

**Italian market gardeners oral history project**  
**Interview OH872/7 with Francesco (Frankie) Ballestrin**  
**deposited in the JD Somerville Oral History Collection**  
**in the State Library of South Australia**  
**recorded by Madeleine Regan in Flinders Park, South**  
**Australia 12 December 2008**

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**This is an interview with Francesco Ballestrin, also known as ‘Frank’ Ballestrin, recorded on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008 at his home in Flinders Park, Adelaide. Frank, we’re going to begin the interview by referring to the family tree that you have in front of you and to give a context of your family. So I’d like you to begin by telling us about the origins of your family.**

Okay. Well, the Ballestrin family tree started off in 1848 and in Riese, Treviso, Italy.

**That’s in the north of Italy.**

Yes, that is the other side of Venice, about 40 kilometres north of Venice. Now, that’s ’48. Then there was the Francesco which was my great-great-grandfather’s son, who is my grandfather, was also born in Valla in 1865, and he married a Guidolin, Santa Guidolin. Then out of that generation there was 10 children. One was Ballestrin Maria; the other one was Ballestrin Luigi; the other one, Ballestrin Giosue; the other one’s Ballestrin Antonio; Ballestrin Isidoro; Ballestrin Ermenegildo; Ballestrin Natalina; Ballestrin Narcisio; and Ballestrin Luigia. And Ballestrin Ermenegildo must be another one there that died, I think.

Anyway, the story is that Ballestrin Antonio, Ballestrin Isidoro and a cousin of theirs, Ballestrin Giuseppe, all come out to Australia at – what have we got it, here? – in 1927.

**They arrived in Adelaide?**

Adelaide, arrived in Adelaide, and they lived in Adelaide, in the West End of Adelaide – Gray Street, to be precise – and in the beginning there wasn’t any work at all. They lingered around the city there and picked up small jobs, whatever was available. And I know that at Christmastime at one stage they didn’t have any money for Christmas so the Government made them sweep the streets and gave them a few dollars just to be able to celebrate Christmas with their friends.

**Because that would have been the Depression times.**

That’s right, yes.

**And how would they have got the money to come to Australia?**

I don't know how they got that money. I know that when they returned – in 1935 they went back to Italy and the whole three got married, come out with their wives; and I believe then that when – of the eight years that they worked here, they had enough money for only one way to go back to Italy, and then they borrowed money to come out the other half, like return trip.

**And in those eight years that the two brothers and cousin were living here, do you know what work that they did?**

Yes. My father, Isidoro, went up north, up at Finke, up that area, sinking wells and building fences for the farmers, and actually the chappie that he went with – I don't know who he was – but he hung himself. And Dad panicked and he got lost, no water, and the blackfellas found him, the Aborigines, what you want to call them – at that time they used to call them 'blackfellas' – and they gradually got him back to life again because he was almost gone. And then he come down here and I don't know what he did after that, I don't know what he picked up after that. But I know he kept saying about that, it was really horrendous, you know.

**It must have been awful. Was the other man an Italian?**

Yes, yes. Around the same area of Italy. I don't know who he was, but I know he was around that area of Italy.

**And one thing we haven't said is the ages or approximate ages of your father and your Uncle Antonio and Giuseppe.**

Well, Antonio was born in 1902, so here in '27.

**So he would [have been] 25.**

Yes. Dad was only 23, that's right. And my Uncle Giuseppe was only 16.

**So young!**

Yes, so young. And I know the first job he had, he went to a garden at Uraidla in the Hills, a vegetable garden, and couldn't speak a word of English. And the baker at those times used to supply the bread with horse-and-cart and he used to go round and drop a loaf off and that, you know, and at 16 working like they used to work that wasn't enough so he got in the back of the van and threw out loaves on the ground then picked them up, and he knew the next day he had to leave him more bread. (laughs) So yes, that's how it was in those days. And yes, they went back to Italy, got married like I said, they come out.

And then they settled in Glynde for a while, and then from there – and then I was born. Well, my sister was born first.

**She was born in – – –?**

1935. And then I was born in 1937. I don't know where she was born, but I was born in Keswick. And then they moved up to Virginia. They leased some land on Gawler River near the Port Wakefield Road and living in a train wagon, and they grew cabbages and cauliflowers and that sort of stuff.

**The three couples, living together?**

Yes. Not Antonio; this was Ermenegildo then, the younger brother of Dad come out, and he come out in 1938. And they all – because Ermenegildo couldn't read or write or anything, you know, English or Italian, so he stayed with them and they all worked together. And then they were getting flooded out, out of the three or four years they were there they got flooded out twice, so they moved down to Adelaide.

**Would they have been leasing the land up there?**

Yes, they were. Yes, they were leasing the land and off – I think it was a chap named Marshall at the time. And even I remember, I came down from there when I was four, and I remember the army people going through the exercises up there and seeing the planes fly over and the army people exercising up there.

**Wow. Would that have been – yes, it would have been already in the War.**

Yes.

**Wouldn't it, if you were four it would have been 1941.**

Yes, that's right.

**And what was it like, do you remember much about what life was like up there at that time?**

No, I do not, but they tell me there was a lot of snakes and they reckon at one stage I was standing by the water and the snake went in between my legs, (laughs) and things like that. And it was pretty desolate up there in those years, pretty desolate.

**Housing, what was – – –?**

Like I said, we were in a train wagon and not much housing at all, just more or less shacks at the time. And then they moved down to here, down to Flinders Park, and they were leasing land from Keele, you know the name Keele, at the other side of Findon Road going up towards Lockleys, and they were there for a few years until this land come available. So then they leased this for a while, for I don't know how long it was, but they had 15 acres here they were leasing.

**And you told me that this land was originally owned by a family called Britten-Jones?**

That's correct, that's from what I can understand, that's what it was; and they owned from the river down to Grange Road and Findon Road. And I don't know how far over, but it's just the other side of Flinders Park Oval, so all down, that was theirs. So it was a fair bit of land, sort of thing. And *they* lived in a nice home: they had a brick home, you know, like the old homestead homes, which was a nice home.

**Closer to the river?**

Yes. And then, because these ladies didn't have – they were two sisters at the end, they were ageing, didn't have any children, and I believe they left everything to a church – and I don't know which church it was – and of course they sold out. And of course Dad bought all this land; he only bought five then, five acres, and he was leasing fifteen. So then my uncle Narcisio come out later, so he bought a couple of acres back further here.

**East of here.**

Just next to our property. And Berno, a chap named Berno, bought next door to us, the land that Dad didn't buy, this Berno, and that was the same area of Italy. He bought there and his brothers bought this side of our land. Yes, and then my Uncles Giuseppe and Ermenegildo separated from Dad – although they were still friends, there were no arguments about it – and they bought their own land. They had 20 acres just next door to us here, next door to Jarmans – I don't know if you remember the cricketer?

**Yes.**

That was his parents there.

**So that would have been closer to the river?**

That's correct – abutting the river, actually.

**Oh, okay.**

And down to Hartley Road, they had 20 acres there.

**There's actually a Jarman Avenue there.**

That's where it was. Well, they were next door to Jarmans.

**So they had how much land?**

20 acres there.

**Between the two of them.**

Yes. And they gardened successfully for a number of years. Then their children all went to school, learnt – you know, one was working for the Government in weapons research – and so they sold and then they went and worked for the council after that until their retirement. And then of course I went to school and – – –.

**If we can just go back a step, about this land?**

Yes.

**So you would have been around four when you came here.**

Yes.

**And do you remember what your father was growing, say, at the time?**

Here?

**Yes.**

Well, he – yes, we had 17 glasshouses.

**17.**

Yes – 17 glasshouses. And he at one stage had rheumatic fever. So because my uncles were all interned because the Italians were allied to the Germans during the War, so they interned my uncles and one went to the salt mines in Price on the Yorke Peninsula; the other one – two of them, actually – went up to Katherine and Adelaide River. And they were all supervised because of the war effort, that Italy was allied to Germans, you see. But Dad, they didn't send him because he had rheumatic fever, so that he grew cabbages and that sort of stuff for the army people for the war effort. So he stayed here, and I remember when I was about 10, 12 or something I used to plough land here with horses and we used to do everything by hand. It wasn't like it is now, all mechanised; it was all done by hand.

**So would your father have owned horses?**

Yes.

**How many did he have?**

Two, we had two draught horses. We had our cow – we used to make our own butter and cream, our own cheese – and we had our chickens, and we were pretty self-sufficient at that stage.

And then I went to school, like I said. First we went to [what] used to be Underdale, named ‘Underdale’; they’ve now since changed it to ‘Flinders Park’, which is on this side of the river, it used to be ‘Underdale’. And they used to take us to school with a sled, a horse-and-sled. There was no roads in those days, only the main roads.

**So if we imagine that land in those days –**

Yes.

**– so the western boundary is Findon Road and the southern boundary is the river.**

Yes.

**And the northern boundary is Grange Road –**

Yes.

**– and the eastern boundary would have been – – –?**

Of our land? No, no, we weren’t down to Grange Road, we were only – – –.

**No, I was meaning like that big tract of land.**

Yes, yes.

**And what was the eastern boundary?**

It wasn’t as far as Holbrooks Road, that was the school down there. It was only the other side of the Flinders Park Oval here, so it was only say two streets down, it wasn’t that far.

**Right. But in that piece of land there were no roads at that time.**

No, no. Oh, no.

**So how was the land divided?**

Well, just fences. Whenever they bought it – whoever, the individual that bought it, just put up their own fence and separated it that way. You know, Findon Road here at that

stage was only a little strip of bitumen in the middle and boxthorn bushes all over the place, you know. You couldn't see the road, they were that bad. So it was pretty primitive, it wasn't nothing like it is now, you know.

**No. And up till what time, you know, what years would it have been like that, do you think?**

Let's see when it started developing: gee, the first homes over here were built, would have to be '46, '47, something like that.

**So just after the War.**

Yes; but that was over further.

**Towards Holbrooks Road?**

Yes. And then this was still all gardening here for a while, and then of course the homes started closing in – you know, they start selling from Grange Road; individual people there sold their little bit and they put homes in. And of course here, with glasshouses, it got to the stage where they had to fumigate the soil because they had all nematodes and different things in the soil and they couldn't grow tomatoes successfully so they had to fumigate. But of course they were using chloropicrin that they used during the trenches in the War, so people started complaining because of the smell and eventually they drove the glasshouses away from all this area, even down at West Beach and around Tapleys Hill Road, all round there, and Fulham Gardens and all that, that's how they ended up. They had to get out of there because the gas smelt so much and people were getting ill about it and they had to move.

**And close housing, housing was becoming closer.**

Yes, closer to the property, so we eventually moved out to Port Wakefield Road on Little Para River at Bolivar, and we still carried on for a little while here but we were just planting potatoes and no fumigation, no nothing there, you see.

**So did your parents – you know, when they first came here and you were four, what sort of housing were you in at that point?**

Well, when I remember was that we had a house just here, where Ballestrin Court is [Flinders Park], right on that corner: that was our old house, and it was one of the best ones in the area at the time but it was just iron and plaster inside; and four rooms – three

bedrooms and a kitchen and a bathroom – and a veranda at the back, and it was a reasonable sort of home at the time.

**Would your dad have built that?**

Yes, yes. Yes, with another friend who had come out from Italy, he was a carpenter and Dad paid him and he done the job for us, you know, and that's how it all started. Yes, and then we had our chickens, we had our fences up and they were free range. Like I said, we had our cow, we used to make our milk and used to have our cream and that and we used to grow the lucerne for it, all basic sort of stuff.

**So this was all on five acres?**

Yes.

**Wow.**

You see, in those years, vegetables were valuable because it was all done by hand. You didn't have the oversupply. Now, like I said, they're growing 2,000 acres now of potatoes in one lot, so it has changed a lot, has changed a lot. And everyone was basically in that same sort of set-up. Yes, and then they started moving away because, like I said, because of the homes. But that was basically what I remember.

**Did your parents build once they had bought the land, like built another house here, or – –?**

Well, that was the house they built when they bought it.

**Right, and they continued to live in that.**

Here for a while, yes, for a number of years.

**And when they bought the land at –**

Bolivar, yes.

**– Bolivar, you didn't move there.**

No, no.

**You stayed – – –.**

We stayed here and commuted up there each morning and returned in the afternoon and did it that way. Set up there, set a shed up, you know, a packing shed for our machinery

and sunk a bore for water and levelled it off, and started planting crops up there. So a bit of a hassle.

**Yes. Did you shift glasshouses up there?**

Well, I shifted them when we were *here*.

**Tell me about the process of shifting.**

My cousin and myself, homework was – at the time, like our Christmas break – was to drill holes and put up a row of posts each night we come home from school. Our parents would prepare the rails on the grounds and that was the start of setting up your glasshouse. And we put the rail in, then they'd have the rail on top of it and then we'd come home and nail the rafters in. You know, they'd show us what to do, sort of thing. And then carry on from there. And then slide up the glass and all the rest. It wasn't easy.

**No. What were the dimensions of your glasshouses?**

Like Johnny's [Marchioro], 114 feet by 14, I think it was, feet – something like that; 14 foot 6, or 14 feet, something like that.

**And the height?**

They were very low in those years. They weren't like the later [ones]. They were only two glass high. You could barely get in with a tractor, you know, you had to put narrow, small wheels on to get in with a tractor to be able to work them. Before, we used to dig them by hand, we used to dig them by hand with a fork.

**And you remember doing that?**

Oh, yes, I did that myself. Actually, one year I dug them *all* by myself.

**That must have been days of work.**

Oh, yes. Dig one a morning.

**One a morning, wow.**

Yes.

**You would have been extremely fit.**

Oh, yes. Yes, we were.

**And this is when you're at school?**

No, this is when I left school and was working in the garden. When I left school I worked with the garden with Dad and carried on from there.

**The glasshouses were moved every couple of years, is that right?**

About three. About three years, yes.

**Every three years.**

Depending on your soil, you know. Some got contaminated earlier, some got contaminated later.

**And what contaminates the soil?**

Well, they used to get what they used to call 'yellow leaf', and nematodes. Nematodes is something that irritates the roots of the tomato and it swells up the roots and they won't accept the water and the fertiliser, and of course they wilt. The plant wilts.

**Is that a little beastie?**

It's a little white bug that you can't see with the natural eye, you've got to have a microscope to see it.

**Are they particularly interested in tomato plants?**

Yes. They'll go for carrots, they'll go for broccoli, cabbage; I don't know about cauliflowers, but I know they go for them.

**And they go to the roots.**

Yes. They irritate the roots and the roots swell up, and of course you had to fumigate for that, you see. And when they discovered that they had to fumigate, then they didn't shift them anymore, and that was the beauty of that, you see: less work and less sort of thing on that. But we've since found out that they didn't have to fumigate because sugar is a natural cure for those nematodes.

**Really?**

Because I'm using that now.

**And how was that discovered?**

Read it in a book, and the University of Queensland about five years ago, six years ago, had a test on cabbages or Brussels sprouts and they used – not treacle, what's the – – –?

**Golden syrup?**

Syrup, yes, something like that. What's the leftover of sugar? Anyway, they used [that] – it's still a product of sugar – and they used it, and they can't work out why it works but it does work.

**So it's applied to the soil before planting?**

Yes. At any time – sugar, I put it at any time. You can put it any time. But I know that we've had carrots, because of the nematodes, it makes them throw out a lot of carrots, like a lot of roots, instead of the one. I start putting sugar on then. Perfect.

**Just on the top of the soil?**

Yes. Then it washes in when you water, you see.

**That could have saved a lot of market gardeners a lot of money, time and illness.**

Correct. Yes. Well, you know, they didn't study those things in those years. Now, they're doing a lot more on that natural way of doing it. You can see it even with the sprays now, they're doing garlic sprays and things like that, which is more natural.

**And healthier.**

Yes, it is. Far healthier.

**Going back to your father and his brothers, what would have made them all so committed to market gardening, do you think?**

Because that's what they were all doing over there. They didn't have a trade, they didn't know anything. They went to school for two years only, over in Italy. So they had a bit of land over there and that's what they were committed to doing over there and that's all they knew. And out here there wasn't jobs available. When Dad come out, they said that the only building that was being built in Adelaide was the TNG, they were finishing that off.

**In King William Street.**

Yes. That was the only building here that started going up in height. And I believe that Johnny's father helped build the railway station, is that correct?

**Something to do with the terrazzo steps.**

Yes, there you are.

**We're talking about Johnny Marchioro.**

Yes.

**Do you know much about your father's life in Italy?**

No. No, I do not know much of it.

**You know that he was one of 10 children.**

That's correct, yes.

**And I understand that his mother came out.**

That's correct, she come out with the younger sister, Luigia, and I don't know when – wait a minute, we might have it here. No, I don't know. No, I can't say when she [came]. But she come out with my auntie, the youngest daughter, and they just lived up here on Grange Road and she married Zalunardo and my grandmother died in 1945. I know that. And she died in our house, actually. She was living with us and she died in our house. And at that time fridges weren't – they were the first fridges that were coming out, and we got one because of her health, it wasn't well, and at that time you could buy a block of land with what you paid to buy a fridge.

**Are you talking about an electric fridge?**

Yes, yes.

**– or a gas fridge?**

No, no. Electric fridge. And they had the compressor underneath and you had like a half-fridge, more or less, because they had all the big motor underneath. Yes, and we were the first ones to have it because of that reason. Before there was ice chests, I remember them. They used to come round with the ice blocks and they'd put it on top and you could have your milk, at least you could save your milk occasionally and things like that. Yes, it was a hard life. And especially us, because we were that in between; you know, Dad and our parents, all right, they were true Italians, but we half Italians and half Australians. You're sort of in between. We could see one side and also could see the other side, you know, and it made it a bit harder in a way. In a way. Because we had to blend with the Australians on one side and the Italians on the other side.

**And I'd like to talk more about that a little later in the interview.**

Yes, okay.

**But I'm thinking about your grandmother –**

Yes.

**– and her name was Eugenia?**

Eugenia, yes.

**And do you know why – she must have been a fair age when she came to Australia. Do you know why she would have come?**

No, I do not. But I believe that, like everything else, they were struggling there and they probably got news that everything's a lot better here than what it was there – living, sort of thing, and food and that way. So when the daughter, the youngest daughter, come out she come with her, because the others were all married. The other daughters were all married and stayed there in Italy and the younger daughter come out and she come with her.

**So by that time your father was here –**

Yes.

**– Antonio was here.**

Correct. Ermenegildo was here.

**Ermenegildo.**

And Narcisio was here, too.

**Narcisio.**

Yes.

**Because he'd also joined.**

That's right.

**So there was (counts) four of you –**

Yes.

**– and then Luigia and your mother.**

Yes.

**And the others remained in Italy.**

In Italy, yes.

**I think that's an extraordinary thing for an older woman to come.**

It was, my word.

**And to leave everything that she knew.**

Yes. My grandfather had died, though, so whether she was staying in the home on her own, maybe that was the incentive of her to come out here with her daughter, because what was she going to do there, home on her own? If all the rest are married and they've got their families and she probably didn't fit in with them, coming over here with her daughter, because her daughter at that stage didn't have a boyfriend, you know – she met her husband here after, when she was here – so she probably come out with her daughter as just come out with her, sort of thing, as a single person. So I imagine that was what was the story.

**It seems really interesting, because she must have known that it was unlikely that she would return to Italy.**

I would say so, I would say so. That would be very hard, especially in those years, you know, not knowing any English. And the people that come after the War always kept saying that *they* found it hard; but I assume that, when our parents come out, it was really hard because there wasn't many people in South Australia at all at that time.

**No. And hard times to come, when there wasn't a lot of work or money.**

That's correct. And then, like I said, interned – like my uncle went to the Yorke Peninsula in the salt. He didn't know a word of English or a word of Italian – like he couldn't read or write, so he was pretty well – – –.

**And do you know how long he would have been interned for?**

No, but he would have been there for the length of the War.

**Wow. And was that actually an enclosed situation?**

No, no, I don't think so.

**It was just like he had to work there.**

Yes, that's all. Yes, just supervised, and so they knew where he was.

**Yes.**

And that's how it was at the time, unfortunately. And they fitted in. Gradually they learnt a bit of English, or Dad learnt pretty quick because he went out in the bush and he had no choice, he had to learn it. The others that sort of remained amongst the Italians didn't learn it as quick or not as well because they sort of had more of their own people to speak with than with the Australians, and Dad had the Australians and he had to learn so he mastered it quite quickly, you know. Within six months he said he mastered it quite well.

**Wow.**

So yes.

**And what about your mother?**

Yes?

**Like how old would she have been when she arrived in 1935 with your father?**

Well, she wouldn't have been too [old]. Here we are: she was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1912.

**So in 1935 ---.**

She come out in '35 ---. (counts)

**Our maths are not very good, are they?**

No. 18, is that right?

**What year was she born?**

'12.

**23.**

23, sorry, 23.

**But that's young, isn't it, to leave everything?**

It is young.

**Did she ever say to you what she thought life was like here when she first arrived?**

Here? She never rubbished this place, she was always happy. I remember that: always singing, always very happy and they always had a lot of – like a lot of Italians were around here, and our place, you know, 10 o'clock in the morning was always coffee time, I

remember that. They all used to come around. Whoever was around would have a cup of coffee –

....., yes.

– yes – at that time, you know. So they had their friends. And in summer when the season was over, tomato season – it used to be very hot in those years, a lot hotter than what it is now; in longer periods, too – and we used to go to the beach all the time. They'd sit under the jetty, all the women, with us kids and Dad used to come, too.

**This is down at Henley Beach?**

Yes, Henley Beach, under the jetty.

**And how would you get there?**

We had trucks in those times – well, after the War, when they got established here, we always had a truck to go to market. Never had a car for a long time. And that's what used to get us everywhere, and go to wherever you wanted to go. But in those years there wasn't any Italian films, there's nowhere they could go sort of thing –

**No clubs or – – –?**

– and they were quite happy to be amongst their friends. And I remember when I was about 14, 15, we had a big shed here and Dad used to get a keg of beer on a Sunday afternoon and all our friends around here used to come there on a Saturday afternoon, so they all used to meet, they used to take some food from home, and whatever the beer cost whoever was there they'd split up whatever it cost, so much per person, and that's how they used to spend their Sunday afternoons. And then, later on, someone put up a bocce court so then they started going to bocce and cut out this party.

**Where was that?**

Rosewater was one and Kidman Park – was it Kidman Park? – yes, Kidman Park was another one. So they used to go there and spend their Sunday afternoon that way.

**And would that have been on someone's private property?**

Yes, yes, oh yes, yes. Someone come up with a smart idea of 'Why don't we do this?' and yep, it all started off and away they went. And away they went. So that's another way of doing it.

And of course they always went to church. We always worked, but never worked on a Sunday.

**And where was your church?**

Captain Cook Avenue here at Flinders Park, just off Grange Road. And they always went to church. And then, of course, after, the Italian priest start coming round and they built one up at Gleneagles [Seaton]. And Dad's era, still we went here, but when our era come along we went up to Gleneagles up on the hill. So, you know, call it 'the hill' because it is on a rise. And all that area used to be sand hills, red sand hills, until they built homes and they started knocking them down.

**So from like Frogmore Road west it would have been sand hills?**

Yes, that's correct.

**Because that's where like there's a slight rise.**

That's right, yes. And this place here, the Torrens always used to flood because it was narrow and the trees used to fall across, and when we got a heavy rain – like we did today, say, for instance – the grass and twigs would back up on the trees and out it would come and down this way it deposited all alluvium soil.

**So even as far as here.**

Oh, yes.

**How many metres, how many hundred metres, would it be from the ---?**

Here? Be 500 at least. At least.

**So a fair covering of water.**

Oh, yes.

**And how would that have affected glasshouses?**

Oh, well, after that they cleaned it out, you see. When the glasshouses were on it wasn't flooding anymore.

**Oh, okay.**

They cleaned it out, took the trees away, and then they built the dam up on the Kangaroo Creek, so that stopped it coming down in big volumes. And of course after that they widened it out and it will never flood now. But in those years it used to flood, because

even here you go down a metre and it's sand, it's red sand. And they used to deposit the soil from the hills and it's very good soil here, very good soil.

**So it was no wonder that it became a really good area for market gardens.**

Oh, yes, my word. It was really good, really good.

**Yes. Frank, you don't know why your father and his brother and cousin came here, to this particular piece of land in Flinders Park in 1939 or ---?**

Yes - '41, I think, about '41.

**Do you know why it would have been here?**

Well, like I said, they were leasing across the road in Keel's land.

**Oh, that's right.**

So then they must have got the message that -

**Heard about it.**

- they were selling here and then they bought into here, you see.

**Do you know why they would have gone to Keel's land?**

Well, because it was available and word of mouth, you know, friends that they knew. Because there was a lot of people around here: they were on the other side of the river. On the other side of the river on Findon Road was Taverna - you know Taverna the hairdressers?

**Oh!**

That was where *they* were, and they were gardeners, you know? Arturo Taverna, you know, now they've got all these hair shampoos and that? Well, that's where *they* started, that was *their* garden there. And of course all that area - Hank's, I don't know if you remember Hank? You wouldn't remember Hank that played football?

**No.**

All that area was all gardens, and they had friends there, you see, and word of mouth got around and so they leased there first and then bought here when it come available.

**And do you know anything about the Keels?**

Keel, I remember him, I remember seeing him. He was a short chap, like me. Actually, the bridge was named after him, it was built in 1937 I believe. And before that they tell me, parents were telling me, there was only a board going across the river and when the water was real high they still used to crawl across there, they had to crawl on fours, you know, hands and knees, to get across the river, even when it was almost touching the bottom of the board. I don't know how they did it.

**Wow. So where were the other bridges over the Torrens at that point?**

South Road –

**Right.**

– and there was one on Frogmore Road, there was a wooden bridge across there.

**Was that pedestrian or was it vehicles?**

It is pedestrian now; it used to be vehicle years ago, but it's pedestrian now because it got a bit weak and they're frightened it's going to fall, so they strengthened it a bit and only use it as pedestrian now.

**And what about further west, was there one – – –?**

Tapleys Hill Road. But there, if you see the map, you can see where the river used to run out. The river never ran out to the sea there; it ran out past the Tapleys Hill Road and it crossed the Henley Beach Road where the old folks' home is now, and then it just spread out over the land, because it never used to run out to sea. And when they got enough rain it built up, went out across the West Lakes, and then out to the Port, out the Port River.

**So all of that was marshy kind of land, wasn't it?**

It was all – yes. Henley Beach Road was built, though, that went down to the sea. There was homes there on the sand hills. But the water never ran out to the sea there; that was all man-made from a bit north of – it would have to be, what, 200 or 300 yards north of Henley Beach Road, that was all man-made out to sea there.

**From what point on Henley Beach Road?**

Well, the bridge is over it. Do you know on South Road? You know where the bridge goes over the outlet?

**Yes.**

Have you ever seen it down there, the outlet? It's back north of Henley Beach Road, it would have to be about 300 or 400 metres back. That's where they widened it out and made a canal.

**So that's the Hindmarsh.**

The outlet, what they call the outlet. Not Hindmarsh; Hindmarsh is way over here.

**But you said South Road.**

Oh, sorry – Tapleys Hill Road.

**Tapleys Hill Road.**

Yes.

**Oh, okay.**

Yes, Tapleys Hill Road; across Tapleys Hill Road – and the trees are still there. The trees are still there. They've covered it in now, but it's still there and it went across Henley Beach Road and then from there it just spread out. It used to flood up Hindmarsh, too, the river used to flood up there, too. But mainly it used to flood down here.

**Yes, because it widened out.**

Yes, it got lower.

**And lower banks.**

Got like a delta.

**Yes.**

And of course, like I said, down Henley Beach it just built up when it rained a lot and went out towards the Port.

**So do you know what sort of time that would have changed, like when they changed the course of the river?**

When it was built? No, no, I can't remember it; but I know that our people were saying that it was hand-built and with draglines and horses and scoops, done in those years.

**Wow. Big project, to do that.**

It was – in those years it was, definitely was. But it's fixed the land, it fixed up the area there. I remember where the airport is now, I remember that being a swamp. And they

used to fire coal to make electricity down at Osborne and the waste coal they used call 'cinders', they used to cart that down to the airport, where the airport is now and it used to be swamp, and they gradually built it up. And then they put the airport on it when it was built up.

**A lot of cinders to put there.**

Oh, yes. Yes. A lot of everything in – dirt, anything they had to lift it up they did. You know, if they had a project and they had to deposit something that's where they would deposit. And they gradually built it up and eventually got the airport there.

**And would that land have been government land?**

Yes, it was.

**Marshy government land.**

Yes.

**And did people use it for anything? Like, you know, did people go and – – –?**

Where, in the airport?

**Yes.**

No, no. No, no – just marsh. Water, laying around.

**So it wasn't like – you couldn't go fishing or – – –?**

No, no. Oh, no. It was just like that marshy, swampy thing and about a foot to half a metre underwater, and that sort of thing. Of course, they gradually built it up and then you could see it's got canals now on the side?

**Yes.**

Well, that drained it out and it went out to West Beach. And of course they put that in, then the glasshouses started to move at West Beach, too, because it gradually drained away. Actually, a friend of ours, his son's still alive up here: he started off there, he bought a piece of land there.

**At West Beach?**

Yes, at West Beach, in the start of the glasshouses. And then a few others got involved. Down around, I don't know if you remember where the drive-in was?

**Yes, I remember that.**

Around that area. And then of course they started homes there, too, and they had to get out there like everything else. Fulham Gardens the same, you know: they started there and it was swampy, so they got the land cheap, obviously, and then they start bringing in a bit of sand, soil, gradually lifted it up and put their crops on top of there and glasshouses, and then until such time as the fumigation drove everyone out to Virginia, and that's where they all went.

**So would people have paid for building up the land?**

Well, what they did is they built their little section where they put their glasshouses and leave the other swamp. And of course when they had to shift them again, when they used to shift them – you know, at that stage where before the fumigation come out – then they'd bring in more sand and dirt to lift up, to shift them. So consequently where they shifted them from was raised, so then they'd grow other crops there until they eventually got it all raised, and that's how they did it. And of course canals and it drained out a bit, and when they built the river it sort of started drying out because the river's down lower and it drains away, and yes, it all got developed that way.

See, West Lakes, that's when Dunstan developed West Lakes; before, it was all swamp. You'd go down Military Road there and sometimes you couldn't get through because the wind would blow the sand of the sand hills over the road.

**And was it bitumenised?**

Oh, yes. Yes, but a little strip, you know, you could just get through and that's all.

**Wow.**

So yes, it's come a long way in my lifetime here. Because they were saying when we moved into this land here we were the first people to plough it.

**Really? How do you think that the land would have been used before your family took it?**

They had it before, the Britten-Jones had lucerne on it, but they didn't plough it. They scarified, I think, to plant the lucerne. But we were the original people to plough it with a plough, with a ..... plough that reversed the soil, that turned the soil over.

**And that was horse-drawn?**

Horse-drawn. So that's in my lifetime. So it's not that many years ago.

**No. And this land is so close to the city.**

Yes.

**Like how many kilometres is it to the city?**

In the direct line, seven kilometres.

**So close to the city.**

It was, yes. And it's like the Gawler River: they are going to build all along there. The Little Para River, where we were, that was magic growing soil there. We used to get 30-plus tons to the acre of potatoes there. And here was the same. They should have kept a strip all along the river for market gardening, because they had the water from the river – you can see now it's very scarce – they had the water from the river; they had top-grade soil, the best soil available; and now, with all the new medicines and sprays and things that are not toxic anymore, they would have had [it] close to the market, less transport, would have been cheaper, would have been better-quality. See, up Virginia now, where it's sandy, the ground is not as good because you get one or two crops and then you've got to fertilise very heavily, so there's fertiliser, which has got acids in it and it's got everything in it, whereas here it's more natural, you don't need that much equivalent to what they use, you know? So yes, it has changed and it's in my lifetime. In my lifetime.

**Yes. And to think of your family being the first to actually do that –**

Yes.

**– kind of intensive growing of food that's sold.**

Yes.

**We haven't talked about the sales part of the work.**

Yes.

**Would you be able to talk about your experience of markets?**

Market? Well, I never went to the market that often. Dad used to do the marketing all the time, and when he died I attempted to and I couldn't do it because I thought it was like begging, you know. They go up there and you'd ask them a price and they'd try and barter, and I just wasn't like that. I had a good-quality product which have always been

top grade, you know, and they used to lift up the tomatoes and have a look if you'd got rubbish underneath and they'd try and knock you down, and they'd play one against another, and I just wasn't capable of doing that. So then I gave my gear to merchants to sell on commission, sort of thing, for a while; and then I got out of glasshouses.

**I don't understand the merchants – can you explain that?**

Merchants is a commission agent, you know, that I'd take the tomatoes and beans or whatever we had to the merchant, he'd display it in his showroom and people would go and buy from him.

**And what would be examples of merchants that you would have sold to?**

Keen[?] Brothers was one of them, they used to call them Keen Brothers.

**Where were they?**

They were where the market is now, the East End Market. The façade is still there.

**Yes.**

And they all had their shops on the external perimeter of the market and people used to drive with their trucks inside and park there and sell their gear in there, and they used to be on the external side of the market, like where some of the shops are now.

**Ah, yes.**

That was their merchants' area.

**So merchants were different from – what's the other system called, that you were just talking about?**

The growers? The growers would sell their own.

**Yes.**

Commission agents? Well, the merchant is a commission agent.

**But, you know, you told me you didn't like the people looking at the [produce].**

Yes. Well, the shopkeepers used to come round and buy off the back of the trucks, you know, like growers.

**Oh, okay.**

See, Johnny used to do it, but I couldn't do it. And I went there a few times, but I just couldn't handle it. And they'd come there and they'd buy off the truck. Then you'd deliver to their truck and they'd take it to their shops and sell, because years ago it used to be a lot of small shops; now, they're all supermarkets. Supermarkets come along and they play one against another. But at that time it was that or merchants, you know, and the shopkeepers used to go to both. They used to go to the grower and they used to go to the merchant. You know, they'd safeguard themselves, because if they bought everything at the market and then, when they were scarce, the merchant would not sell to them because they'd say, 'Well, go and get them where you got them before'. So they'd always buy some off others, you know.

**So it's about the relationship with the merchant.**

Yes. So, you know, once you'd dropped them off at the merchant's place I could continue on and work, because Dad had died and I was on my own then and I had to do work, and if you waste a few hours at the market you haven't got time to do your jobs.

**So it was quicker to sell to the merchants.**

Oh, you'd just drop them off.

**And did you always use the same merchants?**

Yes, more or less, yes.

**So they'd know –**

Oh, yes.

**– that Frank Ballestrin's veggies were really good.**

They knew the quality I'd have – yes.

**And then who sets the price in a sale like that?**

They used to have a board in there, you know, a market board, and every morning they'd have a meeting: 'Today there's not going to be so many tomatoes so we'll put them up a bit today.' When there's a lot they know that they're coming – you know, usually tomatoes after a full moon they'll all come. A lot of people don't believe in the moon, but that's fact. And so they'd have a meeting: 'Oh, this morning we've been walking round the market and we can see a lot of tomatoes, so we'd better drop the price a bit today,

otherwise we're going to have a glut of them.' So of course the shopkeepers would buy them up cheaper and they'd sell them cheaper and people can afford it.

**So you knew what the price was, because it was up on the board?**

Oh, no – no, I never knew. I used to take them to the merchants and then, when the merchant would sell, and then once a week he'd pay you. He'd do his books, you know, and so much for tomatoes and commission so much, and they'd give you a cheque for the net proceeds, you know.

**Oh, right.**

But, you know, if you had 100 or you had 200 or you had 300 they had to accept them, because they had a contract with you.

**And when did they make that contract?**

Oh, when I asked them to handle my tomatoes in the beginning of the year.

**Okay. And would that have been a signed kind of contract?**

Oh, no, just a – – –.

**An understanding.**

Yes. In those years, everything was handshake stuff and they'd all stick to that. They were pretty good in those years.

**So in some ways it was –**

An agreement.

**– an agreement, but a cleaner kind of situation for you because you could drop the stuff off.**

Yes.

**What time would you be there?**

Oh, I'd even go the day before, the night before, the afternoon before, you know, and they'd be all in his store because the markets start early in the morning. And, see, I could go to the garden and work first thing in the morning, whereas if I went to the market I'd waste a half a day.

**Yes, and you'd have to get up – – –.**

Yes, two or three in the morning, you know. And you wouldn't be too keen on working once you'd come home from doing that sort of work.

**No. So it didn't take you very long to find out that that was a more efficient way for you.**

It was. No, I knew that pretty quick because I had no choice to do it. Although, if you go to the open market, you'd probably get a little bit more; but in actual fact I could get on the job and you lose a little bit but you'd gain on the other side. So, all in all, it probably broken even, you know, for me. Some people didn't see it that way, but I saw it that way, anyway.

Of course then, when I started with potatoes, that was different because potatoes they had a board, a Potato Board, and they would tell you where to deliver, how many to dig -- --.

**So it was very regulated.**

Yes, that was very regulated at the time. Then, luckily, I got in with snacks, growing potatoes for chips, on a contract and I was exclusive for them, all my potatoes went for them, and I was there for about 14 years.

**And this is up at Bolivar.**

Yes, up at Bolivar -- and here, too; we used to grow all potatoes here when we shifted the glasshouses. We still lived here.

**Right, so this became the potato patch.**

Yes. And we used to get over 100 tonnes here. And up there, and I also used to lease 10 acres up there in potatoes so we had a fair patch.

**So you leased 10 acres in addition to -- --.**

To my 15 up there.

**Wow -- and it was all potatoes?**

Yes, all potatoes, for snacks. Until I retired and the children were -- --. I got married late, and the children were a bit young, and Maria couldn't come and help me anymore on the farm. They offered her a decent job at the football club so I sold and retired at that time, and I took the kids to school.

**How old were you when you retired?**

52 or 53, something like that. But I couldn't handle it because I had a heart attack.

**Oh, wow.**

Doing nothing, you know, I got bored. Sometimes I'd be working up there long hours, and so then I had a heart attack and the doctor said, 'You'd better find a little job to keep busy'. Consequently I was lucky, I did find something to do, and I'm still working now three half-days a week, just to pass the time away.

**And you're doing –**

Bit of maintenance, bit of gardening –

**– gardening.**

– and a bit of maintenance like changing globes and changing locks on doors and things like that, at a firm, and pass the day away. It's good – you chat with people, and I haven't had a day's illness since that day.

**Oh, wow, that's a success story about having focus in your life.**

Yes. That was 11 years plus ago, 12 years. Wait a minute – more. (counts) 12 years.

**Wow, you've done really well, haven't you?**

So yes, and everything's okay so that's good.

**That's great. Frank, we're going to have another interview –**

Right.

**– so there'll be other matters that we can cover then.**

Yes, certainly.

**But thank you very much for this time.**

Pleasure.

**End of interview**

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**Second interview OH872/7 with Francesco (Frankie) Ballestrin**

**Recorded by Madeleine Regan on 14 January 2009 at Flinders Park, South Australia**

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**This is a continuation of the interview with Frank Ballestrin on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Frank, we're going to use two focuses in this interview, and the first one will be about the changing use of land that belonged to your father in Flinders Park, and then we will move into more reflections on your life.**

Okay.

**So the first thing that we'll talk about is, really, what you think have been the major changes of the land in John Street, Flinders Park, where your father had 15 acres, and I understand he first leased that land in 1941.**

He did. Yes, we come down from Virginia and we had a garden there and it was too far from everything at the time, so they moved down here and leased that 15 acres. But the land round here, as I remember, was that it was all in gardening style. Now, from the river right down to Grange Road, on either side of Findon Road, it was all gardens. And right up near the river there was a Chinaman that was growing spinach and all those type of bunch stuff; then we had the next section was grown celery and potatoes; and then we were next, and we were growing a bit of everything – tomatoes in glasshouses, Dad grew cabbages and carrots during the War as a war effort because he had rheumatic fever and they let him stay at home and he did that work for the Government; and then it progressively moved down to Grange Road and everyone had their bit of growing whatever they grew. Even flowers were grown down towards Grange Road. So we had a chap there named Both[?] that used to grow flowers.

**German?**

I don't know, I don't know where he was from. But yes, they all had their sections.

**And would it have been similar – – –?**

A lot of glasshouses there were at that stage around here, a lot of glasshouses. All along the river, right down to the beach, was glasshouses. Even Torrensville in those years were glasshouses, a lot of glasshouses.

**And similar plots of land, like 15 acres or ---?**

Yes – some five, 10, depending on what they could afford to buy at the time. They were all different-area plots, because there were roads around, like the main roads, and obviously there were sections of five acres or seven or 10, whatever was available they'd buy up, you see.

**And they had boundaries of bamboo and ---.**

Yes, they all knew their boundaries. There were – some people, after they'd bought them, planted bamboo as windbreaks because there weren't any trees, there were nothing, it was just bare land.

**And your father was leasing the land from a family called Britten-Jones.**

That's correct.

**And they had a huge amount of land, didn't they?**

They owned the whole land from the river, along Findon Road down to Grange Road and I would say back over a half a kilometre off Grange Road, all the way up to the river. That was all owned by them. And then they gradually sold it in sections, and the last section was where they lived. But that was quite a few years down the road after my father ---.

**After '41.**

Yes, round about that. And celery was grown there and, as you can see, they're still building homes there now. It was sold recently, about the last four or five years it's been sold, and they've redeveloped it and they've built some quite splendid homes there, haven't they?

**Yes, they have.**

So, yes, that's as far as it's got so far.

**When do you think that the changes started happening? I mean one thing that you told me was that when the Britten-Joneses sold in maybe the mid-1950s –**

Yes.

**– what did the people do who bought the land?**

Well, they grew celery, but of course they just knocked everything down – you know, trees. That's the only stand of gum trees around the area, leading into the old home, so

they just knocked everything down, home and all, they just destroyed everything and cleared it all up so they could grow veggies and celery and potatoes.

**And you were telling me in one day everything changed.**

Yes.

**Can you remember that day?**

Yes. One day, a big D-9 come in, tractor – Caterpillar, as we would call it – and they just pushed them all over and they were all gone. In one day they were all gone, cut up and everything. They had chainsaws going and (laughs) we went to school in the morning – it would have been '52, that's right, because I was going to Christian Brothers College at the time and we used to ride our bikes down to Henley Beach Road, lean the bikes against the chemist shop and go up with the tram – and we come home at night and they were all gone. (laughs) All the trees were gone. So made quick work of that, they really cleared it up.

Yes, so they were all gardens and gradually they disappeared. The first was towards Grange Road, that was the first to go. The Trust homes got into there and built a few Trust homes, and some were sold privately and they built homes around there, and then they moved next door to us – the Bernos owned that and they sold that, and then they went overseas.

**When would that have been, approximately?**

That would have to be '65, '66, because they went to Italy in 1969, so that would have been round about that. And then we sold in 1980, we sold out here – actually, we developed it ourselves and sold the blocks – and then the last one was Mercurio. As you see, they're still building homes on the property at the moment. So they were the last to sell around this area.

**So in the last four or five years.**

Yes.

**It's interesting that, you know, for all that time from say the early 1940s –**

Yes.

**– farming was continuous.**

Yes. I think that was the biggest mistake the Government ever made was to get rid of these farms along the river, because it's the most fertile soil there is and they had the water from the river and they wouldn't have had the water shortage, would they?

**No. And transport really close.**

Yes. And that's what happened not so much here but down towards the beach on Henley Beach Road, where all the Bulgarians had the glasshouses there. They had to fumigate the glasshouses because of the nematodes in the soil and the gas they were using, that chloropicrin that they used during the War in the trenches that used to kill the soldiers, and the people that started moving into the area building homes, they started complaining, so they had to get rid of the farms, you know. But I think it was the biggest mistake they ever made.

**Yes. But the reason for a subdivision in this particular piece of land here at Flinders Park was probably a bit different. People perhaps got older and didn't want to keep the farming?**

Oh, no, no. In our particular case, Dad had died and Mum had died and there was a couple of children involved in it so we decided to sell and make the difference in the money, so split the difference, you know.

**I was thinking of what you were saying about the area closest to Grange Road, which would have been sold and subdivided in the, what, late '50s or early '60s?**

Oh, yes – even before. Yes, before that.

**So why would people have started then?**

Well, that was Britten-Jones selling.

**Oh, okay.**

See, the first lot was sold by Britten-Jones.

**Oh, I see. I thought that they must have already sold it to another person.**

No, not then.

**So people were leasing that land and so the lease would have been finished and then – –**

I assume that was the situation. And then they decided to sell bits at a time. They sort of sold out until they got to their own home, and then they got so old and they moved out –

they were very, very old when I used to go there and pay Dad's rent and Mum's rent, you know. And then next thing you know they're selling. I don't know the reason why, whether they had passed on or whether they moved into an old folks' home I don't know. But that's what happened. They were two sisters, spinsters and didn't have any children, and I think they left everything to a church but I don't now which church it was. So yes, that's what's happened, you know: they progressively sold. And then, of course, the people that bought progressively sold, and that's what happened to the Flinders Park Oval – that was owned by Zerellas and then they sold out and they developed an oval there. And then my uncles up a bit further, they sold out –

**Near Hartley Road?**

– yes, between Hartley Road and the river. There was the Jarmans there, next door to them, and they sold out. And actually Jarmans' old house was only knocked down about a month back and they're building two units on there now.

**So, Frank, did your father buy the land, like he leased from 1941; when did he buy?**

Exactly, I don't know exactly, but it would have to be round the '50s, I would say. Maybe even a bit earlier. But I don't know the exact date, anyway.

**So the Britten-Joneses were obviously landladies –**

Yes.

**– and then they sold to people.**

That's correct.

**So huge changes in your lifetime.**

Yes, my word, because Findon Road was just a bit of bitumen in the middle with all boxthorn bushes on either side. And the bridge, the Keele Bridge, was built in 1937.

**Ah, the year of your birth!**

Yes. And before that was just a plank, they used to crawl across the river on a plank. That would have been a bit hair-raising. (laughs)

**Yes. You know when, say, your dad and mum began leasing in 1941, would there have been mains water and sewerage –**

Yes.

**– and all of that was in place?**

On the main roads they were, yes. Our house was midway down our land here. We had septic at that stage. We had tap water, though, it was mains water. But no toilet, we had to have a septic tank there. But that worked satisfactorily.

**Oh, yes. But it was really like farming land.**

Oh, yes. It was real farming land, all right. I used to plough that with horses and a plough, single-furrow plough. I used to do it myself, coming home from school. (laughs) Yes, we used to change glasshouses at the age of 12, 13, something of that nature. So yes, it wasn't idle.

**No! Absolutely it sounds like you weren't. Which brings us, really, to the second focus of this conversation, and it's really, I guess, your reflections, firstly about growing up as the son of Italian market gardeners in Adelaide. Like when you were a boy, you were born in 1937, your father had come in 1927 and your mother in 1935. So they were relatively recent arrivals in Australia, weren't they –**

They were.

**– as you were growing up as a boy in your family.**

That's correct.

**I'd be interested to know some of your reflections about what that was like.**

Well, you know, we went to school on the Flinders Park School down here, primary school, and like I said it was pretty primitive in those areas. I still remember the trenches: when they heard a plane going over they used to take us all out of school into the trenches.

**So this is during World War II.**

Yes. And they used to take us to school on a horse-and-sled when it was wet, like in the winter. It used to get flooded out occasionally because no rivers, no roads, it was just bare land. And there used to be severe storms in those years – whirlwinds, because no trees to break the wind – and yes, it used to be terrible in those years.

But we got on well with the kids at school, we sort of got on quite well, and never an argument, never fight.

**Were there many other Italian boys –**

Yes, there were a few, yes.

**– well, ‘Italo-Australians’, I guess?**

Yes, there were, quite a few. We all got on well with the kids there, we never got into fights, never got into arguments. We played sport with them there and yes, we did quite well. Then in secondary school I went to Christian Brothers for a couple of years and I left school with a couple of credits, but I still sort of worked the garden because that was the accepted thing to do in those years. You know, you sort of listened to what the parents had got to say, and in those years that’s how it was. And I chose to follow on the family tradition and keep the garden going.

Of course, and then we bought more land out at Bolivar, near the Little Para River, and we expanded a bit more, and then we carried on there for a few years, then Dad passed on in 1965 and I got stuck with the burden of going to the market, that I never had any experience at, and that was hard work so I decided – – –. In that time, we used to have our own cow here, we used to grow our own lucerne to feed it, we had our own chickens and it was real basic – free range everything, you know. We used to make our butter, our cheese, all that. So we couldn’t handle it anymore so we got rid of the cow, and then I carried on as best I could. I didn’t do the market anymore, I supplied the merchants for a while; then we got out of glasshouses and turned over to potatoes, strictly potatoes, and then I was lucky enough to get in with APD Snacks for chips, I had a contract with them growing specially for making chips, potato chips, and that’s what I did until I sold out. That was in ’82, I think it was.

**Yes. A hard-working life.**

It was.

**If we go back to, say, your family life –**

Yes.

**– and thinking about how your parents had a sense of being Italians in Australia, how did they keep links with their family?**

Well, they always wrote, because phones in those years weren’t connected. Radios – well, barely we got one; I can’t remember when, though. We got one of the first fridges here in Adelaide because my grandma had cancer and they allowed to get her a fridge, sort of thing, for the medicines and all the rest that they had to give her, they had to keep them cool. And I remember that we had ice chests before that. I remember when they used to

come round with ice blocks, big ice blocks, and put them in the ice chest. And yes, that's how they got on. The parents wrote quite frequently to overseas, to their families overseas, and then they always used to get together here. We used to go visiting people.

**You had relatives, of course.**

Oh, yes.

**You had your dad's brothers, family, and cousins.**

Yes, correct. Yes. None on mother's side, but on my father's side we were. And they sort of all stuck together, they all used to meet, you know, in different places.

**Did they all live in this area?**

Most of them lived in the area round here, within I would say a kilometre of each other, so they used to walk or on a pushbike.

**Would it have been a regular Sunday activity that families got together?**

At one stage. I remember Dad used to get a keg of beer on a Sunday afternoon and all the friends and relatives all used to meet in our shed, and some would take some sandwiches from home or a piece of chicken or something to eat and they'd share the cost of the beer. You know, no profit out of it; just to be in the community spirit, you know. And things like that. And sometimes they used to have just parties, just for the sake of having a party. Just sort of to keep together as migrants, sort of thing. They had their fun. They used to play bowls and get around. They all used to like singing, because on Mum's side – or even on Dad's side – they were all good singers over in Italy. Actually, one of my cousins, during the War the Americans wanted to send him to La Scala in Milan to learn singing and he refused. Silly, wasn't he?

**And you remember some of these people singing and the parties and – – –?**

Oh, yes. Yes, I remember them. We were young. We used to carry on like kids do even now, just run around and carry on. But we remember them dancing. Then, at one stage, a friend of ours, Bruno, and I and an Australian lad that we went to school with, he used to play on the drums, we'd play the accordion and we knocked up a little band and we used to play at all their little parties they used to have. We weren't experts, but neither were they at dancing! So it all mixed in pretty well, actually. They had good times. They worked hard, though, they worked hard.

And of course being from a strange country, in the beginning they couldn't speak English all that well and even at the end some of them couldn't speak English that well, and they weren't very well-received, especially during the War. You know, they couldn't go into a hotel, they couldn't go anywhere, because they'd get bashed up.

**Did you know about those sorts of incidents happening?**

I heard about them. I never witnessed them at all, but I heard about them after, when I grew up a bit older and I was told about these things. But they still had their fun. And in the summer – Dad used to grow tomatoes, and around the Christmas time when it was too hot and we were on school holidays – we used to be down the beach all the time, every day, under the jetty there. And all the group round here, cousins and aunties and uncles and friends, the whole mob of us used to go down the beach and pass the day away that way, because it was very hot in those years and no airconditioning and, you know, all in tin shacks; I mean there was no insulation, no nothing, and like an oven.

**Hard. Did you sleep outdoors when it was really hot?**

We used to, yes, we used to sleep outdoors. We used to go to town and leave the house open. You can't do that anymore now. And we'd leave our bikes at the chemist shop, just leaning up against the wall, when we'd go to school and never, ever had a problem.

**Did you have a sense of being Italian as you were growing up?**

Yes. I knew, although I never went to Italy until I was 33, I think it was. But I always liked the language, I always used to listen, because the dialect I know pretty well, quite well. Actually, I don't think people can mistake me from an Italian as far as the dialect goes. But the true Italian I've only learnt from hearsay, I mean I haven't studied it at all, but I can get by. But it's always interested me.

When we went to Italy the first time I was excited about going.

**You went with your mum and your nephew.**

Mum and my nephew. Actually, I didn't want to go at the time.

**This was in 1969.**

Yes.

**And this was the first time that your mother had been back.**

Back for 34 years.

**Wow. And what was the decision to go – like was it she wanted to see her family?**

Well, it started off because my nephew was in a hit-and-run accident and he was unconscious for eight months, and then we looked after him until he got reasonable. He wasn't well. He was in callipers, you know, his legs were in callipers. And his grandfather had said he wanted to see him, wanted to see him, because his father got killed in that same accident. So Mum decided she wanted to go so we went.

**And how old would Peter have been then?**

Then? Oh, I don't know, about 15, 16. He was seven when he got hurt. Yes, he would have been about 15, 16. And yes, well, Mum hadn't seen her younger sister – she was only seven or eight when she left and she'd never seen her – and when she met her at the airport it was a sight to behold, you know. I'd never seen anything like that before.

**It was very emotional, I can imagine.**

Oh, yes, very. My auntie jumped the barrier. (laughter) And we had problems at the Rome airport. Every time we've been there we've had problems through the airport.

**What, with immigration?**

No, no, the people behind the counters. They think they're a step higher than everyone else because they've got a counter job. But when we got off at Venice I said to Mum, I said, 'Gee, what made you leave a place like this?' And she said, 'Well, in those days there was no food, there was no nothing'. Because in Italy they got bombed out, they really got bombed out, like hell. It was real terrible.

**She would have left before World War II, wouldn't she?**

Yes, she left. But even when – – –.

**Even then it was a very poor area.**

Oh, terrible. Very poor. Even when we went in '69. You know, some of the workers, farm people, they had patches upon their patches on their trousers, even in '69. It was just starting to come out of it then. Now, of course, they're the best in the world as far as style and that goes, in clothing.

**And you mum was the only one of her family to come to Australia.**

Yes, correct.

**It's hard to imagine.**

It is.

**Leaving her whole family.**

Yes. I can't understand it, why, because all her other relatives – oh, her brother come out, one of her brothers come out with my father in '27, and he was here for a couple of years and then he moved to Victoria. And he bought an apple orchard there and he met a girl there and he married a girl there. But we used to see each other once every 10 years, they never used to come over and we never used to go over because no money in those years.

**Yes. And also the working life was probably –**

That's correct.

**– not making it possible to have longer breaks.**

Yes. And those years you couldn't fly, no planes around. And train was – I used to get sick, I'd get sick on the back seat of a car. (laughs) But yes, that's the story there. No-one ever thought about driving; weren't any cars in those years, any decent cars. The roads were terrible going to Melbourne. And it was pretty hard in those years. Even I can remember that. We didn't have much money and I was always taught to save, save, save. And of course in the long run it pays off because you can sort of set yourself up a little bit better than if you hadn't saved.

**But, Frank, one of the things that we talked about earlier was the fact that you were in this family business –**

Yes.

**– with your parents and you were the only son, taking up the responsibility after finishing school, and you considered yourself a worker in the family; but it wasn't like you were getting wages.**

No.

**Can you talk a little bit about that, because that's a different family arrangement, isn't it?**

Yes, it was, yes. I was never paid wages. I never *expected* wages. But I just had money to go out when I wanted to go out, although we never used to splurge our money or go out, you know. We used to go to the hotel if we went to the football, because normally on a Saturday afternoon that was our goal.

**You and your friends.**

Yes. Some of our friends – Johnny played A grade for West Torrens.

**Johnny Marchioro.**

Yes. And a few of our friends played A grade, you know. We tried to play but we never got anywhere. (laughs) Played Sunday afternoon football for the YCW.<sup>1</sup>

**Young Christian Workers?**

Yes. Because we always kept our ties with the Catholic Church.

**That was important to your parents?**

Oh, yes. Because two of my mother's nieces were nuns.

**In Italy.**

In Italy, yes. One was in Rome. I know the first time we went there we stayed at a convent. And yes, even on Dad's side they were all churchgoers. We made sure of that, we kept going.

**And that was even though there weren't Italian priests who were – – –.**

Yes, there was – occasionally there were. Occasionally there'd be one going through and occasionally they might have had to go to the cathedral in town or St Patricks' Church in town to meet them, but if that was there they'd make their special effort to go there and see him.

**But otherwise it was a Sunday Mass.**

Yes, the normal Sunday Mass, wherever the church was. It used to be here on Captain Cook Avenue before the Italians started one up on Grange Road, so we all used to go there. And we were accepted well there, and yes, we used to carry on that way. We used to go out, all sort of our Italo-Italian group together: we used to go to dances, pictures. You know, we never always used to go to dances; we used to go to the pictures sometimes. And it's not like now; we always used to dress up in a suit, even to go to the pictures.

**Wow.**

Even to go to church.

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<sup>1</sup> YCW – Young Christian Workers.

**You must have looked gorgeous.**

We used to get our suits tailor-made in those years, even us kids.

**And by Italian tailors in the city?**

Yes, Pozza, Hugh Pozza, which later they become Rembrandt[?] Tyres, they had Rembrandt Tyres – you remember up at Salisbury they had a factory there? And one of the Pozzas played soccer for Juventus. No, we more or less – yes, we kept as a group to ourselves, us Italians. Although we used to mix with the Australians and we never had fights. We had a lot of good Australian friends. But we more or less kept with ourselves because we all had that same upbringing. We were half-Italian and half-Australian, that in-between. You sort of couldn't get rid of one and you couldn't get rid of the other. That Italian sort of always kept – even to this day, we all seem to knock around with each other, although we've got Australian friends. Basically, we still stick with our friends that we had 50, 60 years ago.

**Yes. And you really grew up together –**

That's correct.

**– almost like extended family.**

Yes, correct.

**You know, that's how we'd understand it today.**

Yes, that's true.

**And there's how many of you who meet regularly, still?**

Even now there's about 10, 12 still meet now. Some of them married to Australian girls and they've fitted into our group quite well. We get on well, never have fights. Now that Maria's in with the football club there we know a lot of people there, a lot of people – mostly Australians, but we're always well-accepted no matter where we go. Always well-accepted.

**I'm interested in the young boys getting their suits made and going out to the pictures in them.**

Yes.

**That's really different, isn't it?**

Yes. Nowadays it's so scruffy, even to go to church. You know, we never dared go without a suit.

**Were there clubs for Italians, like when would the Veneto Club have been established?**

Well, I helped establish that. I went there the first day with my tractor and grader and we levelled out the soil.

**When would that have been, Frank?**

Forgot now. It was after Dad died, so it would have been –

**After '65.**

– he died in '65, so it would have to be close to '70, I think. Yes, we went there – Bruno [Piovesan] did a lot of engineering work there, and yes, we all helped to get it going.

**And can you tell me a little bit about how it got going, then? You know, where did the idea come from?**

Yes, Bruno knew more about that because he was at the original meeting. I come in a bit later than that, just before they started the building itself. I wasn't involved in the actual discussions and things like that. They used to have picnics and things to raise a bit of money to be able to start building the building itself and the concrete work, all the labour was done free and I think they got all the material at cost price. And eventually they got it going, eventually got it going. So yeah, ..... with their bowling alleys and the dance floor there and they have parties and weddings and things like that.

**Why do you think that it was important for that group of people to build the club?**

Well, I think originally – I assume; like I said, I wasn't there for the first meeting – but I assume the idea was to try and keep their children as part of Italians, you know. That's my theory. I might be wrong. And also some of those Italians that come out after the War, there's still some that can't speak English well, and that was a meeting place.

See, the Veneto Club is all the Venetian area, although they're allowed – they've got to have 10 per cent of strangers, there can be Australians in there as members and any other part of Italy or anywhere in the world, they've got to allow a certain amount of strangers; but mostly it was the Italians from that area of Italy, and they all spoke the same dialect and it was a good meeting place for them. You know, they'd go and play bowls and the women would go in and play cards or sit around, have a drink with their friends. And then

on Sunday nights they used to have dinners there and dances and they all used to meet. You know, and the children, they could play outside, they had an oval, in security, because they always had security people there. And that's how originally it got started. I haven't been there for quite some time now, we don't go – we're now involved with the football club and you haven't got time. Haven't got time at all.

**And I guess in some ways it was an extension of the kind of activity that would have happened with your father's keg of beer on a Sunday.**

Exactly. That's exactly how it is. It just expanded. Expanded. See, when Dad was doing it, it was just basic, old friends who were here in those early years. And of course then he dropped it after a while, when it got too big and they started getting people, strangers – although they were Italians, but they weren't of the group that was here years ago. When it got too big they decided to drop that, otherwise it would have been a circus then, wouldn't it? It wouldn't have been a friendly gathering anymore. So they sort of decided to stop that. And then, after a few years, they started building the club then. And it's like all the other clubs, it's all different clubs around Adelaide of these different areas of Italy. And yes, the club is still going – although I haven't been there for a while, but it is still going.

**And do you feel a sense of connection with people from the Veneto region –**

Oh, yes.

**– because of language, because of heritage?**

Yes. Yes, I do.

**Tell me a bit about that.**

Well, if I go anywhere and I hear Veneto being spoken I'll go up and ask them, (laughs) you know, what part of it they are and where they're from. I'm just interested in that area of Italy and that language. That's where we sort of come from.

**Would your parents have spoken to you about it as you were growing up?**

No, they did not say much about their town at all. Just that they starved. They starved, and it's the best thing they ever did was to come here. And actually Dad never, ever wanted to go back to Italy, and he never did, because of probably the starvation they had there. Yes, I relate to Italy quite well. I would like to go there for quite some time and tour round the place the way *I'd* like to do it, you know.

**Yes, take your time.**

Take my time. But, unfortunately, the money's not there. (laughs)

**No. Do others of your friends feel the same way, do you think?**

Not as much as me. Not as much as me.

**So what is it about you? I think that's really fascinating.**

I don't know. Might be in the genes, it could be in the genes. I've always been interested in the language itself. Every time they spoke, I listened. I listened and I caught up, and if I didn't know what it was I'd ask the question: 'What does that mean?' or 'What does this mean?'

**Because you would have spoken dialect at home.**

Yes.

**And when your dad died –**

Yes.

**– you and your mum would have spoken dialect.**

Oh, yes. Even before.

**Did she learn to speak English?**

Yes, to a certain extent. To a certain extent. They used to go shopping in town and all that, they could understand themselves in that respect, but they couldn't have a proper conversation, put it that way. They couldn't pronounce the words properly.

**Yes – and her opportunities to learn English wouldn't have been huge –**

That's right, no.

**– because her focus was very much with family and work.**

Family-orientated and garden. You're always sort of in the same spot, aren't you?

**Yes. And there was a ready-made community here.**

Yes, there was. And, like I said, we used to meet quite often and especially down the beach. They never used to go to clubs or hotels or anything like that, but they still used to have their fun. They were always happy.

**And, Frankie, who would have – apart from, say, your mum and your dad as adults as you were growing up – who would have been your influences, you know, adults that you looked up to?**

We had an uncle, Dad's brother, living with us for years before he married.

**His name was?**

Ermenegildo.

**So he lived in your family home?**

Yes, until he was married. He got married at 44, too. And he couldn't write English or Italian.

**He'd come out with your dad or a bit later?**

No, he come out I think it was two years after, 1938 I think he come out.

**Yes, that's right, I've got that written down.**

Yes, 1938. And of course, when he wanted to go to the pictures or when he wanted to go anywhere, he always asked if I would go with him. That was as I was growing up, you know, 14, 15, 16 sort of thing. Then when I grew up and went out with my friends it was different, but up until that stage I used to go with him to the pictures and – – –.

**How much older would he have been?**

Oh, he's quite an age, yes, he's quite much older. He was an adult, you know, just that he couldn't speak English. And we used to go to the pictures on our pushbikes down to Lockleys and we used to meet quite a few Italians there, they used to do the same thing, see the pictures. But because he couldn't speak English or read it or write it he was a bit confused about the tickets and all that, and he was very shy, like I was, and the two of us, we managed to sort of go to the pictures that way.

**That's interesting. So he would have been a fair bit younger than your dad.**

Yes.

**And kind of older than you –**

Yes.

**– but almost like an older brother, in a sense.**

More or less, yes. Well, he was more or less a father figure, he was very quiet – a real gentleman, he was a real gentleman.

**And did he work with – – –?**

Never heard him argue with Mum or anything. Whatever Mum put in front of him for tea or dinner he'd have, and if she'd be a bit late you'd never hear him say anything. And she washed his clothes – and, no, he was a real gentleman, he was, a real gentleman.

**And did he work on – – –?**

He worked on the land –

**With your mum and – – –?**

– no, he worked on the land adjacent to ours with my uncle, another uncle, Dad's cousin. We used to call him 'Uncle', but he was about second cousin down the road. But he originally come out with my dad and my other uncle in Melbourne, they come out together 1927.

**And was he the 17-year-old?**

Yes, 17-year-old.

**So young.**

Yes.

**So that's interesting that you had your dad's brother living with you.**

Yes.

**And then he got married in 1944.**

He was 44 when he got married.

**Oh, he was 44 when he got married – I thought you meant 1944.**

I can't remember the date – oh, wait a minute: '53, I think, when we had that earthquake.

**Yes.**

1953 he got married, I remember now, because he went to Italy. He lived with us until he went to Italy and got married and come back. And then he built his own home and lived in that, in the garden. And they're still down Holbrooks Road.

**Oh, okay. Did he marry somebody from his village?**

Yes, he did.

**And would that have been arranged?**

No, it wasn't arranged. The woman he married actually was my uncle's – other uncle, that he worked with actually – his brother's girlfriend years ago and he'd died with cancer. And he went over there, they met and they just married.

**Wow. So they returned and he had a house he built?**

Yes – on his own, yes.

**And you said on Holbrooks Road.**

Yes. Hartley Road, sorry.

**Hartley Road.**

Hartley Road.

**And he had land there then?**

Yes, they had land there, they had 15 acres there. They used to grow celery and potatoes – next door to Jarmans actually, Jarmans the cricketers, you remember years ago? Barry Jarman? Barry Jarman's parents.

**So this was a Ballestrin, too.**

Yes, Ballestrin, yes.

**Oh, that's really interesting. And then, when your dad's mother came –**

Yes.

**– did she live with you?**

She lived with us, and she come with her youngest daughter, with Dad's youngest sister. She was unmarried at the time, she was single and they come together. Dad brought them out. And then she eventually married ..... on Grange Road, yes, and they married, had two children, they're still alive. And yes, we see them occasionally.

**So how big was this house that your parents had?**

Oh, it was only a three-bedroom. Three bedroom and a lounge and a kitchen and bathroom.

**And was this the house that your dad built or was this the shed?**

Yes, yes. No, no, no, he built it. It was still an iron home, you know, with the plaster inside and iron outside, but it was one of the better homes in those years.

**When would he have built that?**

He would have built it when he come down here, after he bought the land. Oh, no, he had the house built, it was built before he bought the land. So they must have had a long lease on it, otherwise they wouldn't have built a house, would they?

**No, I was thinking that.**

Yes. I don't know how that situation was, but they did have a house. I remember when we come down we were living in this house before they even bought it. And then, once they'd bought it, then we built this huge shed, packing shed, for all our gear. So Dad would have built that in – when we come down, '41, '42, something like that.

**So your Uncle Ermenegildo came with you from Virginia, like he was up there?**

Yes, they were all together then. There was my father and my Uncle Ermenegildo and my Uncle Giuseppe, Joe.

**He was with you, too?**

They were all up in that garden, they were all together at this stage. We were living in the train wagon. And it's still there, the train wagon is still there. And it was hot in there, believe me.

**And quite a few people.**

Yes.

**Adults, too.**

Yes.

**And what happened to Giuseppe, did he come – – –?**

Then they all come down and my father took on this land and Giuseppe and Ermenegildo had land, leasing land from Britten-Jones here, too, and then they bought a section of their land because they were wanting to get bigger and grow like celery and different things, so they bought 15 acres just off Hartley Road, which was still Britten-Jones land.

**Right – big piece of land, that.**

It was, wasn't it? And they bordered the river, so they were pumping water straight out the river. There was unlimited water then, that used to flow all the time.

**When your grandmother came with her youngest daughter –**

Yes, correct.

**– was Ermenegildo living in the – so there was – – –?**

He used to sleep with me, in the same room.

**I was wondering how it all figured, because you had two sisters, too.**

Yes, and my grandmother used to sleep with my sister and my auntie.

**Wow.**

Then my grandmother died in 1945, so it was very long after she was here that she died, you know. I think I was seven or eight or something when she died. It was in '45; I was 37. I remember, though, the night she died. She died at home. I remember that night. And I can remember the day we come down from Virginia, and I was only four, I think.

**You've got a fantastic memory.**

I can remember that. Yes – trouble is I'm getting old and I don't remember short memory, but I remember back those years, I can remember all that.

**I think you're doing extremely well to remember so many details. But I was just thinking like your family life would have been quite busy and, you know, a lot of people in that house.**

Yes.

**Was your mother somebody who managed to kind of organise things really well?**

She was always quick. Everything she did she was fast at. She could cook – I mean she wasn't a specialist at it, but when you're working out in the garden you've got to do the best you can, but we always had a meal on the plate.

**Your mum's working in the garden, coming back, putting on the pasta.**

Yes. Most of the times we had seconds, you know. We didn't use to eat much pasta in those years. We used to have a lot of soup, I remember home-made soup –

**Like minestrone.**

– and a lot of chickens and meat. Oh, yes. For meat, chickens, we had a chap named Coles up on the corner here of Grange Road and Findon Road, and he used to breed layers, and when they used to sex them and the roosters they used to destroy, so we used to go up and get boxes of them and just let them free range. We used to have a huge area with the netting around it and just let them free range, and when they were even small Mum used to kill them and we used to have fresh chicken every second day. And they were different to what you eat now, you could smell them cooking 200 yards away. Now, can't even smell them once they're cooked, and that's if you put ingredients in them. (laughs) But no, we used to have quite a lot of meat, a lot of soups, a lot of chickens, a lot of veggies – always had veggies – and salads, always had them.

**Straight out of the garden.**

Yes. Even now, salads and veggies. Always, always. And fruit, always had that. Grapes, we always had grapes around the area. We used to grow our own watermelons, rockmelon, corn, things like that. Yes, we had beetroots, we used to have carrots and pumpkins, potatoes. We all had that for home use, always.

**Your parents must have thought it was – you know, like to come from their countryside in the Veneto, which was so poor that they had nothing to eat – you know, abundance of food.**

Yes. That's one thing in Australia that you always had was food, and I was told – I stand to be corrected, but I was told – that if you were ever stuck out in the country and you didn't have food and you were starving you could kill a lamb and eat it providing you took the skin to the owner and explained the reason why, and there wouldn't be any hassles over that.

**This is in Australia?**

Yes. Here in Adelaide, you know. That's what I was told.

**Have you tried it?**

I didn't witness it, but that's what I was told by my parents, anyway, by my dad.

**Have you tried it, doing it?**

No. (laughter)

**So your dad told you that?**

Yes.

**Oh, isn't that lovely! Wow.**

When he first come out he worked up at Finke, all up that area, laying fences and sinking wells for farmers up that way, because there wasn't any fences or any bores at all down there, and they had to separate the animals and get water for them, so that's how they started off working up there out in the middle of the desert and living in a tent.

**Hard, manual work.**

Living in a tent. My uncle was telling me, my Uncle Giuseppe was telling me, when he first come out they were up at Tailem Bend in a tent building the road to Melbourne, splitting rocks with a sledgehammer and loading them on one of those horse drays, the high things, with a fork, and then spreading them out and building the road to Melbourne, before it was even bitumenised, you know. So that was hard work, and it was very hot in those days.

**And this was the late 1920s, like he came in '27, didn't he?**

Oh, yes. Late '20s, early '30s.

**Depression years.**

Yes. When did Amy Johnson come here? Remember the aviator from America? He said that landed in the paddock next door to where he was working.

**Oh, really?**

The first woman to come on an aeroplane. That landed and they all come up from Parafield to meet her, because her relations had that farm and she landed on that farm. So that's only in the lifetime of a person, it's not really that many years ago when you really think about it.

**No. That's quite amazing, isn't it? And, Frank, we've talked around your young years, young adult –**

Yes.

**– and you mentioned your uncle getting married at 44 –**

Yes.

**– and you also married at 44, in 1981.**

That's correct, that's right – there's no coincidence because he was my uncle, but it just worked out that way. Like I said, we had my nephew who was in a hit-and-run accident and he was unconscious for eight months and he was semi-vegetable, and I helped Mum look after him for a certain stage. And then as you get on in age I didn't sort of go out as often and –

**You were working hard.**

– oh, was I ever! And then, for some reason – oh, yes: my auntie come over from Italy, that she had never seen my uncle in Melbourne. She married my uncle's brother in Italy.

**This is your mum's sister?**

No, no.

**Your dad's – – –?**

My mum's brother's wife. In Italy.

**Right.**

He died, so she's got a daughter here in Adelaide and she come to see her daughter and she said she wanted to see my uncle in Melbourne, so we drove over there and I went to a New Year's party there with my cousins and met up with Maria, and that's how it all started. (laughs) And we were married a couple of years after. And I didn't see her after that night, and then went back a couple of years later – and again at Christmas, when you've finished your crops – and went to church and in comes Maria and I said to my cousin, 'Isn't that that girl I met – – –?' He said, 'Yes, do you want me to introduce?' I said, 'No, no, that's all right', I said, 'I can introduce myself', and started off and away we went, and that was it. (laughs)

**Wow.**

So married a year later.

**Oh, that's a lovely story.**

Yes. So, as you can see, we're still married. (laughs)

**And you're the proud father of –**

Stephen.

**– yes, who's now 26.**

26. And Julia, 24, going on 25 almost. And Maria had a daughter from a previous marriage and she's 40 almost, 38, 39 or something. And the two girls are in Melbourne.

**And you are grandparents.**

Yes.

**To a beautiful – – –?**

Yes, Clare. She's six now, I think – five, six. Yes, going to school.

**So you're Nonno and Nonna.**

Nonno and Nonna, yes, that's correct. And they were here at Christmas. (laughs)

**And, as somebody who has a really strong association with Italy, how have you shown that to your children?**

Well, the children, they're a different generation now. They have been brought up in English because we never spoke Italian at home, which was a silly thing to do. We should have spoken our language at home.

**To the children.**

Yes. And, you know, TV now – the advent of TV now, they're watching TV and all our friends' kids all spoke English, and they can understand to a certain extent, they can speak very few words but they know what you're talking about if you do speak in Italian. They can understand I reckon half of it. But they can't express themselves as well, you know; they can't speak Italian, put it that way.

**Yes. Do you and Maria speak Italian together?**

Oh, we do, yes.

**And when you get together with your – – –?**

We don't speak the dialect. She's [from] a different part of Italy.

**Yes. What about when you get together with your old friends, do you speak in Italian or in dialect?**

Mostly in English, but then you always break out in Italian every now and then, you know. So we're okay because we're that generation that we've all spoken that language. And although some of the girls are Australian, we still tend to break out in that Italian every now and then. And then of course we've got to explain (laughs) to the girls what we said.

But you still get that habit of going back to that Italian – well, I do, anyway. That’s how I feel about the language.

**Yes. So it’s a really strong kind of identity for you, really.**

Yes. Because, like I said, in our earlier years we were down the beach one day with our friends and this chappie come up to me and he said, ‘Oh, how’s Vallà going?’ I’d never been to Italy, and Valla’s my parents’ birth town and I’d never been to the place, and I said, ‘I don’t know’ – in dialect, because he asked me in dialect and I returned in dialect. I said, ‘I don’t know, because I’ve never been there’. He said, ‘Of course you were. I come away two weeks ago and you were there. I spoke to you in the town’, and of course it was my cousin because we look alike. (laughs)

**And that must have been a really interesting situation for you.**

Yes, it was. But, see, I understood myself and he couldn’t pick the difference as far as the dialect goes. So yes, I’ve stuck to that. The dialect, I’m pretty strong on that. In actual fact, they say that if the Italians in our area want to learn the dialect they’ve got to come away from Italy to learn it because they’ve changed their dialect because now, with the advent of TV and they’re going to school longer and they’re learning more Italian, the true Italian; but the real dialect, they say that you’ve got to come to a strange country like America or Australia – old people. You know, the young kids don’t know it, but of our age that’s where you get the real, true – – –.

**The pure dialect.**

Yes, the pure dialect.

**That your parents passed on to you.**

Yes. Because when they returned – when they come here, they stuck to that dialect because they didn’t know any better, there were so many years that they didn’t go back, and that’s the only dialect they knew. But over there it progressed, gradually, and it’s become almost Italian now.

**Yes. So that’s a really strong link for you, for your sense of connection to – – –.**

Yes. Actually, a cousin of mine in Melbourne, my uncle on my mum’s side, he went to Italy only two years ago and he couldn’t speak Italian but he wanted to go back to where his father come from to see, and he saw my aunties and he spoke to my aunties somehow,

he got to know how to talk to them. They got people there, some friends that knew English. Yes, so that's as far as we've gone so far. That's as far as – you know, that I can say. And I'm still proud to be an Italian – an Australian, too.

**Thank you, Frank.**

Thank you.

**Thanks very much.**

END OF INTERVIEW.s