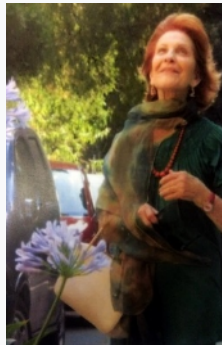


**The Fair of Oh Bej! Oh Bej! - An iconic Milanese festive event**  
**Interview with Augusta Micheli of Cardinal Colombo University, Milan**  
**By Farnaz T. shams**



G. Augusta Marianecchi Micheli known as "La Grande Mamma", awarded the 'Ambrogino d'Oro Medal' for having contributed to spreading the commitment of volunteers at all levels, kindly shared with us the re-enactment of one of the oldest Milanese traditions the "Oh Bej! Oh Bej! "

**-In your own words, could you tell us why the fair is called “Oh Bej! Oh Bej!”?**

"Oh Bej! Oh Bej!" is a Lombard expression that translates into Italian "Oh belli!" (How beautiful things!) And derives from the joyful exclamations of the Milanese children who gladly accepted the gifts of the papal envoy.

**-What are the specific characteristics of the fair that are passed down from generation to generation?**

The fair opens on 7 December, the day of the feast of Sant'Ambrogio (patron saint of Milan), which is considered the most important religious festival in the city.

The fact that it is held in December makes you feel already the Christmas spirit and the magical atmosphere of giving gifts. Moreover, an active participation in charity programs, embodies a characteristic imprinted in the mind and heart of the Milanese (people from Milan), that is passed down from generation to generation.

Seeing the joy on the faces of children with their mouths coloured by cotton candy, wearing chestnut necklaces, firòn, smoked chestnuts in the oven, dipped in white wine and strung in long strings, an original way of preparing roasted chestnuts, are sweet memories that always make me smile.

**-What is the relationship between the "OH BEJ!" and the pawnshop?**

People in need borrow cash and exchange it for valuables. In most cases, if money is not returned within a certain period, these items are sold at the “Oh Bej! Oh Bej”, but, if someone recognizes the object, he buys it and gives it to the owner as a Christmas present. Helping the needy has always been a peculiarity of this community.

**-Do you think that the most significant historical events (the Second World War) have had some influence on a traditional festival such as that of "Oh Bej! Oh Bej! " ?**

After the Second World War we have witnessed cultural colonialism, globalization!  
I remember that the signs that said "COFFEE" were replaced with those that said "BAR"! People began to stop telling stories, tradition began to seem like something out of date!  
And this sad story continues!

**-How important is awareness of endangered cultural traditions?**

Cultural traditions are essential to protect and maintain one's identity. Traditions offer an irrefutable link with the past and allow us to deepen our sense of unity, belonging and national pride. Tradition is important in any culture or civilization. Despite the attempts of Modern and Postmodern society to uproot it from its past, today more than ever, people show a strong desire to recover their traditional values. In an era of change, continuity is something that people feel the need and desire for. Preserving and passing on Italian traditions must be our ongoing commitment. I hope that we will be able to fulfill this mission by involving volunteers from different generations.