalene who was a sinner, or for Zacchaeus who cheated the people, or for Judas who betrayed him.

We were fascinated by Jesus and his words and we spoke of him with so much enthusiasm that those who were close to us wanted us to continue telling them more. There was also someone who did not understand what we said and teased us, so we loved him even more; we would leave him the most comfortable place or we would offer him the nicest or the best thing we had with us and he did not say anything anymore.

At home, on the street, at school, our joy was contagious and if someone was sad, we knew the secret to comfort him: it was enough to love him. Certainly, to love a person it was necessary to forget that you were tired - or maybe having a scraped knee or toothache - and smile at others or help them. But this increased our joy even more and the other would be consoled and ask: "How can you be so happy?" "We have discovered love - we would answer - and, when we love, there is Jesus among us: Love. He is our happiness."

And we would add: "[And] your happiness too! If you want, come with us!"

So every day we would introduce a new girl or lady to Chiara and to others and our number grew. »



## There was a great love among all

Giosi was also in Trent in that small group of girls around Chiara, many, many years ago.

"Who knows how many things Giosi remembers of that time!" we thought. And so we went to her house and let her recount [her story] with us.

« When we had to flee to the underground shelters because the planes bombed the city, I would not go to the nearest shelter, but I would run across the city just to go to the one where Chiara and her companions were.

Together with Chiara, in fact, we would stay in a corner and read the story of Jesus. The words of the Gospel were all so beautiful, but the most beautiful to us were those that Jesus had said on the last night before dying: "Love one another as I have loved you!"

Jesus loves us so much that He gave us everything, everything, everything, He even died for us. So we wanted to do it too.

If one of us would see a poor man in the street, she would stop immediately and ask him: "Do you need anything?"

If he was hungry, we would invite him home and share lunch with him.

Once a poor man told us:

"I badly need a pair of shoes. Do you see how damaged mine is?"

We asked him what size he was wearing, where he lived, and we promised him: "We will bring them to you; you will see that we will find them!"

But in the little house where we lived with Chiara, there were no men's shoes.

So we went to a nearby church and asked Jesus: "We are asking you for a pair of shoes, size 42, for you, who are in that poor!"

Going out of the church, a friend of ours came to meet us, saying, "Do you need these shoes by chance?"



And think about it: they were precisely men's shoes of the right size: 42!



You can imagine our happiness and that of the poor man when we brought them to him.

And so many [other] things happened, so many.

One day there was another bombardment and so, many people remained homeless, without clothes, without anything.

A young lady came knocking on our door: “We urgently need clothes for these people who have nothing.”

Chiara entered our little room, took a bed sheet, laid it on the ground and put everything we still had on it, making a little pile. Then, taking the clothes one by one, she gave everyone only what each needed. Then Chiara gave everything else, tied in the bed sheet, to that lady for the poor.

We had given everything in the house. But do you know what was happening? Our corridor was filled with sacks of flour and potatoes; they brought us eggs, vegetables, clothes, shoes, medicines ... things that were difficult to find in that war time.



And do you know who gave us these things?

They were the people of Trent who had begun to love with us. So the more we gave the more stuff God gave us and we could give even more!

Even those who are poor loved and wanted to help us.

Like grandma Cesira: We went to visit her because she was alone and we even gave her money because she was poor. But one day she came to us saying: "Look, I saw that if I'm careful, if I save, at the end of the month, I can give this too." And full of joy, she gave us a dime to give it to those who needed even more than her.

There was a great love among all. Many people of Trent, seeing us, said: "How they love each other! They are like the first Christians"».

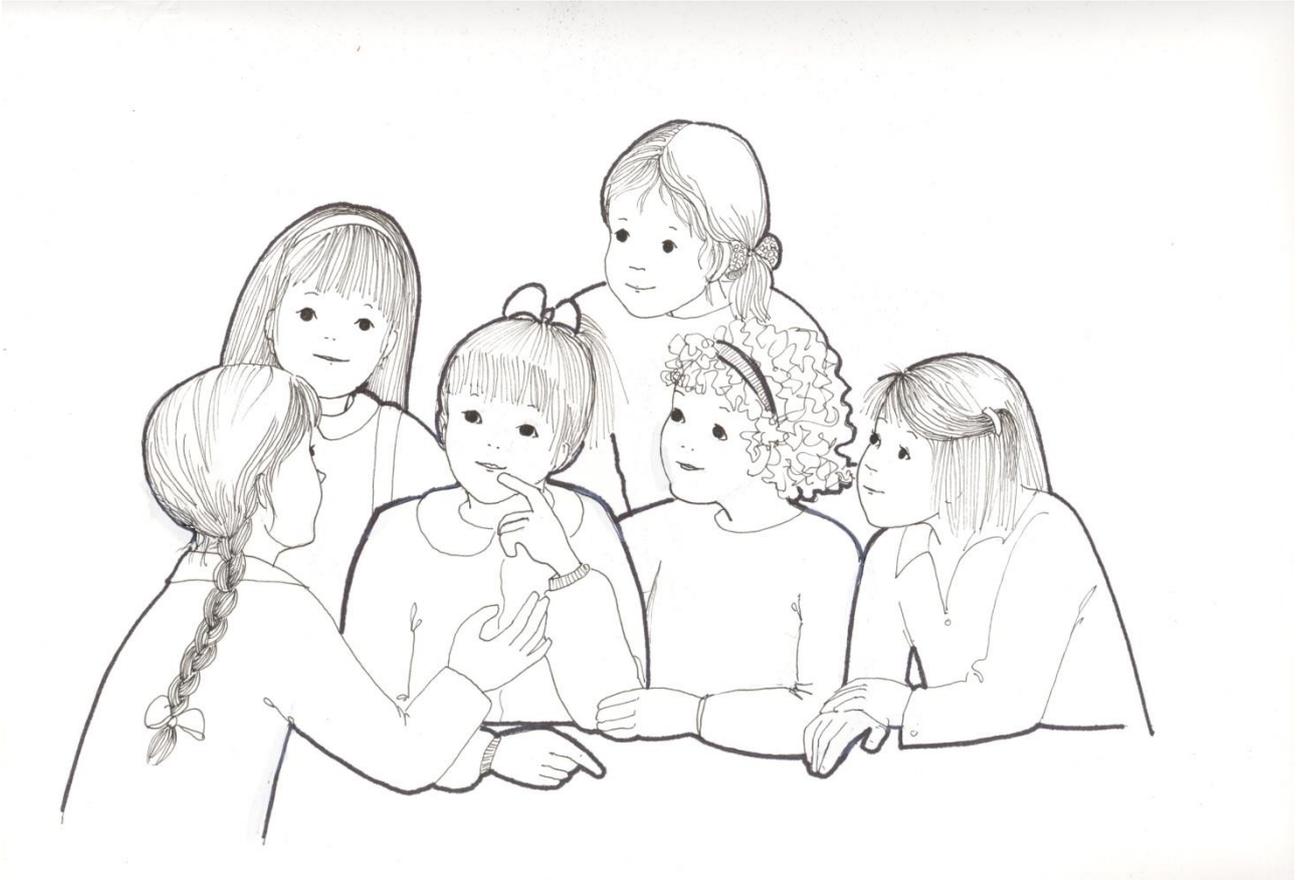
## **She was happy! No one ever gave her that much money!**

*Another time Dori told us:*

«Every day I would go to Chiara's house, and she would explain many things to me, above all, that that great Love that I had discovered - God - was also among us, if we loved each other as Jesus wanted. Then she taught me to love always, so much, every person I knew or met, starting with my mother, my dad, then my classmates, neighbors, all ... but especially those who suffered. We felt that we were loved by God. We were happy, and we wanted to give everyone this great love, our happiness of having a Father who always loved us, who never abandoned us.

So I told my happiness first to my close friend: and she was happy, and began to participate with me at the meetings of the girls, in order to learn more (at that time there were no Gen 4, but they were like the Gen 4).

Talking about these beautiful things was easy too, but loving others as Jesus wanted was more difficult. So I began to help my classmates to do the most difficult tasks, to explain to them the problems of arithmetic, and I tried to do it with love. They were happy, and they asked me how I was so good and so studious.



Then I also told them my secret: I understood that God was Love and that He loved me. I shared how He revealed His love to me: in so many ways...

So my friends started feeling like they were also loved by God and they were happy.

For example, one morning at school, one of my classmates did not have a snack, so I gave her mine. When I got home, I found a big, big cake that was given to us.

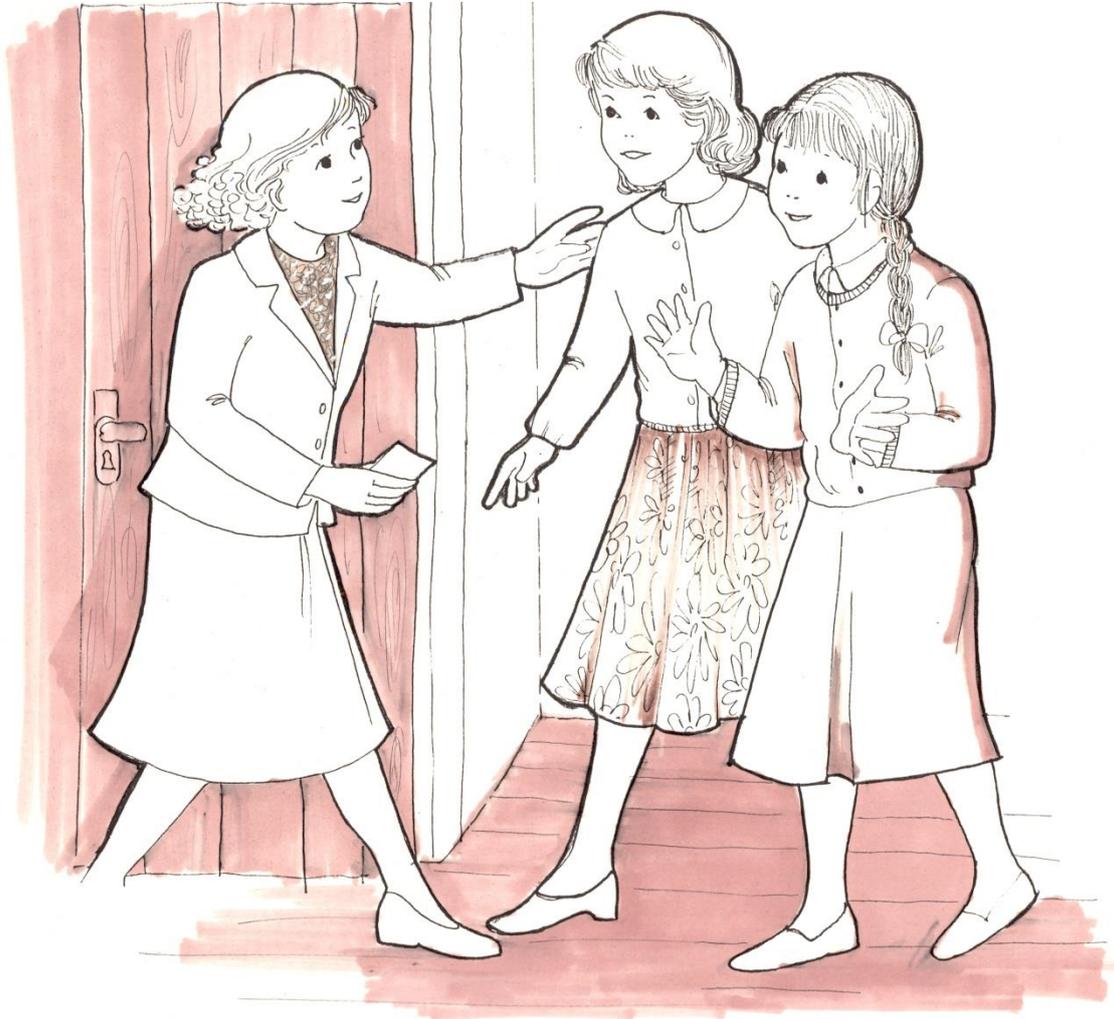
Another time I was in the focolare with Chiara. Someone knocked on the door. It was a poor woman who asked for money because she did not know how to pay the rent of her house.



Chiara went into the bedroom, told the lady to wait a moment and called me next to her. She opened the drawer where we kept the money to buy food ... we only had those! Chiara told me: "Let us pray together!" She said the prayer and I repeated it. She said: "Jesus, you are in this woman who asks me for help: we give you our money, because we know that you are Love, and You are thinking of us!"

Then she came out, and gave all the money to that poor woman, who was happy, because no one had ever given her so much money at once!

But we were happier than she, because we had loved Jesus in her.



Soon after, Natalia came running from the office and told us that she had received more money from her salary, and she had thought that perhaps Chiara needed it right away: they were twice what we had given to that poor woman!

We were really happy. We thanked Jesus and we said: “You give us more and more than what we give!”».

## It was Jesus who was hiding in them

Also Aletta, another companion of Chiara, told us something:

«In Piazza Cappuccini, Chiara told us many things: she took them from the Gospel. In the Gospel Jesus had said: “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was in prison and you visited me (...) Whatever you did to these little ones - little ones it means poor - you did it to me.”

For this, Chiara said: “Let's love Jesus in the poor, because we are sure to find Jesus there. He said: ‘I am there where there is hunger, where there is a sick person, where there is someone who cries ... I'm there! If you comfort them, you comfort me.’”

So we started to love the poor, and we went to their hovels, which were half-destroyed houses or made of cardboard.

Then we went to the streets where we met the poor, but in them we always saw Jesus: we were meeting Jesus, even if these people were dirty, unkempt, ill-dressed. It was Jesus who was hiding in them...



So Chiara, for example, took off her gloves and gave them to those who asked for charity under the snow ... Because it was cold in Trent!

One day I was with Angelella (another of Chiara's first companions). We went to see a poor woman: it was winter, there was snow and it was so cold.

We entered a cold, cold room, because there was no heating: it was a very poor house. There was an old woman wearing a men's shirt: she did not even have a nightgown, she was so poor. She was completely disheveled...



Angelella threw herself towards this poor woman and embraced her with all her heart. Then she turned to me and said: "It's Jesus!"

I tell you that on that face of Angelella I have almost seen, if one can say, the face of Jesus!

She had really embraced Jesus and was happy, radiant, and even the poor was radiant! »