

**Italian market gardeners oral history project**  
**Interview with Giovanni (Johnny) Reboli**  
**recorded by Madeleine Regan on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2018**  
**at Bigolino, provincia di Treviso, Italy**

**OH:** Oral Historian

**GR:** Giovanni Reboli

**OH:** This is a recording of an oral history interview recorded with Giovanni Reboli on 21st September 2018 at Bigolino in the province of Treviso in Italy. My name's Madeleine Regan and I'm the recording this for the Italian market gardeners oral history project. Thank you very much, Gianni, for agreeing to be interviewed today.

**GR:** Thank you for coming.

**OH:** So we'll start with your family background. What is your full name?

**GR:** My name is Giovanni Reboli.

**OH:** And your date of birth?

**GR:** 17th March 1948.

**OH:** And where were you born?

**GR:** I was born in ... Valdobbiadene. Oh, there used to be a hospital at Valdobbiadene, I was born in the hospital of Valdobbiadene. That is the municipality where you find the suburb of Bigolino.

**OH:** Great. Were you named for anyone in your family?

**GR:** Eh, yes, I think so because both of my grandfathers, on Mum's side and on Dad's side, were both called Giovanni.

**OH:** So it was like without exception that you were going to be...?

**GR:** Without exception, they did not argue.

**OH:** Where were your parents living when you were born?

**GR:** That's a good question --- I think they were living in --- a rented house --- in the centre of Bigolino. Near the Bigolino square.

**OH:** Right.

**GR:** Uh huh.

**OH:** And you could please tell me the full name of your parents, and their place of birth?

**GR:** Right. Well, Mum was born, Mum's name was Amabile, Dal Toè. She was born on the 7th June 1924. And Dad's name was Teodoro Reboli. He was born on 27th January 1920.

**OH:** And were they both born in Bigolino?

**GR:** They were both born in Valdobbiadene.

**OH:** Oh, okay. In your mother's family how many brothers and sisters did she have?

**GR:** Oh, Mum used to have ... well, she had ... let me think, two brothers and ... two sisters.

**OH:** Right.

**GR:** Ah ... plus herself. So there were two brothers and three sisters. Then my grandfather on Mum's side married a second time because his wife died when the kids were quite young. And he had another two children. So Mum also has a step-brother and a step-sister.

**OH:** And your father?

**GR:** Eh, My father has, had two sisters and a brother. So a total of four; two sisters, two girls and two boys.

**OH:** Did any of those aunts and uncles go to Australia?

**GR:** On Mum's side, no. On my father's side yes, my father's brother, Richetto, in Italian, Enrico, went to Australia, I think in 1950 or 1951. And ... Ginevra, one of the sisters went to Australia with Richetto, I think.

**OH:** Right. What do you know about how your parents met each other?

**GR:** ... What do I know? That's a difficult question. I think they just ... Mum was working in a very, very large family, a traditional patriarchal family. They used, the great-grandfather used to run the family and he used to have brothers and sisters and in-laws and whatever. They were a very large family. They used to work a lot of land, it used to be something like 60 acres. It wasn't their land. What do you call it? Piecework?

**OH:** Was this part of the *mezzadria*?

**GR:** This was the *mezzadria*, yes. They were pretty well off and I think Mum and Dad just met casually, you know, going to church on a Sunday. And that was it.

**OH:** And when did they marry?

**GR:** Oh, for heaven's sake! They married ... I'm not sure if they married when Bruno, Richetto's son was born, I think ... on 15th February 1947.

**OH:** And they married here?

**GR:** Yes, they married here.

**OH:** And what...? You've said what work your mother did prior to getting married. Was she ...? What kind of work was she doing?

**GR:** Well she was doing farm work basically. She was a little girl, she grew up in the family, a big family and ... here, this area was basically dedicated to agriculture. Today it has become the centre of world *Prosecco* wine production, in the world, but then there was very little wine production, it was always *Prosecco*, they used to have pigs, cows, pigs for meat, cows for milk and vegetable plots ... hay. They were self-sufficient in this way, in maintenance.

**OH:** And your father's work?

**GR:** Um, my father's work was ... as a kid, he worked the land with my grandfather. My grandfather lost his wife, his wife died when the four kids were very, very young. And he worked land, his own land, his own piece of land in Bigolino where he grew wine, he had cattle like everyone, he had a pig or two or three pigs or whatever it was. And the kids just grew up in this agricultural setting, helping out. They went to school but schooling then was not, how would you say? Obligatory, as it is today, I think Dad did his fourth or fifth grade elementary school. Mum, I

think succeeded in getting through her fourth. That was it. that was all the schooling they had. This was the majority of the people who lived here. Let's say the poor people because this area was immensely poor.

**OH:** Going back to the *mezzadria* system, could you explain that?

**GR:** Eh, the landowners used to be quite wealthy, they used to own all the lands, let's say.

**OH:** This was historic?

**GR:** Yes, this was historic, yes. Historic. And quite wealthy landowners, could rent, they couldn't work the land themselves, they didn't have the necessary tools or will or whatever to work the land so they paid these farmers, people with their own families to live on the land and work the land for them and I believe, *mezzadria* means 'half'. So they would split the profits, if you want to call them that way at the end of the year. That's how it worked.

**OH:** And your father's family wasn't part of the *mezzadria*?

**GR:** My father's family ... well, you know ... my grandfather on Dad's side owned some land, I don't know how much exactly he owned which he lost when he was young because he signed some papers for a friend of his who needed money and it was the bank mortgaged the house, my grandfather's house as he was helping a friend out and the friend went bankrupt and my father lost his land/house. So my grandfather went through hell raising four kids. Because he lost his land/house.

**OH:** How did he manage?

**GR:** Working, working as a *mezzadro* working for other people who owned land, working on their land and going halves on whatever he produced. My grandfather on my Dad's side never remarried. So he grew up. He'd lost his wealth, let's say, the house he owned and the land he owned and ... he worked the rest of his life working as a *mezzadro* ... going halves on whatever he produced and raising the family. So I think you can imagine how the kids were forced... my grandfather was actually a very kind man. But the kids were forced quite young to work and to help him out.

**OH:** A difficult life?

**GR:** Very difficult life. But in general, this is the life you'll find the majority of people did live in this area. Not let's say, the better off people but the better off people were not many. Very, very few.

**OH:** So if you were to describe this area of Bigolino ...

**GR:** Hmm.

**OH:** ... At the time you were born, what would you say?

**GR:** Well, I'm just thinking of what I've been told ... on memories of Mum and Dad and my uncles and people. It was a happy time because they were young but they'd just come out of a war, a bitter war with a lot of people having died, a lot of suffering, a lot of anguish ... physical suffering, mental suffering ... they were ... the thing that clings to my mind is the poverty ... there was no dreaming then. There was no possibility to dream, they just had to work and help the family in whatever was needed. So, you know, as a kid, I just remember poverty here, people were forced ... my father went to Germany at the age of 16 to work in Gypsum mines in Leonberg which is north of Stuttgart in Germany. He worked there nearly four years at the age of 16. I remember he left and he didn't have a pair of shoes, normal shoes. His father gave him a pair of his own shoes

to go to Germany which just goes to indicate how poor the area was or how poor the family was. Mum's side was a little better off.

**OH:** And why was that?

**GR:** Well, because they worked so much land because my great-grandfather on Mum's side evidently was a bit of a merchant. He used to contraband, I've been told, tobacco and some other stuff. Yeah, this is between the first and second world wars. He was quite a clever bugger, they say.

[laughter]

**OH:** So in comparison ...?

**GR:** They were pretty well off but once again, being well off ... they had to look after, not one family, there were many families within that, under my great-grandfather's, say, domain.

**OH:** Living all in one ...?

**GR:** Living all in the one, there was a very big, big building, a very big building.

**OH:** So there would have been ...

**GR:** My grandfather ...

**OH:** Four families?

**GR:** More than four families. Yes, maybe five. With the kids.

**OH:** Yeah, and the number of kids growing?

**GR:** Yep, yep so the women would help out in the gardens, outside in agriculture, whatever they were planting. Then someone would dedicate time to cooking, from morning till night. And everything was rationed. I remember this, they used to ration everything. You wouldn't have two slices of salami, you'd have one slice of salami. That was it. There were very hard times.

**OH:** The economy of this area then was ...

**GR:** Was agriculture. There were I think there were some *filande*<sup>1</sup> here. They used to spin silk here, they used to have silkworm farms and they used to spin silk, they used to make silk. That was very, very important in all of this area here.

**OH:** And who would have owned those *filande*?

**GR:** Oh, I don't know the names, I can't ...

**OH:** But like people from the area?

**GR:** Perhaps from the area or from Milano or from outside, bigger cities, definitely.

**OH:** Was that seasonal work?

**GR:** No, it must be seasonal because the trees to feed the silkworms, they only bloom, they only have that obviously once a year. I don't know how it works exactly, I don't know the timing.

**OH:** They were mulberry trees, usually, weren't there.

**GR:** The trees that we see outside, we call them *morer*, in dialect. *Its "gelso" in Italian*

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<sup>1</sup> *Filanda* is the Italian word for silk mill

<sup>2</sup> Richetto Reboli was interviewed for this project in 2013

<sup>3</sup> Rino Mattaizzao whose parents were from Bigolino and were close friends of the Reboli family in Adelaide

**OH:** Oh, okay.

**GR:** There were two or three, well there quite a few silk growing farms ... for the silkworms, sorry. And silk mills, there were quite a few silk mills, I don't know exactly how many, but there quite a few.

**OH:** And was that seen as women's work?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Or men's work as well?

**GR:** Basically women's but there was also men doing it.

**OH:** In families ...

**GR:** Hmm

**OH:** From what I understand you're saying, that it was not an agricultural life where they were selling what they grew?

**GR:** No, they were producing. They were producing and evidently they were also selling but I won't go into that because I don't know enough about it. They probably would sell because I remember Mum telling me that when she was little bit bigger she would go to the market place in Valdobbiadene, there would be the weekly market, on the Monday, I think it was held. And she would sell some wares, I don't know what she was selling but she would go and sell her grandfather or her father would say ??? "Go and sell these ..." But as a little girl so I can imagine that they could have sold something. But it wasn't a real business. Their business was growing the produce for their own use.

**OH:** Would they have had money?

**GR:** Yes. My great-grandfather had, I've been told by Mum, he could have bought the 60 acres, nearly 60 acres. It was one piece of land, it's unique. I'll show you the scenery, it's not very far from here. But money had a different value then. But he just missed out on arriving at the sum that was requested to buy it. He could have bought it all the same. He would have made a fortune for himself. But he didn't. That was his biggest mistake. He didn't make a mistake but he did have the money to buy and he didn't.

**OH:** I was wondering in other families, like say, in your grandfather's family ...

**GR:** Right.

**OH:** Whether there would have been money passing hands or ...

**GR:** No.

**OH:** Or was it subsistence?

**GR:** Subsistence, pure subsistence. I never heard my father or my uncle, Richetto<sup>2</sup> or my aunties speak of any type of abundance of money or you know, wealth or ... subsistence, full stop. You know, very, very poor, very dire, very derelict sort of an upbringing.

**OH:** What happened when young people married? What was the tradition that followed? Where did, like, your mother married into the Rebuli family ...?

**GR:** *Si.*

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<sup>2</sup> Richetto Rebuli was interviewed for this project in 2013

**OH:** So what happened then? ... She moved from her family?

**GR:** What happened then? She would go and live with my father. I remember, one thing ... I won't go into detail because I don't know enough about it. She would move into my father's house. Or they would rent, not being sufficiently autonomous economically, economically, they would rent a house, or a room or whatever. But they went to live with my grandfather. My grandfather was renting a home, as I said, in Bigolino, near the Bigolino square so they went and lived with my grandfather.

**OH:** And how many were there then, like the others?

**GR:** No, there wouldn't have been a big family because ... I don't know where Richetto was living. Perhaps he was living with them because my father, Richetto's brother, and my mother and Richetto's wife were sisters. They grew up together, they were the same age. So it would have been quite good for them. So from that side, you know, it would have been an excellent combination because they always got on very, very well. I think that all of them lived together with my grandfather. Yes.

**OH:** And so it meant that there were additional people to be able to work and ...?

**GR:** Yes, you know we're talking about my grandfather. My grandfather on my Dad's side was not well off ... it was always just enough. And once again there was not sufficient work for the men. They did not have enough land to make any profit at all, to create a business, even to plant agricultural product, they didn't have the land. So .... my father as at the age of 16, well, he worked here, doing odd jobs, my father, when he was a kid, after he left school, working for different farmers or working for different small companies artisans, getting paid nothing at all and the same would have been for my uncle. The girls would be working for families for families as waitresses or maids. That was the lot that was set up for them. For a lot of people here, I would say a majority. And ... this was just a survival race.

**OH:** How common would it have been for young men like your father to go ...?

**GR:** Very common.

**OH:** To go to other countries to work?

**GR:** Very common, very common.

**OH:** How did they know that there would be work there?

**GR:** Well, someone started eventually, years before because ... this area .... the poverty of the area and the development of the area ... didn't start when my Dad was born. He found ... this area went through the First World War, the land was devastated, the houses were devastated, everything was devastated. This was the centre of the First World War. This was where the First World War ended. Geographically speaking, it was fought here. So we've got thousands of dead, there was nothing here, it was just ... And ... many Italians from basically from southern Italy from the Veneto area and from the Friuli Venezia Giulia emigrated from Italy. The majority of Italian emigrants come from the south of Italy centre-south Italy and the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia which basically is the north-east of Italy. These were the poorest areas of Italy. So they started emigrating back in the 19th century, early 20th century.

So by word of mouth when they started, where would you go to begin with, you go to countries that were better off such as ... Germany although it was not thriving, there would be more work, they would be better organised. They had iron mines to begin with. Belgium had coal mines.

France is a much bigger country than Italy. They had many, many more possibilities of finding labour in France. Italy is 300.000 square kilometres, okay? France is 600,000 to give you an idea. So when my parents, my uncle and my Dad and other people went abroad, to go into other countries to work like Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, France, they went there only because there was someone there before them they knew from the same village. Right? So by word of mouth they say you come here, we have a job for you. Right. So they left Italy so they went to work ...

**OH:** At a young age?

**GR:** That's where ... at a very young age. Very young age. They were little boys.

**OH:** Gianni, I'm thinking as you are talking, maybe we should explain the geographical context of this region of the Veneto and also where you are located in Bigolino. Because of people listening ...

**GR:** Right ... so just to describe ... to create an image of where we are living .... This area was dominated by the Venetian Republic. The Venetian Republic was a nation state that existed autonomously without ever having been plundered for 1,100 years. Ah, it lost its independence when Napoleon came in, conquered it. Okay? It was towards the end of its history, its life span. And he eventually sold it off to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in order to facilitate his war ambitions in going to Russia. So Venice was a sea power. It wasn't a military power, it was a commercial sea power. It was so for many, many years, for hundreds and hundreds of years. Venice is on the water, on the Adriatic Sea, it's on the plains. So we have what's called in Italy, the *pianura padana*. *Pianura padana* extends from Piemonte which is north-west of Italy where we have a big city called Torino and ... a plain begins to form from Torino coming south-east. So there we have a plain and in this plain, we have ... a lot of agriculture, okay? The majority of our agriculture is to be found in the *pianura padana*. That extends into Lombardia, the southern part of Lombardia and Emilia-Romagna, the plain, they have some hills but we call it *pianura padana*. Venice itself is part of what is called *pianura padana*, it's on flat ground.

From Venice, going north, we come to the city of Treviso which is 30 km from Venice, okay? Ah, from Treviso going north again, we come to Valdobbiadene which is 30 kilometres, as I said, from Treviso. When you come to Valdobbiadene, you hit the pre-Alps. So we've come up from the plains, from the *pianura padana*, the top section of the *pianura padana* and we meet the pre-Alps. Pre-Alps are the first mountains you hit before seeing the Alps. The Alps in north-east Italy are called the Dolomites, discovered, because of the hue, the pinkish hue ,by the French scientist called Monsieur Dolomite. And today they are called the Dolomites because they change hue during the day and they are pinkish.

North-west, they're called the Alps, the Italian Alps. The Italian Alps they extend ... so we're at the foothills of the pre- Alps. The highest peak of the mountain behind Valdobbiadene, about 2km from Bigolino, it's not a rocky mountain, is about 1,650 metres high. Okay? To the left, we have across the river Piave which flows down from the Dolomites to Venice okay? ... it divides, let's say, the valley, divides what we call our mountain range *Pianezze, Monte Cesen, Monte Babbarbaria* and this section goes out towards Vittorio Veneto. On the other side of the Piave we have what we call the Monte Grappa which is a mountain range which extends north and goes into the province of Belluno. ... That, the highest peak there, I think, is about 1,800 metres.

26:35

So here we've got the first mountains you're seeing. Going south, plains everywhere. You are going to Castelfranco, you're going to Vicenza, you're going to Padova, Verona, you've got the plains, Mantova, you've got the plains, Milan, you've got the plains. So here we have the first mountains. Not many people realise that Italy does have alps. And the Italian alps, they extend from ... the east which means basically bordering with Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and France. So we have all the alps, we have the French alps, the Swiss alps, the Austrian alps and the Slovenian alps. Not many people know that.

**OH:** So I'm thinking of people like your father in nineteen thirty something, going off to Germany  
...

**GR:** In '36.

**OH:** '36. How would have made that journey?

**GR:** Train, by train.

**OH:** And of course, the alps, when you talked about the First World War.

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** Were very important in terms of the feature of ...

**GR:** Well, defence.

**OH:** Fighting.

**GR:** Fighting, definitely, if you visit the alps ... I'm going to take Rino,<sup>3</sup> a friend of mine, with his wife, we're going to visit the Dolomites, you'll find the tunnels that were excavated in the alps in the First World War, just the immensity, the fatigue, the ferociousness of the war because they loaded their [laughs] their cannons onto mules, right? And they took the cannons up the mountains then they had to re-assemble them on mule paths and took them to the peaks of the mountains to bombard the enemy. This is both the Italians and the Austrians, it worked both ways. --- But the galleries that were built underground for protection for storing the ammunition, for storing the foodstuffs et cetera, to surround the enemy or whatever. It's something that's just awe-inspiring. You can't believe that a human being can suffer so much and work so hard with his bare hands because there were no machines then.

**OH:** Incredible.

**GR:** Yes, it is, it is.

**OH:** So in terms of the legacy of World War One it would have been felt by your father's generation, your grandfather's generation

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** Very deeply.

**GR:** Felt very deeply. But they didn't speak of it. No one in the family spoke of the war, neither the First or the Second World War. Occasionally they'd speak of the First World War, occasionally but no one ever, you know, openly spoke or took sides. This is from my family. But in general people who fought in wars, they won't speak openly of wars. They won't offend the enemy because they weren't an enemy, at the end of the day, were they?

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<sup>3</sup> Rino Mattaizzao whose parents were from Bigolino and were close friends of the Reboli family in Adelaide

**OH:** --- But, the destruction nevertheless was ...

**GR:** The destruction well that subdued any, destruction I think kills any sign of hope or --- makes you very sad, makes your life very, very --- it just puts out the light, I think. --- People who've lived through the wars, and through poverty, through poverty, can actually teach us a lot. And one thing I've learned is that people who've lived life that way, they don't talk about it, they don't throw words around heedlessly. And when they speak, you know, they know what they're talking about. I think we should listen to them more carefully. Today's it's opposite, today we know everything. [laughs]

**OH:** When you say that your parents didn't speak about World War Two ---

**GR:** Well, they did speak about it but it's not, you know, today --- I'm trying to make a reference -- - people, I live in an area where people speak about politics and: "We need a strong hand, we need a strong government, we need a strong man, we need this. Look at what Mussolini did. Look at what Hitler did. Look what ..." And I think that's sad because when I grew up as a kid, my mother and father never said, they would say, okay, Mussolini did this but they never over-indulged because they lived what war meant --- And I always say to my friends here, you know, one man alone won't solve any problems. Never. He can create a lot of problems ---

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** That's why so our parents and people who've done, who've lived the war won't speak of it willfully because they've lived it, you know, on their skins. You don't talk about suffering, do you? You can, but killing people, atrocities, starvation, going without food, infection. They went through all of this. But not for one week --- for many years --- and then the aftermath of the war because things don't happen miraculously. [laughs]

**OH:** Did your father serve in World War Two?

**GR:** Yes, he did.

**OH:** And where did he serve?

**GR:** Well, on the Italian front and in Yugoslavia. Don't ask me where but he served in Yugoslavia.

**OH:** And do you know the impact of World War Two in this area?

**GR:** In what sense? The physical impact?

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** Well, this area was destroyed, you know, totally destroyed.

**OH:** So it was destroyed in World War One?

**GR:** Yes. Destroyed in World War Two.

**OH:** And again because of its geo...

**GR:** As I said before, Monte Grappa is the seat --- of where the Italians set up, let's say, a blockade against the invasion from --- the Austro-Hungarian army that were coming down from Austria, they'd come down into Friuli Venezia Giulia, right? And through Vittorio Veneto --- and they were stopped here on the Piave, on the River Piave. There's a song that says the River Piave *mormorò*, murmured, it's a sacred river, it's called *Il Fiume Sacro alla Patria*--- The nation's sacred river because it was here that they stopped the invasion. They say that the Piave was

flowing red with blood. It's not a myth. I don't know exactly how many, I know that when the Austrians retreated, they left 300,000 prisoners here. 300,000.

**OH:** And was that World War One?

**GR:** World War One --- We're talking big numbers, aren't we?

**OH:** Who were the prisoners?

**GR:** Well, you know, the Austrians, going back, prisoners on both sides, depends. But when the Austrians retreated and declared defeat and returning back to their lands, 1918, the prisoners, well, they abandoned everything here. And as I said, they were fighting in winter too. Winter in those years, is not like winter today, winter, I won't say like Siberia but was pretty close to it. They would have been Austrian prisoners.

**OH:** And in World War Two, this area would have been occupied by the Germans?

**GR:** Definitely?

**OH:** Did your parents ever talk about that kind of experience?

**GR:** No, no, no --- There would be the Fascists, okay? Germans were Germans. The there would be the Fascists and the partisans. But my parents never, this willfully, they never took sides --- because it's always, you know, there's always good and bad on both sides, surely. Like you've always got to mediate and find --- they never, they did speak of it but they never went over, round the bend, too much.

**OH:** So you wouldn't have known if people were treated badly here?

**GR:** No, I do know, some were treated ... There were atrocities committed here.

**OH:** By the Fascists?

**GR:** Amongst Italians. *Si*.

**OH:** And the partisans?

**GR:** *Si*. Both ---

**OH:** It must have been hard after --- all of that happened ...

**GR:** Definitely.

**OH:** For people to have a sense of what ---

**GR:** Of belonging here. You're right, you know, and demanding --- they'd want some retaliating even back in the '70s.

**OH:** In what kind of way?

**GR:** Well, they were sending, sending ... because someone, during wars, someone gets rich all of a sudden. And we don't know where the money came from. Someone who has always been poor and all of a sudden he's filthy rich. Where did he steal his money? So some people who go and put their nose into it and start doing research and they find he stole the money from so and so or perhaps he killed someone. I remember back in the early '70s some of the culprits who'd become very rich, I think, three or four, received coffins on their front door. I'm talking about 1970, '71. [laughs]

**OH:** And did anything happen?

**GR:** No, nothing, no.

**OH:** But it was a warning?

**GR:** Well, it was a sign, that we know all about it --- We're talking about war.

**OH:** And memory?

**GR:** War's not a game. You know it's not like cowboys and Indians on TV ---

**OH:** You've given a really full and interesting account of like that historical context.

**GR:** Hmm ...

**OH:** ... in which your parents living as young people.

**GR:** I don't know anything about it because you know ... just I'm living on memory now of what they told me. And I repeat they did not speak of the war. The only thing I know is, you have a feeling of things, the poverty that's what's lingers.

**OH:** Just finishing off about your family, did you have any siblings?

**GR:** No.

**OH:** So you were a precious only child?

**GR:** I was only two years old, you know, I was two years old when I left Australia, Italy, sorry for Australia ... and I had two cousins and they were like brothers and sisters, Bruno, Richetto's son and Rosanna, his daughter. We're the same age basically.

**OH:** And you grew up together?

**GR:** We grew up.

**OH:** Yeah. We're going to turn to your parents and going to Australia.

**GR:** Hmm ...

**OH:** What do you know about the situation here in Bigolino at the time that your father went to Australia which was ...

**GR:** 1949. There was no work. I'll just sum it up that way. There was little work --- there was no promise of improvement. They couldn't see anything developing to create opportunities for work, opportunities for doing anything at all. So that's when a lot of the Italians from the Veneto area were in general, from Italy, after, many Italians left Italy after the war because there were no *prospettive*<sup>4</sup>. Nothing was developing.

**OH:** So how did your father make the decision?

**GR:** He made the decision because back in the, I think it was in 1926 or '27, my grandfather, my Dad's father's brother, Brunone Rebuli<sup>5</sup>, went to Australia with his wife. I don't know if she went with him or if she arrived later. I don't know that. But he had relatives there and they communicated, okay? '26 to '49, we're talking about 23 years, so it's a long time. Evidently there was some form of communication and people were leaving so when people leave, people talk about it and if there's no work here and you see people leaving and you're a young person, you

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<sup>4</sup> *Prospettive* – is the Italian word for prospects or possibilities

<sup>5</sup> Brunone Rebuli had emigrated from Bigolino in 1927 with three of his Rossetto brothers-in-law

know, "This is my opportunity", you'd think, I would think, it was my opportunity also, to leave and --- live my life better, hopefully.

**OH:** So it was obvious that it was going to be Adelaide because of the relatives?

**GR:** Yes, it was Adelaide. It was either Melbourne or Adelaide. There was some ... the Rossetto's that went there, I think the majority stopped in Melbourne --- but we landed in Adelaide because we had, let's say --- my father's uncle Brunone was living in Adelaide and the Rossetto's were in Adelaide and some other people from Bigolino were in Adelaide. That's where we ended up.<sup>6</sup>

**OH:** And do you know if he travelled with anyone else?

**GR:** No, that I don't know.

**OH:** And did your father tell you anything about his early experience in Adelaide?

**GR:** --- I think that when he went to Adelaide, I think he worked in the market gardens for some Italians who'd been there, who'd arrived in Australia since the '20s. This is to pay off because when he went there, he didn't travel first class, or second class. He had to borrow money to travel. That gives you a further idea of how poor the area was. So when my parents went there, they went there on borrowed money and they had to reimburse the money to the people who lent it to them.

**OH:** Were they people here or in Australia?

**GR:** --- They were people ... that's a good question. But it may have been in Australia, it may have been, through people here. Can you follow me? So when they got to Australia, my father, and also my Mum because Dad went there in 1949 and we went in 1950. When he went there, having worked in mines, he initially worked, to pay off some, debts for the market gardeners.

**OH:** Who did he work for, do you know?

**GR:** I think perhaps, the Berno's. I think. I'm not sure. --- And then he went to work for six months, I think he worked six months or nine months and near Alice Springs, in the mines, the mica mines, in Alice Springs, not in Katherine --- I can't remember the mining, I think it is still there, maybe it is closed down. Then he came back to Adelaide.

**OH:** Where did he live when he first arrived?

**GR:** I think he lived with my *zia* Nana, *zia* Giovanna, that's his uncle's Brunone Reboli's wife who was living on Frogmore Road, near the old wooden bridge. That's where we actually, when me and my Mum arrived after I think, about a year, that's where we went to live also.

**OH:** And Brunone died early, didn't he?

**GR:** Yes he did.

**OH:** Was he alive at that time when you arrived?

**GR:** No. No, no --- I think he died --- I don't know, I've got no idea, I think he died the early '40s, just thinking because he wasn't there when we arrived.

**OH:** And of course, his wife was a Rossetto?

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<sup>6</sup> Eight of the nine Rossetto siblings emigrated to Adelaide between 1925 and 1939 and most lived in Adelaide

**GR:** *Zia* Giovanna, *si*, Rossetto, she was a Rossetto.

**OH:** So you went to a family where you had cousins?

**GR:** Went to a family, well, you know, my Dad's first cousins. So *zia* Nana, *zia* Giovanna had three children when she left Italy, Dorina, Vito, Elvio and they were between I think between five and eight or five and nine years old when she left. I think she left in the '30s, just thinking out loud, I think it was the '30s, the early '30s. Then she had another child, the nicest guy you could meet, Guido, in 1938.

**OH:** So he was ten years older than you?

**GR:** He was ten years older than me. But you know when we got there, it was a big, big family. When you're poor, when you don't have much at all but there is work, you can work and you can pay your bills and you can pay for what you're eating, you're happy. It was completely different from what it was here. You were very happy because you were making ends meet and you could see the possibility of creating something for yourself. So we lived with *zia* Nana, she was a lovely lady, for six months. I can see, it wasn't a house. It was a house but it was a shed. It was a house but it was really a shed. It had its own commodities, it was looked after, it was clean, but you know, the space was limited. I remember we used to have curtains, dividing one room from the other, the bedroom from the kitchen then.

Anyway, when we left the house, my father found a bigger place on Torrens Road with an Australian gentleman, I don't ... his name was Mr Cook. I say 'Mr' because I've never known his Christian name. Everyone used to call him 'Mr' Cook. He was a bald, quite an old man. Good man. I always distinctly, he used to love drinking tea with milk and butter, with a scoop of butter on the milk. Nice, isn't it? [laughs] and we lived there, I think, for a couple of years. So that meant that my father, mother and myself and then Richetto and when Richetto came to Australia, he lived, he wasn't living, Richetto never lived on Frogmore Road with *zia* Nana. He immediately lived on Torrens Road with us. At Mr Cook's place. So, both the families were there. So I grew up as a kid for a couple of years with my two little cousins. I was three years old, okay?

**OH:** Where was your father working at the time you were on Torrens Road?

**GR:** I think he was working at GM, General Motors, Woodville.

**OH:** And did Richetto also get a job there?

**GR:** Then Richetto got a job there too.

**OH:** Then his wife and two children ...

**GR:** Then Mum, yes. Go on.

**OH:** That they arrived also?

**GR:** They arrived after, in '51, I think, or '52, I'm not sure. With my *zia* Ginevra, with the older sister.

**OH:** Was she married?

**GR:** She wasn't married, was not married which goes to show, you know, the immensity of the poverty here.

**OH:** Nothing?

**GR:** Nothing ---

**OH:** How old would she have been?

**GR:** Oh, for heaven's sake. *Zia* Ginevra was, I think, from 1916, born in 1916, 1916, she was born.

**OH:** So she was already ---?

**GR:** 1916, to ... let's say, to '50, we're talking about 34, she would have been 34, 36 --- yeah.

**OH:** So did you all live with Mr Cook?

**GR:** I don't know anything about *zia* Ginevra, I don't know where she went to live. She didn't live with us at Mr Cook's. I remember Richetto's family and my family lived together, at Mr Cook's place. It was a very big house, a lovely house, run down because he was an old man, he had no one to look after him and that's why he took us in. And Mum and Eti used to look after him.

**OH:** Like cook for him?

**GR:** Cook for him, wash for him and whatever. He was a good man, Mr Cook and we were there, what? For two years. My *zia* Ginevra, perhaps she went ... I've got no idea where she lived.

**OH:** Did your mother and Auntie Eti work outside the house as well?

**GR:** Yes, we had a garden patch.

**OH:** But also did they have another paying job?

**GR:** Mum worked at --- Brazzale's.

**OH:** With the mica ...

**GR:** With the mica ...

**OH:** Processing?

**GR:** Processing business where they put the mica into the irons --- I don't what else. Mum worked there for a few years. I don't know, my *zia* Eti, where she worked or if she worked somewhere. She had two small kids. Or perhaps she looked after me and Mum did the working, can you follow me, for a salary. Then quite quickly after Dad and Richetto started working at Holden's, both the women got a job at Holden's. They were all at Holden's.

**OH:** Who would have looked after you three children then? Maybe it was shifts?

**GR:** Not when we were at Mr Cook's because we didn't live there many years. I think we were at Mr Cook's for two years or one and a half years, not many years. I would have been four, four and a half. That's when --- the men were working, they were making money, they had a salary. So that's when they decided to invest their first monies and they bought a block of land in Gleneagles which is near ...

**OH:** Off Grange Road?

**GR:** Off Grange Road. On Airdrie Avenue, Airdrie, I still remember the name, Airdrie Avenue. And it was like, you know ... there was sand everywhere, it was only sand there. I remember there used to be a church there, Catholic church, on Grange Road, on top of the mound. There used to be a huge dump on the right-hand side. No houses, there was nothing there, there were very, very, there might have been two houses, I think. I'm exaggerating, there was nothing there. So, they bought two blocks off Grange Road, on Airdrie Avenue, three blocks, sorry. One for my Dad, one for Richetto and one for Piero Mattiazzo who had married Pierina Vetorello, they're both from

Bigolino. And they came across to Australia more or less at the same time as my parents did and Richetto did.

And the idea was to build a house or a shed ---do it up comfortably, well, and help each other to build it, to save money. You don't go to a contractor because you save your money so you do things yourself. So they built Dad's home then they built Piero's home and then when it was time to build Richetto's home, they were doing overtime, they were working eight days a week. So Richetto's house never got built on that block. So he bought himself his own house, it was an old house, pretty run down as they all were, at that moment, on Aroona Road, 12 Aroona Road, Kilkenny, near West Croydon. So that's how things started to evolve.

**OH:** So --- you have told me that you had some clear first memories of time in Adelaide?

**GR:** As a kid, I had memories, as a small child, where you can remember things when you were two years old, two and a half, three, I still remember, I have clear, vivid memories [coughs] when I was living at Frogmore Road at my *zia* Nana's house, jumping up and down on the bed or seeing ... she used to make tomato paste, tomato sauce and I remember her drying the tomatoes on some pieces, some rags, some pieces of clothes in the back yard under the sun. I remember the red colour of the tomatoes.

I remember playing games with her older daughter, Dorina. I used to pester Dorina and she used to go .... I was only two and half years old ... These things I remember. I remember Vic used to have a utility ... car. I had these fingers chopped off when I was there, see. I was sleeping on a sun deck chair and someone played the dirty on me, I was only very, very small. But I remember these things --- then I remember also when we were staying at Mr Cook's place on Torrens Road, I remember the gigantic, for me, when you're a kid, everything is gigantic, you see things ten times bigger than they are actually. Bamboos, a lot of bamboos. I remember Mr Cook quite well, being a nice man, gentle polite and I remember his tea with the milk and with the butter.

**OH:** And your mother and your Auntie having a garden in his ...?

**GR:** Well they had a garden and they had a chicken farm there too, at the back, he had a big block, a very big block. Blocks used to be big there. Then.

**OH:** Did they buy the chickens?

**GR:** Evidently they bought them or someone gave them to them. I've got no idea.

**OH:** After you left ...

**GR:** I remember when we shifted, I'm going to interrupt you. The reason why ... I think I was about three, three and a half, four years old when we shifted, we left from ... I don't know the name of the suburb on Torrens Road. I remember the chicken because my father caught the chicken and my mother put them in bags, the cotton, potato bags --- threw them on the lorry and we brought them to Gleneagles, These are the things I remember, I still have images of these things in my mind.

**OH:** That's great that you do.

[laughter]

**OH:** At Gleneagles, do I understand that your father and your uncle and Piero ---

**GR:** Piero.

**OH:** ... Mattiazzo actually built the houses themselves?

**GR:** Themselves, yes they did.

**OH:** So they must have had some skills?

**GR:** My uncle had some skills, Richetto, he was a good artisan. He could, you know, work very well do nearly everything with his hands. he was good at, he was a good carpenter and the structure of the sheds was in wood. So they'd buy the wood and my father would help, Piero would help. They were pretty good themselves. But the inside, the ability and know-how was supplied by Richetto. That's how they built them.

**OH:** And what was your house like on Airdrie Avenue?

**GR:** I'd live there tomorrow. It was --- it was shed made of tin, or what do you call it?

**OH:** Oh, corrugated iron?

**GR:** Yeah, corrugated iron. Inside it had slabs of plaster or asbestos --- I shouldn't say asbestos but it was asbestos. Then it was allowed, okay?

**OH:** So that was like a lining?

**GR:** It was a lining all inside, I don't know if there was any insulation, there may have been some insulation between the corrugated iron and the asbestos lining, okay? They they'd drawn the electric wires for electricity. Initially we didn't have electricity, there was no electricity there.

**OH:** Plumbing?

**GR:** There was no plumbing. Hold on, there may have been plumbing. I know there was no toilet. There was no sewerage. When we got there, there was no sewerage, there were no electrical lines in that area.

**OH:** What year?

**GR:** '51, '52. There may have been but not ... there may have been on the road or somewhere near but it wasn't everywhere because I remember when we when they installed the electric lining, it was done so one night after work because first you worked and then you keep on working ... the Italian community got together and I remember them you know, at night ...

[sound of muffled sneeze]

**GR:** ... lifting this gigantic wooden pole from the back of a lorry and dumping it into a hole and that was the pole that they were going to connect the electrical wires to.

**OH:** So they did it themselves?

**GR:** Oh, yeah.

**OH:** And inside the ...

**GR:** Not connecting the wires, for heaven's sake but putting the pole in, yes.

**OH:** It seems unusual you know, for today. In that house, or that shed ...?

**GR:** No, it was a house, it was a house because my Mum and Dad, everyone, they painted it, decorated it. It was a house, a normal house inside.

**OH:** So if you went in ...?

**GR:** Outside they painted the corrugated iron, nice colour, they had the screen for the flies put in, they had everything, it was nice, small but nice.

**OH:** So what was it like inside, if you went in the front door?

**GR:** For heaven's sake, now I can't remember. We had two bedrooms --- a kitchen --- two bedrooms and a kitchen and another room, I think. The laundry was at the back, toilet was at the back.

**OH:** Bathroom?

**GR:** At the back. Outside.

**OH:** And was ...?

**GR:** ... In another ...

**OH:** ... It a decent size, the block, like for a garden?

**GR:** The block was enormous, the block would have been 2,000 metres. I'm not kidding. It wasn't a 1,000 metre block. Maybe I'm ... maybe it was 1,500 metres, it was a very big block and the house was at the back, it wasn't at the front.

**OH:** And how did the land get used in the front?

**GR:** Garden.

**OH:** Vegetables?

**GR:** Vegetables, flowers, trees. You name it. I remember Mum and Dad, they planted rosemary. You know, rosemary, you can trim it, they made a hedge of rosemary where you came in with your car. It was very nice.

**OH:** So your parents bought a car?

**GR:** My father bought a Hillman, Minx. Afterwards.

**OH:** Secondhand?

**GR:** Third, fourth hand. [laughs] I'll show you Richetto's car, the first car that Richetto bought.

**OH:** So when you moved in there ...?

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** The next house wasn't ready yet?

**GR:** Oh, when we moved, I can't remember to be precise but it was ready soon after and the house next to us was Piero Mattiazzo's but it was more or less together, I think.

**OH:** And how long did your family stay there at Gleneagles?

[sound of coughing]

**GR:** --- Oh, I think about five, six years.

**OH:** And what was the next move?

**GR:** The next move, Mum and Dad, you know work, work, my father used to do a lot of shifts. So did Richetto, everyone did. He bought a block of land on Frobisher Avenue off Grange Road, where Crittenden Road and Grange Road intersect, looking at the city, right. On the right you've got Frobisher Avenue in Flinders Park. So he bought this old, utterly devastated house in Flinders Park. When I say devastated, it was mess, it was a shambles, it hadn't been looked after. It was in shocking condition. I remember it was a nice house, it was a big house, nice block. But the owners used, you know used to live in it and as a kid I was shocked to see the filth inside

because I remember the bathtub was black, it was full of ... they used to wash their cutlery there in the bathtub. I'm not kidding. And they were nice people, they used to have German Shepherds and the German Shepherds would be in the house and they'd have their claw marks on the doors. And they used to have a stable, very, very small, they were into horses, for what, I don't know. They used to have a farm out of Adelaide, this wasn't their ... they used to live there ...

[sound of someone entering the house]

**OH:** We're just going to pause this for a moment

**GR:** *Avanti* --- what's the time?

**OH:** We've done an hour.

**GR:** Really? Good morning.

Break in the interview

**OH:** We're resuming the interview [sound of coughing]. And Gianni I was going to ask you, why did your parents decide to buy that house at Flinders Park.

**GR:** I think they decided to buy the house simply because they wanted to live in a house that was more solid, a bigger house because the place we were living in at Airdrie Avenue at Gleneagles was ... I call it a shed, okay? Even though it was nice, it was a nice house, it had all the comfort, but it wasn't a house. It would be something like a beach house or summer shed. Okay? Something like that. So they bought it simply because they wanted to live in a normal house like everyone else. That's why they bought it at Flinders Park. And they found evidently a good deal because it would have been a good deal because it was a shambles. The house was ... even I as a kid, when I saw it, I was shocked because there were weeds, there were mounds of dirt, there was no lawn, there were mounds of dirt and grass everywhere. It was shocking.

**OH:** And the bath. Black?

**GR:** And the bath, yeah, it was black. The dogs had scratched the doors. There was a stable at the back with two or three horses *in* the stable and there were two, there was one gigantic pine tree at the back, a very, very high pine tree. I think it would have been, I'm not exaggerating ... it would have been 10, 12 metres high, at least.

**OH:** And what did your parents plan for that place?

**GR:** Well, when they bought it they were happy because they made a good deal and they, coming from this area, the *veneti* are people who only know one thing, work. Physical labour. So Dad used to work at Holden's, did his overtime, Saturdays, Sundays whatever and when he came home from work, he'd start working on the house. Working on the house meant cleaning it, right? Dumping the rubbish in the house, having the awnings changed, having whatever needed changed, changed, painting it. It was all work that they did themselves. Painting it inside, cleaning, painting, awnings changed, putting the linoleum down, new linoleum down, redoing the wood, reconstructing the inside windows, doors. I remember they put in a verandah also, the

extended the house, they put in a verandah, a closed verandah. They cleaned out the stable, they made it into a workshop, okay? And with a little cellar. For the *grappa*<sup>7</sup> ...

**OH:** Did they ...?

[laughter]

**GR:** For the wine that Dad used to produce.

**OH:** Did they build the cellar?

**GR:** It was a hole in the ground, okay? It wasn't a real cellar, it was about say two metres high, pretty, you'd go down on a ladder but it would be what? Two metres long, one metre wide, Not very big.

**OH:** And a roof?

**GR:** No, it had wooden slabbing on it. It was inside the tool shed, do you follow me?

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** So when they put cement on the floor, there was no cement on the floor so before cementing the floor, they dug a hole, put in the cellar and then put the slabbing in, wooden slabbing, so when you had to go down, you just had to take the slabs off --- Makes sense? yes. Oh, that's why they bought the house. And they redid the garden. They put in a lawn, they put in cement footpaths, my father and Richetto made the cement footpaths themselves. They put in new fencing, outside, everything in the house was new. I think it took them about a year to do all that. Because it was spare time, work, when Dad wasn't working at Holden's or whatever. A lot of work, a lot of work. It was all manual labour, no tractors came in to dig or to ---

**OH:** Did you do any of the work?

**GR:** I was lucky, I was a kid. I think that my generation has been the luckiest that anyone can ever remember, *our* generation, I include you. Because we saw no wars, we were born after the wars. After the wars, we were born, we were too little to work, to participate so Mum and Dad looked after us and they did all the working. So they did the wars, they suffered the wars, the suffered the famine, they suffered and we came afterwards and we just lived the best of life. Actually, we got our first TV set in 1960, at Flinders Park. So I consider myself to be extremely lucky, I grew up in hard times, okay. I wasn't a spoilt child, never have been a spoilt child, never but --- our parents, they lived the real life. Getting back to what I said before about the war ... people don't talk about war, they don't take sides, in general, this is from my side of the family because they've lived it. People who've lived it, who've lived suffering on their own skin, will keep it to themselves ---

**OH:** When you were at Flinders Park, there was also a vegetable garden?

**GR:** In our place?

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** For heaven's sake, of course. We had a big vegetable garden with everything in it. Mum and Dad were quite good at gardening, at planting things. We had fruit trees, vegetable garden, a

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<sup>7</sup> *Grappa* is a spirit distilled from all the solid matter left over from winemaking commonly made in Italy and in Australia in homes

chicken shed. I think we had 15 chooks and roosters. Dad used to make his own wine with Richetto, they used to halve it. They used to make some *grappa* too, you weren't allowed to. [laughter] But the thing is they'd make the *grappa*, they'd be petrified that the cops would find the *grappa*. But the *grappa*, they would never drink the damn thing anyway they'd just make it anyway because it was tradition in Italy, to make the *grappa*. So they'd make the *grappa*, they'd dig holes everywhere in the backyard to hide it then they'd forget it was there. This gives you an idea of the mentality. It was very, very funny.

**OH:** If they didn't drink it, who did?

**GR:** Probably they forgot it was there. I remember when Dad sold his land, and the block, and the house and the shed to ... he sold the land to Tranquillo, Roma, Milva's sister ... Roma, the younger ...

**OH:** Bordignon.

**GR:** Bordignon, Tranquillo Bordignon. He sold the land to Bordignon and Bordignon built his new house up front, okay? So things had changed then. The going, the saying goes that when he was digging or when they tore down the shed, they were digging the garden, he found bottles of *graspa*<sup>8</sup>.

[laughter]

**GR:** That's what happened to the *graspa* because they would drink a little of *graspa* occasionally. That was all there was to it.

**OH:** And when Richetto came to help you, where was Richetto and Etti and family living?

**GR:** They were living on Aroona Road, Kilkenny.

**OH:** Oh, all that time?

**GR:** Yeah. And not having shifted to Gleneagles, they'd gone straight from Mr Cook's house to Aroona Road and the house was pretty well off. It didn't have a big garden. The front garden didn't exist, it had a patch of lawn which was about a metre wide, okay? And the back yard wasn't very big, it was about 400 square metres, I think, nothing more than that, the land, the block itself.

**OH:** And your house at Frobisher Road ...

**GR:** Frobisher Avenue.

**OH:** Frobisher Avenue, thank you. Who would come to your house?

**GR:** In what way?

**OH:** Visits?

**GR:** Oh, we didn't have, didn't have very much social life. We didn't socialise ... it was mainly Richetto, Eti, kids, *zia* Ginevra, Dad's sister. She married a man from ... who'd gone to Australia in the '30s, I think, Angelo Caon. And I think you're familiar with the Caon surname, there are quite a few, quite a few brothers left. Ramon di Loria, that's where they are originally from which is near Riese and they emigrated in the '30s, I think. One was a butcher, another was a bricklayer. So she married ... Angelo was a great guy, a fantastic guy and they had three kids. So we would associate with them more often, okay. Not many people came to our place for visits because

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<sup>8</sup> *Graspa* is the word in Veneto dialect for *grappa*

everyone was working that I know of. Not having your own business, not having a business and working as employee in a factory --- we didn't have many, friends that would come to see us. Mum had friends on Grange Road, her best friend was Elda Battaglia, married Giacomin. You know, quite a few friends but it wasn't ... it was occasional. We would go out on picnics, as a kid, I remember with all these groups of people, family friends.

**OH:** And where did you go?

**GR:** Often, National Park. We'd go crabbing, Two Wells, I think you'd go crabbing. Often to National Park, often on the tours to the wineries. That was it, basically.

**OH:** The beach?

**GR:** Oh, the beach was a must.

**OH:** And which beach?

**GR:** We'd go to Grange beach, it was always Grange beach. Semaphore was *the* beach for the elite, Henley Beach was so and so, Glenelg was too far. So it was Grange. It used to be very strange because I remember as a kid the beach used to be very populated, in the '50s and the '60s, a lot of people used to go to the beach. You go to the beach now when I go down to Adelaide, there are very few people on the beach, not many, there used to be many more when I was a kid, many, many more.

**OH:** That's interesting to know the difference.

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** And what about the events in the Veneto community like weddings and things like that? Did your parents get invited to weddings?

**GR:** Yes, yes, definitely. Well, everyone knew everyone okay? Basically. There was always good relations with everyone, always. So you were always invited to the weddings. The weddings used to be held in what you'd call a warehouse, some sort of warehouse in the middle of, I can't remember where. And they were great times - for kids.

**OH:** Do you mean a warehouse like at a market garden. Or a shed?

**GR:** Well a shed, a big shed. They used to stock whatever, perhaps there were fruit, vegetables whatever. So they'd, we'd have weddings there. It would have been a buffet wedding so every lad that was invited would bring, one quality of meal or vegetables or bread or whatever. So everyone brought something that would be eaten at the wedding. There'd be an orchestra or band playing, you could dance. And ... they were the best weddings that I've ever attended, I think. Lovely weddings. Weddings that normal people with normal surroundings where people unite to have a good time and not sit down at a restaurant, like sitting in a sardine tin, waiting to be served at a table which I think is horrible.

**OH:** Did your family go to church?

**GR:** Yes, they did. My family was not a religious family --- I'm not a religious person even though I did grow up a Catholic and I had a Catholic upbringing having gone to a Catholic college, unfortunately --- but you know, mine brought me up as kid by the rules, I went to ... as a kid I went to Gleneagles primary school or kindergarten for a year. Then I did one year at Woodville Primary, don't ask me what age. Then I did a couple of years at Saint Joseph's primary school which was connected to Saint Joseph's church.

**OH:** Was that at Captain Cook Avenue?

**GR:** That's it there. Yeah. We all went there.

**OH:** Were there other kids from Italian families there?

**GR:** I remember as a name, names, Berno's, Tonellato's, Raymond, Adrian Tonellato, Santin --- Torresan, these are the names that I remember.

**OH:** And then after ...

**GR:** Then Pargalitti, not Veneto but Italians.

**OH:** Adami?

**GR:** No, I can't remember that name.

**OH:** So you did your primary school there?

**GR:** Yes, I did a couple of years there.

**OH:** And did you make your first communion from there?

**GR:** St Joseph's, yes.

**OH:** Was that a special occasion in your family?

**GR:** Very special, well, as it is, as always in Italian families. The holy communion, communion days are special events. And we had dinner afterwards at home with friends and relatives, the closest friends and relatives for a special day.

**OH:** Was the priest... do you remember if the priest at that place was Italian or?

**GR:** I can't remember.

**OH:** Okay.

**GR:** I can't remember. I think he was, I think he was Italian.

**OH:** What about confirmation?

**GR:** I was confirmed.

**OH:** Who was your *santolo*<sup>9</sup>?

**GR:** My *santolo* was a man from Bigolino, he was the same age as my father or perhaps a year younger. His name is Giovanni De Poi --- surname is Nanni Curi. Nanni Giovanni Curi. He went with Dad to Australia, I don't know in what year. And --- I know that he suffered burns, his body was burnt working in some mines in the desert. My father was there, too, I think. I can't remember, I have very vague memories when they got there initially. He had a brother there too who died very, very young and I remember my father telling me that his burns were so bad that they had to tie him outside of the aircraft, it was a small aircraft, to take him hospital. Anyway, he survived okay, nothing, there was no signs of the burning. I don't know how he was burnt. He eventually became, he was working in the market gardeners on East Terrace, that's where the gardens were, not the gardens, sorry, the market place, it was on East Terrace. At the end, I don't know after how many years because I didn't follow it. He was my godfather and he was one of the big players in the market place especially at that time with onions, in particular with onions with

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<sup>9</sup> *Santolo* is the name in Veneto dialect for godfather

other foodstuffs, other vegetables. He grew to become, he was known as the 'Onion King of Australia'.

**OH:** When you said 'Nanni Curi',

**GR:** *Si.*

**OH:** Was that his nickname?

**GR:** Nickname.

**OH:** Right. I wanted to just ask you one other question about your family. Where did your mother shop for say, food and clothes and that kind of thing?

**GR:** Well there weren't so many supermarkets at the beginning so you know you'd have your delicatessen, or your grocer's shop or your butcher's shop. There would be some in the area, Flinders Park and Gleneagles then. Eventually, where did we go shopping? You know, the first supermarkets ... I can't remember --- I can't remember --- I know she used to catch the bus every Saturday to go to the city because the bus stop was a few steps down the road.

**OH:** And why did she go every Saturday?

**GR:** She loved looking at shop windows.

**OH:** By herself?

**GR:** Oh yes, she'd go by herself. Or she'd meet up with her friend Elda, or with Bruna or my Auntie. My Auntie would train in from West Croydon, they'd meet in the city and they'd be there all morning because shops closed at 11:30, 12:00. She'd have a great time. Mum used to love... she did the same when she came back here. We're far from Treviso so she'd have to catch the bus from Bigolino to Treviso, she'd go to Treviso. She'd buy a kilo of salt and she'd be happy.

[sound of quiet laughter]

**GR:** I'm not kidding you. Even in Australia ... She'd buy a peg and come home. She'd just enjoy walking around, enjoying the ... gazing through the shop windows.

**OH:** Where would she buy her clothes?

**GR:** She'd go to Myers, John Martin's, David Jones.

**OH:** When you said that your parents worked really hard, that sense of not having a lot of social life ...

**GR:** That's it.

**OH:** Was that common for you noticing other people's families?

**GR:** Well, the people we associated with evidently led the same life. --- That was it.

**OH:** Didn't know anything else?

**GR:** No, didn't know anything else. Just work, work and work. Then at home, it was normal, normal people. There was never any harshness, even with Richetto's place or *zia* Ginevra's or our other friends, very normal people. But there was always work.

**OH:** And you told me that your Dad used to read a lot.

**GR:** A big reader.

**OH:** What sort of things did he read?

**GR:** He used to buy 'The Advertiser' in the morning and the newspaper at night, 'The News' at night. And he'd buy an Italian newspaper called 'La Fiamma' or 'Il Globo'. And he'd listen to the radio and he'd always be, he was a thinker, my father. He was a thinker, a big thinker. My grandfather, my grandfather, my Dad's dad, he used to pick up a piece of paper on the ground and if there was something printed on it, he'd sit down and read it. [laughs] I'm not kidding.

20:02

**OH:** What language did you speak at home?

**GR:** Dialect, Italian dialect. Sorry, Veneto dialect.

**OH:** And you said that your father bought 'The Advertiser' and 'The News'?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** So his knowledge of English ... ?

**GR:** Was very good.

**OH:** And how would he have learned English?

**GR:** Speaking it and reading.

**OH:** Teaching himself?

**GR:** Teaching himself. My father went to Germany at the age of 16 and he was fluent in German when he came back. I know this as a fact because he used to teach me German as a kid: *eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf*, He knew, you know. I learnt numbers in German from my Dad. He'd never ... he'd done his fourth grade from primary school but he had a good memory, a good brain.

**OH:** And your mother, did she learn English?

**GR:** Mum was the opposite. Mum would speak English but she was, you know, she was just a happy person, enjoying her job, cleaning the house --- not wanting problems. If there was a problem, don't over-stress it, okay? There's always a solution, okay? Be happy, sort of a thing. And live your life, okay. As best as you can and enjoy yourself. Don't go over the hill. Don't exaggerate. You don't *need* to. She was a very happy person, Mum. She would sit underneath the peach tree, and she loved lamb, and she'd be chewing on a piece of lamb, she would say: "This is life."

[laughter]

**OH:** The peach tree, the lamb ... Sounds delightful. So I guess you learned from your parents were some pretty interesting values, then?

**GR:** Ah, yes. Yeah.

**OH:** So, from your father?

**GR:** Well, they were very similar. Mum was ... she held the rudder because Dad was always asking her for advice. Ah, he was always ... my father at the end of the day, he ended up having, I won't say Alzheimer's, but dementia at a very, very, very young age when he returned to Italy. And thinking about it later, you know it dawned on all of us that perhaps that he was suffering from anguish, from anxiety late in Australia, in his later years in Australia, you could tell something wasn't there, okay? He was always a bit stressed out, a bit anxious, worried, he was always worried. He was a good man, a kind man but there was something, something wasn't working.

And Mum was the --- she was the person who made decisions. He would make decisions too but he would ask her for consent.

**OH:** And do you think that was unusual?

**GR:** No. I grew up in a family, contrary to what many people believe, our family was very open and democratic. Ladies were ladies and commanded like the men did. They had their role to carry out but if Mum didn't have time to wash the dishes, Dad would. If Mum didn't have time to sweep the floor, Dad would. Can you follow me? It wasn't the woman who had to do that, it's a woman's job.

**OH:** It was much more equal?

**GR:** It was equal, even Richetto's family. It was equal, all the people I grew up had this equality, people I know. Our family, at least, had this, this culture. It was equal.

**OH:** It's interesting, isn't it because ...?

**GR:** It is very. Because the majority would not have accepted, men would not have accepted that.

**OH:** No, they would have seen themselves as separate.

**GR:** Superior, superior, superior.

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** Not separate, superior. But you know I grew up differently where men were men and women were women, that's it. That's all there was to it. I mean there's no dominance of one over the other. So you help yourself out --- That's all there is to it. It's quite simple. When things that are simple become complicated, someone's doing you in.

[laughter]

**OH:** What do you know about other *veneti* who might have arrived in Adelaide around the time, or in the '50s?

**GR:** Not very much --- Not very much because when I went to Flinders Park, then I enrolled in school, Saint Michael's College Beverley, and you know, it was college time. For me my childhood was dedicated to college, school. Mum and Dad used to go to work, I used to go to college, 8:00 o'clock in the morning, 8:30 or whatever it was. I used to walk there or ride my bike and it was until 4:00 or 4:30 or whatever it was, all day at school. That was for eight years. So you know, that college then, meant rules that you had to go by.

So Mum and Dad used to work at the factory, at home, helping my Auntie out and Saturdays and Sundays were the days if they weren't working if Dad wasn't working would be the days when we would be together. It was family time, sort of a thing. So you know I would either go to Richetto's place or he'd come to our place or we'd go quite often to my Auntie's Ginevra's place up at Gilles Plains, I think it was on Main North-East Road and with her husband, Angelo Caon, they bought quite a bit of land up there and an old house and they ... I don't know what ideas they had but eventually in the early '60s or the end of the '50s, they started building shops in the middle of nowhere because there were no houses there, very few. And I remember Dad and Richetto going up on Sundays helping them with the cement. *Si si.* that was life, that's how I grew up anyway.

And they eventually built 14 shops or 16 shops on the main east road<sup>10</sup> and there was no-one around, no houses. And evidently, they had this foresight, this zone will be developed one day --- so they programmed things, hoping that the development would occur. It didn't occur quickly but it did occur while they were still in good health. And now there's a big shopping centre there that has been on their ... on what was on a bit of their land. So they were quite successful

**OH:** That's interesting ...

**GR:** We used to go there to play ... so I'll just finish this ... on Sundays, I remember that to ... you know Gilles Plains was a long way away, it was like going to Mildura, I think. And so on Sundays we'd go there and my Uncle Angelo Caon, he'd built bowling lanes, Italian bowling lanes.

**OH:** Like for *bocce*?

**GR:** *Bocce*. He'd have four of those or six and so he'd had all this energy, all the Italians up there on a Sunday. It was a novelty, it was a regular *bocce* place where he'd serve beer, he didn't serve it, he'd get the bottles of beer out and salami and whatever. So yeah, you'd eat and you'd drink and you'd play *bocce*. The kids would run around, break windows, as kids do, throw stones.

**OH:** And were women there too?

**GR:** Yes they were. Not often because *bocce*'s a man's game. But women would sit down.

**OH:** Yeah, I was thinking ...

**GR:** They were great times as a kid, you know, growing up in the wilderness because it was wild then. Like it was wild back in --- the area of Gilles Plains, of Gleneagles. When I went there, I can remember the sand dunes. There were sand dunes there --- Sand dunes. We're talking about three kilometres from the sea, roughly. And there were sand dunes, not white, yellowish sand dunes. I've got this image in my mind. And bamboos, plenty of bamboos.

**OH:** Good for tomato stakes?

**GR:** I've got no idea. [laughs] It was good for making bows and arrows.

[laughter]

**OH:** Oh. I was thinking that Gilles Plains in those days, you know it's strange to think of *veneti* being there.

**GR:** There you go.

**OH:** But as you say, the foresight, was pretty good.

**GR:** Yep.

**OH:** Why would your parents have sent you to the Catholic schools?

**GR:** It was the closest one there. Why Catholic? Because we're Catholic. No other reason why.

**OH:** But not every Italian family ...

**GR:** No, no.

**OH:** Sent their children to Catholic schools?

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<sup>10</sup> Main North East Road

**GR:** No, no. Everyone has his own upbringing, everyone has his own culture okay? --- There wasn't schooling behind our two families, my Mum's side and my Dad's side. Dad was the thinker, Dad was the one who thought more, considered more, had more consideration, understood things better than you know, quite a few people and I think it was just a question of choosing a culture associated with your homeland, Italy, full stop.

**OH:** And how important was it for your parents to give you an education?

**GR:** Very important.

**OH:** Because of what they ...

**GR:** Not exceedingly, yes, not exceedingly important. They didn't force me in any way to do anything. I didn't know if I was going to be Arthur or Martha or John or Billy, you know. But I just went with school, I got through school.

**OH:** What did you like about school?

**GR:** I didn't.

**OH:** Nothing appealed?

**GR:** No, no.

**OH:** So when you say it was rules-focus, like did you accept those rules?

**GR:** Yes, I had to accept them.

**OH:** And what's your memory of the culture of Saint Michael's?

**GR:** There was no culture --- as I see it --- Ah, you see, I think I mentioned this to you before what I lacked, what I missed for some reason or other was an identity --- growing without identity, growing up in an ambient that I could feel connected to, that I could identify myself with, that wasn't ... you know I didn't find that anywhere. Not in college, for heaven's sake.

**OH:** And we'll talk about that in more detail later.

**GR:** Oh, fair enough.

**OH:** The identity stuff. But I was wondering like, was there ...?

**GR:** College was fantastic because of the rules. I say it's fantastic *now*. Looking at the you know the way we were brought up with rule, and if you live in society, you need rules. So I appreciate the college system because of the rules, that's all. And I realise the importance of rules because when you live with people, I repeat that, you've got to go by the rules if you want to live comfortably. Otherwise you're going to be squabbling you're going to be stressed.

**OH:** So was there a focus in that school on really good academic education?

**GR:** Ah, not over, not over, not exceeding, not really, not too much. I would say, not academic, education, let's just call it education.

**OH:** So they weren't, those brothers, the De La Salle brothers weren't preparing people for university or professions or?

**GR:** They weren't preparing them for professions, put it that way. I didn't see it, perhaps they were, but I didn't realise it. So I don't want to criticise.

**OH:** No.

**GR:** Because I don't know if it was my lack of understanding then or their lack of capacity to get the message through to me.

**OH:** Were there other boys from Italian families?

**GR:** Plenty. It was a mixed call. I'm glad because I grew up with kids, you know, that were, well, *veneti*, Neapolitan, Sicilian, from Malta, from Australia, from Vietnam, from Germany from Holland. It was a mixture.

**OH:** And you told me you liked sport?

**GR:** I loved sport. Certain things about sport ...

**OH:** Were boys encouraged?

**GR:** They were ... Saint Michael's encouraged sports. You had to play, you had to participate in sports.

**OH:** It was compulsory?

**GR:** It was compulsory, yes.

**OH:** Could you have a choice?

**GR:** Yes, definitely.

**OH:** So what was the choice?

**GR:** I chose, [laughs] I chose everything. I was a bit nuts.

**OH:** Australian Rules football?

**GR:** Well, I did, well I did swimming, as a kid, you had to learn how to swim, you had to, it was a must. So it was swimming and then I used to love even gymnastics. I used to like gymnastics.

**OH:** Was that taught at school or was it taught somewhere ...?

**GR:** It was taught at school but not many people enrolled in gymnastics classes, and I did. I was one of the few who did because I liked it. Then it was gymnastics, swimming, you were in Australia and you had to swim. They'd take us to the swimming pool to learn swimming and to have competitions during the summer period which was excellent which was ...

**OH:** Where did you go? Was it to the City Baths?

**GR:** We went to the City Baths also, yes. Yeah. --- And somewhere else, I can't remember. We used to go to the beach at times, too.

**OH:** And there was a swimming pool at Henley Beach.

**GR:** I can't remember, we used to go to Henley Beach, some sort of, some place on the beach but I can't remember.

**OH:** Ah. So, gymnastics, swimming?

**GR:** Swimming, football, definitely football.

**OH:** Did you ...?

**GR:** I mean, now we've got the preliminary finals at midday, they're playing now.

**OH:** Are they? [laughs]

**GR:** Yes they are. I have direct streaming on the Internet.

**OH:** For Australian Rules?

**GR:** I pay \$120 a year for this.

**OH:** Who do you pay?

**GR:** Well, the people who do the broadcasting.

**OH:** Like the Australian ...

**GR:** The AFL League or whatever.

**OH:** Oh, really?

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** Oh my goodness.

**GR:** I see all the football matches.

[laughter]

**OH:** And did you play with the school team?

**GR:** I played with the school teams. And I played tennis as well. Yeah.

**OH:** And your parents supported ...?

**GR:** Well, what I was good at, pretty good at, was athletics, gymnastics for sure but that was limited when I was young. Athletics, I was quite good at running and --- what else? I wasn't too bad at football, a bit too light, a bit too small.

**OH:** And did your parents support you?

**GR:** Yes definitely.

**OH:** By taking you and ...

**GR:** No, they didn't take me. I *went*. No one ever took me.

**OH:** So you had a bike?

**GR:** I had a bike, or I had a bus. I mean, the kids that I knew, even Tony Brice, Tony Brice was one of my best friends who lived on Montreal Avenue, no not Montreal Avenue, it was two streets, Greville Avenue, Greville Avenue, in Flinders Park. He was my best friend. He's died now, he died a couple of years, three or four years ago. And I was with him and we worked together quite well, always. We used to muck around quite a lot.

**OH:** Playing sport?

**GR:** Playing sport, playing football, doing Chemistry, making bombs at home.

[laughter]

**OH:** And you'd go to each other's places?

**GR:** Yes, often, often.

**OH:** And what would you notice about his family that was different from yours?

**GR:** Eh, his family and I discovered this unfortunately last year because I met his daughter who was living at his old place. What was the name? Kelly, her name's Kelly, one of his two daughters. Lovely lad, Tony. I remember he left Adelaide with a couple of friends of his to go to England. He was my age, back in '66. Or early '67 before I went to Italy and --- he left school

before I did, he left school in Leaving, the year before Leaving Honours and went to work as a clerk at General Motors Holden's. And then he left for the UK, he stayed in England, I think for three years.

We were supposed to meet up in Venice when I arrived but we never did. And I remember going to his place, it was always ... he was an only child, like me, Tony. Had a lovely mum. His dad, he rarely spoke, you rarely saw his father, rarely saw his father, it was always very, very quiet there, there was no happiness, there was no --- it was grey. Nice but grey. It was always us two kids. He reminds me of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, sort of a thing. But we never got into that mischief because being college boys, we always had our suits on even when we went to bed.

[laughter]

**GR:** Mentally speaking, if you know what I mean.

**OH:** Yes, yeah, the rules?

**GR:** The rules, That was it.

**OH:** Hmmnn ...

**GR:** So you know he used to come to my place and I used to offer him espresso coffee, you know coffee in the moka machines. He used to love it. So that was the exchange we were having as kids.

**OH:** And did you ever eat at his place?

**GR:** No or perhaps I did but it wasn't something common, no. I had quite a few Australian friends. My friends were more Australian than Italian because I lived on a street that was Australian, full of Australian people, mainly. The Italians, the market gardeners were further away, okay? They were all together and I was on the outskirts so I grew up ...

**OH:** Mixing ...?

**GR:** Mixing with the, mixing with Trevor Moody, Gary Wilson, the Munn's boys, they were the sons of the cop who ran the police station. --- Yeah. That's why I speak English so well.

[laughter]

**OH:** Yeah, I think your English is exceptional. Uh, you have dual Australian citizenship?

**GR:** Yes, I do. Yes.

**OH:** And that's ... well, I was going to ask you about your parents. Did they become naturalised.

**GR:** My Dad did, my Mum didn't.

**OH:** And was there a reason that your Mum didn't?

**GR:** She didn't bother. There's no reason. Simply no. She was just happy-go-lucky, [laughs] Mum.

**OH:** But often wives become naturalised at the same time.

**GR:** My Mum, I know, but you know, Mum didn't even think about it. Can you follow me? There wasn't a reason. If Dad insisted she would have become naturalised.

**OH:** So how important would it have been for your Dad to become naturalised?

**GR:** Very important.

**OH:** Why?

**GR:** It would have made it easier for him to associate with Australia, with Australian administration, can you follow me? Because certainly there would have been some barriers, some rules to go by. And if you were Australian, you were Australian.

**OH:** And it's interesting that he didn't think that your mother should definitely become an Australian citizen.

**GR:** Well, it wasn't necessary ... they ... Australia was very easy ... you know how when I got my first passport in Australia ... you know what my name was in Australia? I was born ... sorry I'll start this again ... I was born and baptised --- and in the Town Hall, I'm written, my name is written as Giovanni Reboli. My name *is* Giovanni Reboli. When I went to school, I was Johnny Reboli. When they gave me my passport: "What's your name, sir, er son?" "Johnny Reboli". So, Johnny Reboli on the passport.

**OH:** Has it been changed?

**GR:** That was Australia, years ago. From a formal point of view, from an administration point of view, very, very easy-go-lucky, very, as it should be, Why complicate? Life is complicated because of illness. Now it's changed because they had to change. Now in my Australian passport it says "Giovanni Reboli" because that is my name.

**OH:** That's the name on your birth certificate?

**GR:** That's it.

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** So Australia then was very easy-go-lucky, very easy. If someone wanted to create havoc and become, you know do evil or as I say, or he could do quite well.

**OH:** Did you choose to become naturalised then?

**GR:** I was two years old, sorry, I was three. [six]<sup>11</sup>. My father was naturalised in '54. So automatically when he became an Australian citizen, his children became Australian citizens.

**OH:** And you know, you've just said for your father it was really important to associate himself with Australia do you think his intention was that he'd be there permanently?

**GR:** No --- I don't think any Italian who went to Australia intended to go there permanently. That's very broad, okay. But I think the majority of Italians would have said go there, make money and one day come back. That's what they all think. But after living in a place and becoming accustomed to it and perhaps returning as many do, with the idea of returning definitely or they returned to see what it's like and they find that it's not like what they imagined. Because when you leave a place and you leave traditions and you leave ways of thinking, of doing of eating and you transfer yourself into another culture --- you become acclimatised to the new culture whilst clinging to the old culture. But in the meantime the old culture changes while you're away. Even the language changes. So coming back, you don't find what you either idealised as a kid as when you were young. Does that make sense. So many would have come back, okay? And gone, returned back to Australia or wherever they were living. Some would have come back and would have attempted to live here and then gone back to Australia after a few years and some just remained.

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<sup>11</sup> In the editing process Johnny corrected his age to six years when his father was naturalised.

**OH:** So for your parents, it was like provisional?

**GR:** No, don't call it provisional. Sorry, you're right. Call it provisional because I remember Dad always speaking about Italy and speaking about Germany. He went there as a kid so you can imagine as a young person, you know, if things work, if you get a good salary, if you're respected, if you associate well with the people, the locals, you like it. So Dad always had a great feeling for Germany for the way they were organised.

**OH:** Even after the War, the experience of the War?

**GR:** Yeah. But you know, war is war and it was carried out by someone who wanted to go to war. It didn't mean, it doesn't mean [laughs] that all Germans wanted to go to war, can you follow me. If you have a mad man running loose, either you stop him or the infection becomes bigger, then the people are forced to go by what he says. This is what happened in Germany, Germans are fantastic people.

**OH:** --- I think that we'll bring the interview to, this part of the interview, to a close now. But I just wanted to check with you about your parents. They didn't return to Italy for a visit?

**GR:** They never returned for a visit, no.

**OH:** And was there a reason that they didn't because quite a few other people ...

**GR:** There was, nearly everyone, many people did return, did return. I don't know. I think that you know, what my belief is now, after having gone through my father's illness, in particular that he was slowly losing --- the, the strength, his mind was no longer strong, he didn't have any more ambition, he was losing his ambition, okay?

**OH:** At that point was ...

**GR:** He was getting ...

**OH:** Was he working?

**GR:** He always worked, my father, even when he came back. But there was no longer that striving to develop yourself, to affirm yourself, something was just blocked [coughs] I think it had to do with his wellbeing. I mean there was nothing that you could say upfront that indicated that there was something wrong with him but deep down under there was something wrong with him. Because that urge, that ... you know, the bombshell you have inside you that stimulates you to go ahead to do things, to dream, right? That had gone. When that's gone, that means something's not working.

**OH:** Would your mother have picked that up?

**GR:** Yes. Well, women do pick these things up ---

**OH:** And ...

**GR:** She would have picked it up, I'll continue what you're saying.

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** Because I think you'd like me to add something onto that. I think she would have picked that up. Not knowing what it was, you'd think it could have been anxiety, stress, tired. But never, you know, what it turned out to become. So she'd keep to him, she'd always follow him. They'd never have an argument, well, they'd have normal arguments, okay? Discussions. But they always got on extremely well --- So she'd, you know, just follow him. If he decided to do something: "What do you say?" "Let's go." I don't think Mum wanted to come back to Italy, she lived a nice life there.

**OH:** And her sister ...?

**GR:** Her sister was there. So when Dad decided to come back, she said, okay.

**OH:** To sum up this part of the interview about your family, your parents, you ... what would your parents wanted for you as they saw you grow up?

**GR:** To be successful in whatever I did. Full stop. There was no ambition. Mum wanted me to be a physiotherapist.

**OH:** Why?

**GR:** Because she thought it was a good job. [laughs] She saw it as a good job, helping people, curing people, okay? And you'd never be out of a job. Okay? And what you're doing, you're assisting people to improve their lifestyle.

**OH:** Had you done science subjects at school?

**GR:** The usual subjects that were taught. Then we used to do what? Maths, mathematics from Intermediate on, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, that was it. Before it was Arithmetic, Geometry and Algebra. Then it became Maths and Maths I and Maths II and Physics, Chemistry and then what? Then I did Latin, French, English, History.

**OH:** So you had ...

**GR:** Geography.

**OH:** Quite a wide education ...?

**GR:** Yes, yes, quite a wide education. But I wasn't into science. I was very bad at Maths. The only year that I got good results in Maths was second year when I had a teacher that I could understand and his name was Brother George. And I did excellent and I got excellent results in all my subjects with Brother George. Full stop. When he was gone .... I didn't actually [laughs] didn't bother about it. The important thing for me was to get through.

**OH:** Yeah. But you did ...

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH** Your full secondary education , Leaving Honours because you could have left after Leaving...

**GR:** I did university, I did university too.

**OH:** Yeah and we'll talk about that.

**GR:** I dropped out after a bit but, you know.

**OH:** Was it an easy transition to go from school to university?

**GR:** No, no. Very difficult. No. Going to school at Saint Michael's and living the way I lived, my lifestyle or the ambient that I was surrounded by, when I went to University, I was lost. It was a different world, it was a new world. It was like having gone to the moon.

**OH:** And challenging?

**GR:** Very challenging.

**OH:** Hmmnn ...

**GR:** Very challenging, it was you know ... as I said before, I had never socialised, I had never clung to anything. Not because I didn't want to but because the ambient surrounding, around me didn't give me that possibility.

**OH:** It *didn't* give you the possibility?

**GR:** No, no, not at all.

**OH:** What about your job at the Findon Hotel?

**GR:** Yeah, I ...

**OH:** How old were you when you ...

**GR:** '66, I started working at the Findon, '66, eighteen, eighteen years old.

**OH:** And how did you get that job?

**GR:** Ah, I can't remember.

**OH:** And did your parents think that was okay?

**GR:** Fantastic, I used to love that job.

**OH:** Did you have ...?

**GR:** I was doing university okay? Then I dropped out after a year and then I re-enrolled doing only one subject, French, I did French and I started working at the Findon hotel, part-time. Part-time meant doing a few hours and then they found out I was pretty good with customers. I used to do between 35 to 40 hours a week --- I used to do quite a few hours. I wasn't too bad. I enjoyed it and I was pretty reliable.

**OH:** And not far to go?

**GR:** Not far to go. Bought myself a Beetle, a car. No-one knew about it. I bought it Dad said: "Whose car was that?" I said: "It's mine."

**OH:** Why did you do that?

**GR:** I've always ... because Mum, Dad always said that "I'll buy you a car if you get through school, if you're promoted, I'll buy you a car." Okay, get through school, doesn't buy me car so I'll buy myself a car.

[laughter]

**OH:** Did you have a scholarship to go to university?

**GR:** No, no I wasn't that bright.

**OH:** So ...

**GR:** I used to get kicked up the arse.

**OH:** Who from?

**GR:** No, well, that's just an expression that I use.

**OH:** Oh, okay.

**GR:** No, I got through pretty well. The last year I did, my results weren't too bad, they were pretty good.

**OH:** So who was paying your fees? Or was it already ...

**GR:** No.

**OH:** No, it wasn't free. No.

**GR:** I can't remember.

**OH:** I'm just wondering if you had to work to support yourself?

**GR:** No, not at that stage. I did, well, I was earning good money at the Findon. But it wasn't a need for money. I wasn't in need of money, put it that way. Mum and Dad always looked after me, okay? I wasn't a big spender, I wasn't the type of person who would bludge his way along, I never have been. But Mum and Dad always ... I wasn't a spoilt kid, but I was looked after, put it that way.

**OH:** And were you mixing with other kids when you in that first year at uni?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** And doing what sort of things?

**GR:** Studying.

**OH:** Not going out?

**GR:** No, studying.

**OH:** So you were a dedicated student?

**GR:** Yeah, I was dedicated. Definitely.

**OH:** And what difference did ...?

**GR:** *Too* dedicated.

**OH:** Too?

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** Why?

**GR:** Because to be dedicated to the extent that I was at and to know what I was doing.

**OH:** And it wasn't clear?

**GR:** No.

**OH:** And that's why you dropped out? And then ...

**GR:** Yes, that's why.

**OH:** And what difference did it make having your VW?

**GR:** Being independent. Going where I wanted when I wanted. And not having to ask my father to lend me his car that he wouldn't do or he'd do it but he was so jealous of his car. Can you follow me? So if I had my own car, I'd have no problems.

**OH:** And what kind of car did you have, your Dad?

**GR:** He had a Holden, a nice car. A white one.

**OH:** By that time?

**GR:** Oh yeah.

**OH:** And a new one?

**GR:** Yeah, he had a new one. He changed cars two or three times. Richetto changed cars every two years. Two different personalities, Richetto, my *zio* Richetto. But Dad was, you know, don't need to change the car as often as that, throwing your money away. But you know, he had a nice car.

**OH:** And would you ...?

**GR:** We were pretty well off, you know.

**OH:** Well, I guess with two parents working, and working hard ...

**GR:** Working hard, they worked very hard because I remember when we shifted to Flinders Park, well, you know, our house, the garden that my Mum and Dad created in the house itself was beautiful ... from --- by looking at it, from the landscape point of view ... I won't say it was the best house on the road but you know ... we're nearly there ...

**OH:** And all the attention they were giving to it?

**GR:** Enormous, yes. There wasn't a weed anywhere, flowers and grass and mowed every week. Yeah. Very conscientious people. Abiding. Went by the rules.

**OH:** Yeah. And in that year that you took off were you working entirely at the Findon hotel?

**GR:** I had worked at a supermarket before for about a month or two months. [clears throat] And then I found this job at the Findon. In the bottle department to begin with because I was under age, I didn't have the age to work in the front bar. So you had to be 21, I think it was then. Or 18, I think. No, you had to be 21. I can't remember; anyway I was under age. So I could work in the bottle department. And so I worked there for a while and they said would you like to work in the front bar? That's where all the drunkies came in and I said: "Fantastic." Because we had, you know, we had closing at six, six o'clock closing. Hotels used to close at six o'clock, no alcohol served after 6:00 pm and Sunday was closed. And I used to have a great time because they used to finish work at 5:00 o'clock, the cattle, the bulls used to come in, used to fill the front bar up. That was the Findon hotel which was *the* hotel in Adelaide. I used to have a great time.

**OH:** And you worked on the Sunday shifts?

**GR:** When they had the first Sunday opening, they opened on a Sunday, I was the one who ran the hotel that Sunday with the waitress. I was in the kitchen, we didn't serve anything. No-one came in but we had steaks to prepare, lobsters that I remember and behind the bar, as well. It was interesting.

**OH:** Yeah. It sounds like you wouldn't have had much of a social life if you were working so hard.

**GR:** No. I didn't. I didn't have a social life. I remember working at the Findon and then they introduced a couple of nights a week, dancing until 10:00, 10:30, 11:00 o'clock so I used to work behind the bar and then we'd clean up and I'd get up 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning. Before going home we'd go to the city and have maybe *gnocchi*.

**OH:** Where at?

**GR:** I can't remember.

**OH:** Marcellina's.

**GR:** Perhaps, yeah, perhaps Marcellino's. Yeah.

**OH:** You must have been earning quite good money?

**GR:** I was because working part-time, you were paid quite well.

**OH:** And doing Sundays and things like that, more pay. Yeah.

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** So that would have been an insight into a whole different world?

**GR:** That's it. That's it. You've got it, you've hit the nail on the head. That's when I started broadening my horizons.

**OH:** Because it would have been a very different culture to observe?

**GR:** To observe and to know, intermingle with people. I have a knack for mixing with people.

**OH:** And not many Italians would have gone there?

**GR:** Yes, many.

**OH:** Oh, did they?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Because it was like the local.

**GR:** The Findon was the "in" hotel in Adelaide. When I was there it was the newest hotel they'd built in Adelaide.

**OH:** But there weren't many hotels ...

**GR:** There were hotels on ... there was the Thebarton, the hotel Hindmarsh

**OH:** On Port Road?

**GR:** Port Road.

**OH:** But not that many in that area.

**GR:** You'd have to go to Grange, to Henley, to Lockleys, that I can remember.

**OH:** So the market gardeners ...

**GR:** Well, it was there, it was the hotel, *the Italian hotel*.

**OH:** Did people know who you were?

**GR:** I don't really know, I don't think so. My friends would have but that was it.

**OH:** But not that older generation?

**GR:** No, no, not at all. No. I made quite a few friends there. Actually I sold my Volkswagen to one of the customers.

**OH:** Well you did well, then.

[laughter]

**OH:** Well, Johnny, I think we have done very well with this part of the interview. I'd like to say thank you very much. There's quite a lot more that we will explore in yet another interview. So, thank you for your time today.

**GR:** Thank you.



**Interview No: 2 recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018  
at Bigolino in the province of Treviso, Italy**

**OH:** This is a second interview recorded with Giovanni Reboli. It's being recorded for the Italian market gardeners oral history project. My name is Madeleine Regan and the date is 17th October 2018 and we're recording the interview in the province of Treviso in north-eastern Italy.

Gianni, thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed.

**GR:** Hmmnn.

**OH:** We're going to start the interview just with a couple of items I'd like to follow up from last interview. And one is, you spoke the *veneti* always having a will to work and imperative to work and I wondered if you could say a little bit more about that.

**GR:** Eh, I'll try to be as concise, as brief as I can. The Veneto region, in particular, is known as the region of the *polentone*. *Polenta* was the basic food during the war period, before the war period, made of corn and water and a bit of salt. That's what people basically ate, *polenta*. *Polenta* and a half slice of salami or *polenta* with bits and pieces of cheese or whatever but it was *polenta*, they called them *polentone*. Having lived, the people living in such a poor area and eating *polenta* [laughs] basically, right, saw them strive to improve their condition, okay? And to improve their condition the only means was that of working. So, the reason itself, I won't say the whole part of northern Italy but the region of the north east the Veneto, Friuli, being *polentone* forced them to work in the mines, to work in the fields, to work as farmers, any type of work they did, right? They would work instinctively, maybe it was also because of the climate in which they lived because we don't live in a warm climate. It's warm in a few months in summer but then we have a very strong and very long winter which lasts six months. So, you know, the people here are not affected so much by the warm climate, they're more affected by an intermediate climate and the colder climates the people are pushed to work, right? Work is not physical, work physical labour is not a suffering for them, it seems to be natural, okay?

And so --- the Veneto in general became recognised in Italy as *polentone* but workers, you could rely on the Veneto, I'm not saying it because I'm Veneto, it's neither here nor there for me, it's neither good nor bad, as people, you could rely on to get the job done, quickly and done well. So the Veneto in general are people who have suffered the pangs of hunger, right? And --- seeing the possibility of improving their fate in life of improving their living conditions, they worked for. They didn't scheme for them. I don't know where this comes from, from their genes but they worked very hard to improve their fate in life, in *any* situation or in *all* situations in all conditions. Working was the sole scope, in general, of the Veneto people. Working.

**OH:** And so they ...?

**GR:** Working day and night. I can remember Mum and Dad, Mum and Dad used to work at General Motors Holdens and my uncle used to work at General Motors and he'd have another two jobs or three jobs backed on a Saturday or a Sunday. I remember my father working as a cleaner at General Motors or working as a warehouse keeper and when they asked for volunteers to clean the chimneys at General Motors Woodville, he'd volunteer to go inside the chimneys and clean them. I don't know how tall the chimneys were, they'd be about 20 metres tall or high, sorry.

So they were not afraid to work because it meant improving their fate in life, improving their living conditions.

**OH:** And did improving living conditions include owning land?

**GR:** Yes, definitely.

**OH:** So was there a connection between the idea of working and ownership of land?

**GR:** Well, ownership simply meant that you were improving your position in life. You could afford to invest what you had made, right? In something that guarantees you in a better way, your life.

**OH:** So that ...

**GR:** It wouldn't be only money, money could come and could go but in land you could have a better guarantee.

**OH:** So when your parents and Richetto and Mattiazzo bought those three blocks, that was part of that sense of putting down ...

**GR:** Ownership.

**OH:** Ownership.

**GR:** Ownership, creating roots, creating a sense of independence, economic independence and starting to create an identity for themselves ---

**OH:** In Australia?

**GR:** In Australia, starting to create an identity, I don't want to go further into that. But you know, it all ... you do start to create a sort of belonging to where you immigrated once you start you creating roots there. So, a house is setting roots to a place where you're living.

06:18

**OH:** And was it also an investment in terms of a future for you? Would that have been in your parents' mind?

**GR:** I think so, being Italians, but I think any parent in any culture over the world would think of that sort of investment also for the children. I don't think it isn't limited to the fact of being a Veneto or an Italian. I think it's general.

**OH:** Did your parents become naturalized in Australia?

**GR:** My father became naturalized back in 1952.

**OH:** And how important would that have been for him?

**GR:** Very important.

**OH:** And your mother?

**GR:** No ---- Eh, Mum, they never actually worried about Mum becoming, it was never even thought of, not even considered. It wasn't a fact of wanting to remain Italian at all costs. It wasn't even considered. I think, you know they'd discussed Mum applying for the Australian citizenship, it would not have been a problem at all, from my father's side.

**OH:** But it wasn't obviously a priority for her?

**GR:** It was not a priority for her, not all. Mum was always very, very happy, she was happy with her life. She'd never thought of acquiring an Australian citizenship. Even her sister Eti and Richetto's, my Uncle Richetto's wife, she became an Australian citizen, I don't want to be

mistaken but I think, in the early '70s --- because she was living there and they decided well, you know [laughs] why not become an Australian .... I live here so I may as well become an Australia citizen, I love living here so that's it. Mum would have done the same thing.

**OH:** And you obviously have dual citizenship?

**GR:** Yes, I do.

**OH:** And was that something that you opted into or ... ?

**GR:** No, when Dad became a naturalized Australian, the children automatically acquired the citizenship of the father. So when Dad became naturalized, I automatically became an Australian citizen.

**OH:** Right. And where we left off the last interview, we were talking about the way you had started living as a fairly independent, young adult ...

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Going to university?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Working at the Findon hotel?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** And then you made the decision to return to Italy? So ...

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Could you talk about ...

**GR:** Well, the decision wasn't made ... it was made, you know, years before because I had always thought of Italy, right? And it was always lingering in my mind because my father had always spoken of Italy, spoken of his father, right?

**OH:** And was that sense of being like, of not being able to be with his father because he was a migrant living in Australia?

**GR:** I think both, my father, my Uncle Richetto, my Auntie Ginevra, I think they all suffered, missing their father. Their father ... the other sister that remained in Italy, Maria, was supposed ... they had asked her and her husband to come to Australia --- Bringing our grandfather, bringing their father to Australia too, this is in the early '50s so when they were set up in Australia, they said you should come to Australia too because it's a land of opportunity. But I think that my Auntie Maria, she was the oldest of the children [sound of phone] She didn't want to leave, Italy, she did not want to leave. So that never worked out.

**OH:** Would your *nonno* have come, have gone to Australia?

**GR:** --- Very difficult to say that but he was alone, he was living with his daughter, he had no other contacts except for his brother, he had a brother here. But that was it, he had no other contacts. I think he would have come.

**OH:** So back to you and your decision ...

**GR:** Hmm...

**OH:** How did that, you know, play out? You were, how old?

**GR:** Well, you know, when I was thinking of coming to Italy, I would have been about ... let's see I'm going back a few years now. Eh, I left when I was 19, right. I arrived in Australia, er Italy, I think 28th December 1967 on a cruiser on the *Guiglomo Marconi*. It was a voyage that took or lasted 31 or 32 days because the Suez Canal had been blocked. That year there was the Six Day War between Egypt and Israel and they had sunk many ships in the Suez Canal so we rounded Cape of Good Hope and it took us instead of 21 days, 31 days or 32 days. So --- I remember, yeah, it was a wonderful trip, it was a cruiser ship. I was 19 years old and you can imagine ... When I left before leaving ... I'd always dreamed of going to Italy, I'd always dreamed of the place, you know, where I had been born simply because my father had always spoken well of Italy. He'd never spoken badly, he'd never spoken of the war. He spoke of the war but in a very objective fashion.

**OH:** Had ...?

**GR:** He never took sides... never took sides, my father. He always had great respect for everyone.

**OH:** Had your parents returned to Italy?

**GR:** No, they'd never returned before. No, they'd never returned.

**OH:** Had they kept up contact with their families here?

**GR:** The only contact then was an epistolary contact, letters, so you'd write letters, and you know ... Yes, my father would write letters to *his* father. And I imagine that Richetto that would do the same with ... as my father.

**OH:** So you ...

**GR:** They were the only contacts that we had, or they had. I would write, as a kid, I remember, you know, a postscript, a *postscriptum* in my Dad's letter. I would write some thoughts to my grandfather.

**OH:** And did your grandfather reply?

**GR:** My grandfather would reply, yes. Yes.

**OH:** So, you had this feeling simmering away?

**GR:** Definitely. Since I was a kid, I had this feeling, as you say, simmering away. Ah, and it never subsided, okay? As I grew up, maybe it would have been put in the background of my mind somewhere but it was always there. It never went away, it never went away, as a child, it always remained.

**OH:** Did you talk about it to anybody?

**GR:** Eh, to my, well, to my cousins, in particular, Bruno and Rosanna.

**OH:** And did they ...?

**GR:** And to Tony Brice, I had a very good friend, a couple of friends that I had in Australia. Yes. Yes, I did. Now that I remember ... Phew, for heaven's sake. You know, as I was getting, as the ... when word went out that I was leaving for Italy --- quite a few friends, people I knew, kids that I used to go to school with used to come round to my place, to see me, and you know, to find out why I was going, and where I was going.

**OH:** So that would have been Tony Brice?

**GR:** No, Tony had already left, Tony was in England then.

**OH:** Oh okay.

**GR:** He'd already left, Tony. He'd left with some friends, he went to England, he decided to leave Adelaide to you know, to leave, as young people do, to see the world. And he was living in the UK, I don't know where in England. He said he was working on a pig farm somewhere on a pig farm, that was one of his jobs.

[laughter]

**OH:** And so who were the boys who came around to talk to you about this?

**GR:** Enzo Giuliani... What's his name? Oh, I can't even remember their names. One is a very, very important doctor somewhere in Australia, and a dentist. One's a very important doctor and one is a dentist.

**OH:** Were these boys that you'd gone to school with?

**GR:** These, the last two, no. They were friends that I'd gotten to know afterwards.

**OH:** And from Italian families?

**GR:** No, English, Australian guys.

**OH:** So they were curious, like why were you leaving?

**GR:** Well, we were friends. More than curious, right? We were friends, they'd come round: [laughing] "Why are you going?" "What do you want to go for?" At that age, you know, they could understand, it was an adventure. You know, at that age, when you're 18, 19, it's an adventure, everyone wants to see the world, okay? Everyone wants to travel, to understand, so basically that's why they came to find out why I was going. But you know, it wasn't in a negative way, it was in a positive way.

**OH:** What about some of the boys from Italian Australian families that you knew?

**GR:** Enzo Zuliani, Basso, quite a few did come across. Yes, I spoke to quite a few of them. Now I can't remember offhand but I think most of them, I would have spoken, or they would have spoken to me and I would have exchanged my thoughts: "Why are you going?" because of you know, blah, blah, blah. For sure.

**OH:** And you weren't exactly second generation Australian because you had been born in Italy.

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** But some of those Italian Australian boys that you were mixing with were second generation

...

**GR:** Well, it was ...

**OH:** And I'm wondering if they had any similar feelings about connections because ...

**GR:** Well, they could have because ... as you said, I wasn't born in Australia but I was two years old when I got there. Which is basically, you know, two years, at the age of two, you've got no memories of, I have no memories of my life in Italy before I left for Australia, none at all. I do have memories of when I arrived in Australia and I was two years old. I have distinctively clear memories of ... at the age of two in Australia so, you know.

**OH:** But did it make a difference for your feeling that you had been born in Italy or was it ... ?

**GR:** I was proud of being born in Italy. Getting back... once again, this search for an identity, this need to find where I belonged --- it can be a physical need, okay? But it can also be a metaphysical need --- Okay? So, in my case, it's, I think perhaps it was more a metaphysical need than a physical one. A physical one you can solve quite easily, a metaphysical one's a bit more complicated.

**OH:** Can you say a little more about that metaphysical need in terms of that movement from Australia to Italy?

**GR:** You're complicating my life now.

[laughter]

**GR:** You're complicating ... I've always been considered a thinker, unfortunately which doesn't mean that I'm an intelligent guy. But I've always been considered a thinker and also from a very young age. and --- I think I mentioned this last time, I've always, even as a young child I've always --- in Australia in particular, being surrounded by a sense of emptiness, of not belonging, right? Which is both physical, I see it as both physical and mental. I never grew up having a good or a full social life, I didn't have a social, I didn't know what birthdays were. Not because my parents were bad [laughs] they weren't, they were excellent parents. But there was not social, it was ... the only social life was with my Uncle Richetto, my cousins, Bruno and Rosanna, basically. The other cousins, Ivan, Angelo and Cosetta from my *zia* Ginevra's side, were younger than I am, five years younger, five, six and seven years younger so there was a bit of a separation. So it was basically with Richetto's kids, this need of belonging. As I said last time we spoke, living in a family where your parents, your father, in particular, who's got a good mind, who's a good reader, who understands the world, right ... often speaks to you of Europe because he is, he lived it himself. When he speaks of Europe, he speaks of Italy, he speaks of Germany, his experiences in Germany. My father used to speak to me of these things, okay?

Growing up with this reality, speaking the Veneto dialect or one of the Veneto dialects and growing up in Adelaide --- ah, and going to school with this heritage --- that I was living in a house, in a household and living and going to school and you know, not understanding the heritage --- the new heritage that I was living, not understanding it, not being able to perceive, not being able to feel it, not being able to understand it --- perhaps because it wasn't taught. I have a distinct feeling that it wasn't taught. I am the type of the person who *needs* to be taught, who needs to understand, I'm very, very curious, so people have to tell me. As a kid, I needed people to follow me, to tell me, to explain --- because I'm very enthusiastic, very, very curious and this was never done. So I sort of grew up in an ambient which was --- good, proper but never with [sound of mobile phone] a real sense of you know, understanding where I was living. And never really feeling a part of where I was living. Always feeling as though I was living on the outskirts. Does that make sense to you?

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** Makes sense to me.

**OH:** Yes, I can ...

[laughter]

**OH:** Really understand it and also from the perspective of somebody who was a thinker, you know ...

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** Trying to kind of filter ...

**GR:** They didn't understand the metaphysical side, didn't explain the metaphysical side, did it?

**OH:** No.

**GR:** Hmmnn... that's a step further ahead because the metaphysical side embraces what I call a spiritual concept --- of your being, of yourself, right? Spiritual concept in the world and so I don't want to delve into that, now because I don't think it's necessary. People can understand it, can believe it or not believe it. For me it's important because I do believe that, I believe personally that humanity has a basic --- a basic point in common which is, you know, everyone is --- living their life as a common, as a common goal, has a common --- how do you say, has a common feeling of what is --- is good --- and of what is bad --- so you know, metaphysical belonging means, you know, Australia, Italy definitely but it goes beyond that, right? And you know, we're getting off immigrants, Veneto immigrants in Australia, now we're going beyond that. When things become metaphysical we go beyond the normal reality of day-to-day life. I don't want to delve further into that at the moment.

**OH:** Okay --- that's fine. You said something to me in an email ...

**GR:** Right.

**OH:** About the idea of identity where --- you have an understanding of customs, emotions, signs and perfumes, you know that like ....

**GR:** Oh, in Australia?

**OH:** These are things that ...

**GR:** They cling to me.

**OH:** And are part of your identity now?

**GR:** Yes, oh definitely. Even though I've been living in Italy now for 50 years, I've gone back to Australia quite a few times and I go, I will go back, continue going back --- but this is what clings to me now. What clings to me more now is the emptiness of Australia, that I can understand.

**OH:** In a positive or negative?

**GR:** In an extremely positive way.

**OH:** The emptiness of ...?

**GR:** The emptiness of the land --- because I can understand, I can see the emptiness of the land, I can see the beauty of the emptiness, I can distinguish the colours better there. I can distinguish the smells, the perfumes, the water, the sea water, in particular, the air, the wind, the trees, nature itself. It really affects me, personally.

**OH:** So that's metaphysical, in a way.

**GR:** To a certain extent, yes.

**OH:** And it's certainly about the kind of sensory perception of life?

**GR:** Definitely, definitely.

**OH:** So that's really interesting.

**GR:** Mmnn...

**OH:** To have that comparison, you know, with Italy.

**GR:** Yes, it's ... whereas in Italy at the moment, you know, I can identify myself much more, now I can identify my childhood with Australia --- My childhood *is* Australia. Now. When I was living there, it wasn't. My childhood ... Well, I didn't have a childhood, put it that way.

**OH:** And you were hearing the ...

**GR:** I was living on what --- what I was told.

**OH:** Yes. And hearing about Italy?

**GR:** And hearing about Italy.

**OH:** And having that connection back here?

**GR:** That's right.

**OH:** Back here?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** So it was like the imbalance?

**GR:** It was neither here nor there.

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** So you know, going back to what you were saying, the perfumes, the sense, emotions --- I, I live them now. I can understand them. What's important to me is understanding them, having come to terms with them.

**OH:** How long did it take you?

**GR:** Oh, it didn't take me long --- I think, the age of 23, 24. I wasn't there, but as you mature, as you start living your life, as you start travelling, as you start opening your mind, meeting people, seeing different countries, you know, you start realising this. It takes a little bit of time. It took *me* a little bit of time. I don't want to be too general. [laughs]

**OH:** No, no and everybody's experience is obviously

**GR:** Unique

**OH:** Different, yeah, yeah. So when you returned to Italy at that time when you were 19, did you see your future here in Italy rather than Australia?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Oh, definitely?

**GR:** I had no doubts.

**OH:** So what did you say to your parents?

**GR:** "I'm not coming back."

**OH:** Just like that?

**GR:** Just like that.

**OH:** What about your auntie and uncle and your cousins?

**GR:** Well, it was natural, if I said to my parents it would have been, that was it. They were disappointed. My cousin. In particular, Bruno. But I'd made a decision. When I make a decision, it's made, I don't waver. I'm not a bad person. But you know, for me, it was a question of understanding who *I* was. I mean, if you want to associate with people, if you want to create a

relationship, you've got to know who you are first, you've got to look after yourself first. You can't look after others if you don't know who you are. [laughs]

**OH:** No, no. That's true.

[sound of Johnny laughing]

**OH:** So what about your first impressions then, when you arrived in Bigolino? Oh, it was made ... my first impression, as I said, for me it was a joy when I got here. It was a joy, I got here at midnight --- of all things. And I remember ...

**OH:** Who met you?

**GR:** --- Actually no-one met me. [laughs] They were going from one railway station to another, waiting for me and I arrived on a bus. And it was all arranged by the travel agents, a travel agent called Cusinato from Castelfranco. They picked up all the Veneto people, the people from the Veneto in Genova because we arrived in Genova, the port of Genova they loaded us on the bus from Genova. And we drove from Genova which is about 500 ks from here on a bus. And we arrived in Castelfranco Veneto. From Castelfranco Veneto, there were several taxis taking people to the different villages and I was put on a taxi with another three people and I was the last one to get off. And when we got to Bigolino, the lighting was shocking and I didn't know where to go, I just knew the name of my grandfather and of my auntie and my uncle but you know, there was no address. There was an address at home but where.

There were no roads so ... It was a bar, the lights of the bar was open, ... were on, sorry, the lights of the bar were on. So we stopped, the taxi driver stopped, went into the bar, so I followed him. And he asked: "Can anyone tell me where Silvio Lucchetta lives and Giovanni Reboli?" And the guy said: "I know where he lives. Why? Why do you want to know?" [laughs] "Well, his nephew's arrived from Australia." So, you know, that's when the party started. He said: "Don't worry. Come with me, I'll take you there." So he got in his car and we followed him and he took me to my Uncle's place, my grandfather's place. So it was midnight and they'd been waiting for me for five or six or ten hours. They had the table prepared with food and everything. [laughs] And I remember my, my, grandfather coming down the stairs, the bedroom was upstairs, farmhouse, a very, very poor farmhouse and pulling up his braces. [laughs] He was dumbfounded.

**OH:** Could he, did he understand your reason for coming back?

**GR:** --- No. --- Or he could. I don't want to say no because you never know what people think. Oh, my grandfather, I didn't have a very long relationship with my grandfather. I'd never known him before. We clicked immediately. He wasn't a big talker. The only big talker in my family is myself. But, you know, we got on very, very well together. He was a very good man.

**OH:** So you began living in the house?

**GR:** I lived in that house for six months or seven months. It was very very poor, an extremely poor situation.

**OH:** And a big contrast to your living conditions in Adelaide?

**GR:** It was a ... someone would have said: "You're absolutely crazy, you're mad." It was like going from Adelaide to India. Okay? But I was extremely happy, I was meeting people. I was going out meeting friends, cousins that I hadn't known, talking to them and they were asking me about Australia and I was asking them about Italy. And I started to live my own life, social life, getting to know people --- getting to know myself, talking to people you start getting to know

yourself also. Whereas this was missing for me in Australia, can you follow me? So, you know, meeting a lot of people, I always enjoyed going out, talking to people, meeting people --- I made a lot of friends when I was here, the first couple of weeks, full of friends, friends everywhere, I'd go out every night ---

**OH:** What did you intend to do, like you know what ...?

**GR:** I had no idea.

**OH:** What were you thinking?

**GR:** I bought a car.

**OH:** Not a Volkswagen?

**GR:** I bought, no.

[laughter]

**GR:** I bought a Fiat 500.

[laughter]

**GR:** I bought a Fiat 500. And after a while I was running out of money because you know, I earned some money and I was running out of money. I didn't want to ask my father for money because that would have been too hard. I ended up asking him to send me some money afterward because it wasn't enough for me. I wasn't, you know, a spoilt, I'd never been spoilt child but my parents always looked after me. But once again but I never went over the bend, I never did silly things. But I started, I went to work in a mink farm, on a mink farm. There was, in Valdobbiadene, there used to be the largest mink farm in Europe. They used to have 25,000 minks, they grew there. I worked there for a few months so I was getting a salary.

**OH:** What did you do?

**GR:** Oh, I used to feed the minks, feed the minks, do whatever odd jobs that were to be done there.

**OH:** This is minks that get killed to make mink coats?

**GR:** Yes, mink coats, yes. So this was my first working experience. Oh, and I enjoyed it. For me it was completely different. You know, leaving, having grown up in Adelaide, everything was quite formal, we had a nice house, telephone, nothing was missing, shopping centres. Here there was nothing like that, absolutely nothing. But I could see that there was a vibrant place. The people were extremely happy, the people were working. The quality of life was not high, it was pretty low but the people were happy, they were working. And you could see that you know, something was on the move but it was going quickly.

33:46

**OH:** You're talking about economically?

**GR:** Economically, economically.

**OH:** And what about the contact with your parents?

**GR:** Oh, we used to call on the telephone. There used to be a public phone that I used to use to talk to them. So you know ...

**OH:** Were they ... you know, what was the communication, Aare you okay?" Or...

**GR:** *Si, si.* Very simple, very simple communication.

**OH:** And at what point did ... ?

**GR:** They decided after six months to leave Australia. They sold the house, they sold everything and they came back. I'll be very, very quick about this because there were no questions asked. "I don't want to come back", I said. "I don't want to come back. I want to stay here, feel comfortable here, I like it here", and that was it. Don't forget what I told you last time, my father had spoken, all of his life was Australia although he loved living in Australia, but he'd always spoken of Italy, of his father --- and I think, just getting off the topic slightly, I think my father, as I mentioned, was suffering from extreme anxiety in Australia and we realised that he had a problem very, very late when he returned to Italy, and as I told you, at the age ---, well, at the age of 63, I had to put him in a rest home because he had dementia --- but dementia does not break out all of a sudden --- So thinking about it after he was put in the rest home, I was forced to put him in the rest home --- so when you start thinking about the dementia, you start realising that years ago he used to be very anxious, even when he was in Australia he used to be very anxious towards the later stages of his life in Australia. So there was something not working very well, at that stage, he was not a brutal man, he was not a violent man, he was always mild, very meek and mild, you know very abiding, never had any problems but at the end, he was very, very anxious.

**OH:** And where did ... ?

**GR:** So that's when I decided to come here. And when we spoke on the phone and I said I'm not coming back, he didn't, you know, he said "Okay."

**OH:** And er ...

**GR:** I think he was just focusing his life on me ... which is wrong but [long pause]

**OH:** I didn't ask you what did people here think about you?

**GR:** oh, they loved me. [laughs] Don't misunderstand me, they used to call me 'l'Americano'.

[sound of laughter]

**OH:** Can you explain what that means?

**GR:** American, because, you know, if you came from Australia, you were from America. This was how Australia, this is how Australia was conceived *then*.

**OH:** In terms of ...

**GR:** It wasn't Australia, it was America.

**OH:** Like wealth.

**GR:** In Australia, you came from Americano wealth. If you came from Australia, you were a wealthy person. They had no idea of some perhaps did of what it meant really ... to have been a migrant. Some here, still don't, no idea, no conception at all.

**OH:** People your own age called you 'Americano'?

**GR:** *Si.* One, in particular. It only takes one to start. One, he actually, he's become one of my very best friends." L'Americano. Guarda l'Americano. Guarda l'Americano!" And that just caught on.

**OH:** Was there a touch of irony about that too?

**GR:** *Si.* Definitely. There wasn't a reason why, you know, I didn't brag, or I didn't act as if I had, you know, was filthy rich at all. No, not at all. No, no he just called me 'l'Americano' because that

was it because I came from Australia. I used to tell him, "Look, Australia's not America, Australia's totally different."

[laughter]

**OH:** So when your parents came back after six months, where did they live?

**GR:** After ... We all lived in [pauses to think] we went to live --- just go back a little bit now --- one of my Dad's and Richetto's cousins called Bortolo Reboli, Bortolino, came to Australia the same year that my Dad came but he was born in 1929 or 1930, he was ten years younger than my father and nine years younger than Richetto. He left for Australia too. He was the son of my grandfather's --- brother and they used to live in the same house, under the same roof basically when they were younger. And so he went to Australia but he returned from Australia back in 1956. He went to Australia in 1949 and returned to Italy in 1956 or 1957. And he didn't go back to Australia again. He wanted to stay in Australia but having been the only son, he remained. He married, a lovely lady, called Marisa Adami and Maria Luisa Adami and we called her Marisa.

They opened up a ... they started working in an *osteria*, they took *osteria*, they rented an *osteria*, an *osteria* is a bar where they had wine, *sorpresa*, sandwiches, whatever. And they made that their business, they had rented initially an *osteria* in Ciano di Montello and then they bought a place in Valdobbiadene --- and they still own it now. So when my parents came, Nino Bortolo had bought with his wife an *osteria* in Valdobbidaene and it had quite a few rooms upstairs, empty rooms. So when Mum and Dad came here, we went to live at the *osteria* --- so bedroom, kitchen, everything, everything was there. Ah well.

[sounds of a bird singing are audible in this part of the interview]

**OH:** Was Bortolo's wife from here? Or from Australia?

**GR:** Yes, from here. Yes.

**OH:** When your parents decided to come back here, what did Richetto and Eti think?

**GR:** [Sighs] I don't know.

**OH:** What that have been ...

**GR:** There would have been suffering for sure. [pause] Would have been a lot of suffering, pain, emotional pain.

**OH:** How did your parents settle into life here?

**GR:** Quite well, quite well. As I said, there was plenty of work. Actually, they were very, very lucky because Mum has a cousin who has died now but he was the owner of the *Locanda da Lino* restaurant in the Veneto. If we have time, I'd like to take you there [laughs], a beautiful place, it's incredible, it used to be called *Da Lino*, *Locanda Da Lino* in a village called Solighetto which is in the municipality of Pieve di Soligo which is about 15 ks from here. The most renowned restaurant in the Veneto.

**OH:** How is it ...?

**GR:** Artistically decorated. And the owner is called Lino Toffolim, Mum's first cousin. A lovely man, an artist, an artist in all senses, besides being an excellent cook, he was an excellent artist, a self-made man. [bird song is loud] And they asked them, they invited them to the restaurant and said: "If you're looking for a job, you can work here". "Amabile", he'd say, "You can work at the table, you can work at the bar, you can serve at the tables, do whatever you like." My father, he said: "You could look after the cellar for me, look after cars." Dad was making more money on tips

than he was on his salary. The place was always chock-a-block, they used to have the major actors in Italy go there, Marcello Mastroianni, opera singers, it was full of the cream of the cream. It was incredible place, then. I'd say it was number one, I won't say it was the number one in Italy, but nearly.

**OH:** And did your parents bring back to the Veneto any customs or traditions from Australia, do you think?

**GR:** pause] I think the only thing they brought back, my Dad brought back the simplicity of doing things, the pragmatism, the simplicity of doing things. Whereas in Italy even then, things used to be quite complicated on the administrative, if you know what I mean, side of things. Can we just hold it for a second?

**OH:** Certainly

43:39.

**OH:** We're resuming the interview after a short pause and Gianni I wanted to ask you a couple of more questions about your parents. What do you think Adelaide meant to your parents? To each of them?

**GR:** What did it mean?

**OH:** Hmm ...

**GR:** I think it meant something different for both because they were two different people. I'll just repeat myself. Mum was very happy --- as most Italian women would have been leaving Italy going to Australia. They would no longer be dependent on the patriarch Italian style that used to exist in those years. They'd be freer even though living in the Reboli family, in our family, you know, there was no patriarch, my rather was very ... my father, my uncle and all the people I knew had always been very, very open, very, very straightforward. they never imposed their manhood on the women, never. Never, not once. They were always very good. But you know, Mum was very happy there. She lived her life as a normal lady, she used to love working, never complained about anything. She was very lucky because she never had any physical illnesses, never in Australia. Never suffered anything at all. Always went to work. She used to love going shopping even though she'd buy a kilo of salt when she went shopping because you had to save your money. But, you know, she lived a wonderful life, she just enjoyed living.

Ah, Dad used to be, as I mentioned last time, a big reader, he used to read newspapers, Italian papers, Australian papers, he'd read a bit of everything, he was a big thinker, my father. I think my --- my father was a European, mentally speaking. There was a culture in his mind and then his upbringing. He went beyond normal, you know, he would read, he was a person who could read between the lines. He had this innate intelligence or capability in him. So I don't know what he would thought about Adelaide. I think he would have thought that Adelaide was a bit of a dead place. I think. But he enjoyed it, you know he never ... My father never made any, any negative comments about Australia, never, not once.

**OH:** Did they go back to Adelaide at all?

**GR:** No, no.

**OH:** When did your parents die?

**GR:** Uh, No, it wasn't a question of dying. --- In 196xx, hold on, in 1972, Mum had a stroke. So she was 58 and I was 34. --- And my father would have been 62. She had a stroke and I was in Saudi Arabia, working. I used to work for a furniture company, export. And I'd just left for Saudi

Arabia that day for Jeddah. It was a two-week tour of the Middle East. I had to come back immediately. She was in a coma, sorry, sorry [speaks softly after touching the microphone] She was in a coma. Do you say it like that?

OH: Hmm.

GR: They said she wouldn't, you know, survive but I got home after two days. And she got through the -- *ictus*.<sup>12</sup> Semi-paralysed. And after three months she was walking on her own. And she was moving her arms. She only suffered, her right leg, she wasn't walking very well but she was walking. In that period, my father whom I've already mentioned used to suffer from anxiety, from other problems, just plunged. He lost his wits, he lost his mind, he lost himself. Ah, and --- while she was in hospital, I was working and I used to, you know, I had to look after my Mum, I used to go and see my Mum and I looked after my Dad who was at home. And --- before, you know --- I'll go through this quickly. When Mum came home from hospital after three months, my father was no longer with us. If you can understand. Mentally he'd become another person, he'd become a child --- Not a violent person, an extremely good person but he'd lost his mind. And I took him to the doctor, we had scans done to his brain. And I'd have scans done to his brain before because I'd noticed something wasn't clicking.

But you know, "Oh", they said: "There's nothing wrong, there's no tumour, no nothing at all." When I had the scans redone again in 1982, in 1982, they said: "Well, look at the scan there's nothing wrong, he's got no tumour. But your father's brain is like the brain of a 90-year old, a 95-year old, not of a 60 year old. So his brain was consumed. --- The blood vessels had become water not liquor, the brain had just disappeared. So you know, unfortunately this happened in --- quite a short space of time. --- So --- what was your question again? ... I've just got lost.

OH: We were talking about ... I asked about when your parents died

GR: Right.

OH: And you said there was more of a context.

GR: That's right so this occurred in 1982 so --- fortunately Mum survived, recovered when she came back, when she got out of hospital, she needed someone to assist her. But at the end of the day, she had to assist my father who was in dire need of support but for another type of support. And --- at that time too, I think I told you last time, or speaking with you, I called my Uncle Richetto and my auntie Etti to inform them that Mum was in a bad condition and they told me that their son Bruno had cancer. --- So it was you know --- [laughs] it was a pretty big shock. Uh, Bruno, so this is 1982. Mum recovered excellently. Dad went from --- from bad to worse, always maintaining that mild, meek attitude but he didn't know what he was doing, no idea. Night, Mum used to call me: "Your Dad's gone." So he'd be gone, he'd leave the house at 3:00 o'clock in the morning in his underpants. I used to get in the car and go looking for him. But this happens when someone suffers from dementia.

I used to work for, I used to work in the export department of a furniture manufacturing company. I used to do quite a bit of travelling, I used to be the area manager for the Middle East. And doing travelling and being away quite often from home, not only travelling but with customers in Italy for public relations, you know going out to restaurants, meeting people you know ... Mum could not cope with my father any more, she needed to have someone to help her. And she could not look after him because when she turned her back, he'd be gone. He'd be walking bare-footed under

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<sup>12</sup> A stroke

the rain, whatever. So I had to decide, I made a very drastic decision that I thought I'd never make. I had to find a rest home and those years the rest homes were not top quality. So I went hunting for a rest home that I could visit daily with Mum. And which I found at Valdobbiadene, it wasn't, you know, a very good rest home, it was pretty shabby when I had my father put into the rest home. But I had no other alternative. There was no alternative. after six months he was put in the rest home in 1983, in 1983, after six months, they started improving the structure of the rest home, okay? They started to hire more professional nurses but it took them two or three years before they reached a certain sustainable, let's say, a certain, decent moral level for these patients. Ah -- in 1983, 3rd May, Bruno died, passed away, in Australia, Richetto's son.

**OH:** And he was aged?

**GR:** He was 36 years old. Yeah, I went down to Australia in December 1982, and I came back in 1983, January, just to see him before he passed away. --- [sound of sigh] So he passed away in '83, I put my father in the rest home in '83 and --- I lived with Mum here in this house since she passed away in 19, sorry in 2016. So Dad passed away after living in the rest home for seven years. He passed away in 1990, he was 70 years old. Ah, living in the rest home, for seven years, the first year, say, was pretty shabby, I wasn't very happy at all. None of us were very happy but there weren't many alternatives mainly because we had to go, Mum wanted to go every day, to see him. So we'd go up and see him, feed him or shave his beard or whatever on a daily basis. Going to a rest home on a daily basis, the people who work there, know you're going there so they have a different attitude towards that patient. I think this is familiar, you can be familiar with this. Anyway, things did appear after a couple of years, the structure improved considerably, more professional nurses, etcetera, etcetera, Even the structure, they shifted them into another, say, better hospital, a better ward, so we would visit Dad daily, even twice a day. This went on for seven years. And --- he passed away in 1990 in June, I'd say June 1990, I can't remember the day. I think which was a blessing because you know, he was, he'd completely, he wasn't with us any more. He wasn't with us when he was recovered, when I had to put him in the rest home but at the end of the year, he was gone. I lived with Mum. Mum was extremely --- positive, strong, ah she'd lived a very good life.

**OH:** And you'd told me story about asking her whether she would like to go back to Australia.

**GR:** Eh, I was going to take her back to Australia, back in the '90s, I think, I can't remember now exactly when it was. I had a passport made for her, she didn't know. So, I had a passport. She'd say: "I don't have a passport." And I'd say: "If you come to Australia, you can come with me." She was fine to travel. But my doctor he said, he suggested: "No, don't. You're doing a bad thing because of what she's suffered, she could suffer more because of the stroke she had, she's had, and she could suffer even more when she gets there because if she's got memories, and she's got her sister there. Right? She'll be torn between here and there, he said. Try not to do that. Let her live her life happily as she's living now. So, I asked her and she said: "No, I don't want to go back." She did want to go back but she said: "No, I don't want to go back." You can understand me?

**OH:** Yes. But you told me something about the "burning ember"?

**GR:** Oh yes this was [laughs] This was in 2015 --- we were in, I used to take her for a drive on a Sunday, and in the car coming back from Montebelluna, I like joking, I've always like joking, I've always liked joking with her too. Mum, she used to speak little, she didn't speak very much but she had a subtle, she had a subtle irony. Oh, for heaven's sake [handles the microphone] She

had a subtle irony to her that I'd never understood, I had never understood the subtle irony that she used to have ... Could I hold it here? [the microphone]

**OH:** You could hold it...

**GR:** I will.

**OH:** But it's probably easier to put it on.

**GR:** No, no.

**OH:** Okay, alright.

**GR:** And --- I said to her one day driving the car, it dawned on me, it's one of those things you intuit, this intuition that some people normally have, and it came to me late in life. And I said, "Mum.", I said, driving the car. "Mum, can I say something to you? She said: "What?" " I finally realised, you know, who you are. She said: "What do you mean?" And I looked at her in the car as I was driving and I said in Italian dialect, I said: "*Tu se una bronza querta.*" And she looked at me and started laughing. [sighs] *Bronza querta* is a burning amber, correct?

**OH:** Ember.

**GR:** Ember, sorry, it's a burning ember that's covered with ashes. You can't see it, but it's burning. You've got to be very careful where you put your hands. She laughed. So, I said: "I've hit the nail on the head."

[laughter]

[A long pause]

**GR:** It was very funny.

**OH:** She appreciated it?

**GR:** Oh, enormously, [laughs]

**OH:** Gianni, can we go back to you being in Italy. Your parents came, and then at some point you decided to go to university in Venice?

**GR:** Right. So, I worked on the mink farm for a few months and I used to, we used to make wooden pallets for a few months there too., I worked for a butcher, a wholesale butcher for a few months and I continued that in my university holidays. I didn't know what to do, you know because I didn't want to continue working making pallets. I'd gone to university in Australia, so I said --- I had met through Robert Berno was here from Adelaide. We'd gone to the same college, St Michael's College in Australia, he'd come back--- to Italy for different reasons than mine. His Mum wanted to come back to Italy, and they came back. They're from Riese, and he came, he came to see me --- with his parents. I remember one day they came to Valdobbiadene with his Dad etcetera. Evidently, they wanted, his parents decided to come back for the Mum's sake, okay? At the end of the day, he said, I said "I don't know what to do." He didn't know what to do.

"Well, why don't we enrol in university?" So we tried, we went to Padova one day, to try to get into Padova, I can't remember the faculty but we got there too late, it was too late to enrol, we got there the wrong month. We didn't know the timings here and we'd met a guy called Silvio Toffolon, who became my best man from Bessica di Loria who was studying in Venice, Ca' Foscari.<sup>13</sup> And I'd met a girl from Bigolino who was doing Languages in Ca' Foscari, the university

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<sup>13</sup> Johnny explained in the editing process that he was godfather to Silvio's only son – it was a special bond

of Ca' Foscari in Venice in 1962. So one thing, so not getting into Padova because it was too late, having met this girl, having spoken, gone to Venice with her and having gone to the university and she having explained to me what faculties there were, how you got to university, what the teaching was like, blah, blah, and having spoken to Silvio Toffolon, my best man, we decided to enrol at the university of Venice. Languages. I was doing a Bachelor of Arts in Adelaide so I'll do Languages in Venice.

**OH:** And what languages?

**GR:** Ah, English, French.

**OH:** How was your Italian?

**GR:** My Italian was ... it wasn't, I only spoke dialect. So I had to do a crash course in Italian before being allowed to enrol, I had to do an exam.

18:24

**OH:** And was that at the university?

**GR:** At the university. It was an oral exam, it wasn't a written exam. So I did that, I got through. I scraped through. They closed both eyes.

[Sound of quiet laughter]

**GR:** And anyway, I enrolled in university and that's when I started to learn Italian at university. So my major was English. I was always very good at English, even in Australia --- And I was always excellent in French. So my second language, I did German, it was basically German literature, not the language. I've never liked the German language because it's too harsh. So I did German, I did Spanish eh ---

**OH:** Four languages?

**GR:** No, but I learned to speak four languages. I don't speak German, I can understand it, after 10 or 20 beers, I'll speak German also. Can you follow me? Uh, I can speak Spanish but I'm off Spanish at the moment because I don't speak it often enough. I need to speak it constantly for a couple of weeks and you know, then it's with me. But I can speak fluently three languages.

**OH:** So how long was your ...?

**GR:** Four

**OH:** Four?

**GR:** Four languages, sorry. Yeah.

**OH:** How long was your course?

**GR:** Four, four years. And it took me a fifth year to do my thesis in Venice. So five.

**OH:** And I understand that part of your studies in Venice were with an Australian academic?

**GR:** Professor Bernard Hickey. Lovely man. Nice man. He always had a big smile on his mouth. I met Bernard there, I had no idea ... There was another, a Scottish professor, Ben, I think his name was Benjamin, Guthrie, from Scotland. I met Bernard there, I think, the second year I was there at the University of Ca' Foscari. And certainly because he was Australia, I'd come in from Australia, But Robert Berno, Robert, wasn't too much into studying. He was studying because he had to do something. I was more inclined, you know in this need to understand who I was, basically --- Well, it doesn't really help you but you know --- and speaking to Bernard and talking to him of Australia, talking to him of Italy, why I came back, he said: "You should do a thesis on Patrick White." I didn't know who Patrick White was. And he said: "Patrick White speaks of

alienation, alienated Australian intellectuals, outcasts, the need of belonging, the search for your own, you know, personal *io, interiore*, your being, your what I call your 'eye'. "You should," he said, "Do it on ..." So that's how I met Bernard, just speaking to him of Australia, he being Australian, Irish, of all things, He'd met Ezra Pound, he was a very, very open man, very elastic, always very helpful, excellent culture. Uh, he always dedicated a lot of time to understanding people, talking to people, being very, very helpful. I think he was in need himself, being an Australian from Queensland, I think he was, I think he was from Queensland, I think he needed to find an identity for himself also for being an Australian, an identity that has nothing to do with materialism but more to do with, you know, a metaphysical [laughs] identity as I mentioned at the beginning. This is why we sort of, you know, we clicked.

**OH:** What did it mean for you to study Australian literature?

**GR:** Well, you know, understanding my life as a kid in Australia. All the study in Australian literature, Australian, what I call culture with a small 'c', studying Australia, *learning* about Australia. When I say 'learning about Australia', learning about Australian geography, the basics, learning about Australian history, Australian history, not the fact that Captain Cook discovered Australia and landed in Botany Bay which is ridiculous. You only have to say it once, you don't pride yourself because of that. You've got to go into depth, you know. Where did he land? Who did he meet? What did he do? Who was with him? What did they construct? Were there women there? You know, you've got to learn these things. How did they interact with the locals, with the Aborigines? I knew nothing about this, when I was a kid, nothing. It wasn't taught at all which I think is shocking.

**OH:** So you had to come ...

**GR:** I had to come to --- to Italy, discover my birthplace, discover my friends here, discover a different --- culture that was in the making because there wasn't any culture here. I don't think there still is.

**OH:** You mean, in Australia?

**GR:** Here.

**OH:** Here in Italy?

**GR:** In this area here. This area, very very poor area. It's not Venice, we're in Valdobbiadene. We're in the pre-Alps. Venice has its culture, Venice has its historical importance. Venice used to be a Republic that lasted for 1,100 years. Venice has had its history, its literature, its explorers, its armies, its crusaders. Venice has had it. Eh, Valdobbiadene hasn't had. Valdobbiadene used to be the farmland of Venice, can you follow me. That's what I mean by no culture in this land here. So going to Venice university, university of Venice and living here, I had grown to understand the culture of Venice to begin with, the importance of Venice that very, very few people are familiar with and also the importance of Valdobbiadene and Bigolino where I live, okay?

But more than this, going to university, I started understanding ... Australia. Learning about Australia and fitting myself, finding a position for myself *in* the country itself and finding a belonging of myself as a child in Australia. But I had to do that here by reading about it by learning about it, by assimilating things here, talking to Bernard, explaining ( ) he made suggestions to me of what I should read, what I should do, because you know, the thesis, it was like a jigsaw puzzle, coming together quite automatically.

**OH:** And your thesis was on a novel of Patrick White?

**GR:** Yes. Unfortunately, Patrick White is an extraordinary intellectual writer, very difficult and what I can a man who found himself displaced. I think he was born in England. Correct? His parents emigrated to Australia, to Sydney. He grew up there and there was something in his mind which distinguished him from normality, also called normality and he had this belonging, this need to discover a belonging, for himself which is bigger than the normal belonging - physical, economic belonging. Geographical belonging. His was much bigger. And I did find myself a little with, with him and you know, with this search, his analysis in his novels of outcasts and people who live on the fringes and his endeavour to --- identify or to give, to find peace within himself, you know, in coming to terms... with a sense of belonging to a bigger --- to a bigger space than the country that Australia was, belonging to the world itself. I don't know if you can understand what I'm saying?

**OH:** In relation to *The Vivisector* which you studied?

**GR:** Well, *The Vivisector* ... Well, Bernard Hickey suggested that I do my thesis on *The Vivisector*. And not on *Voss*, not on *The Tree of Man*, not on *The Aunt's Story* or whatever. He said: "Do it on *The Vivisector*. And I said: "Why not?" So I read it. --- And --- I said: "Well, I've got to read it again." You know --- and I could understand, it was basically the story of an artist, but it's the story of an artist, a misplaced person, a person in search of an identity, in search of something that goes beyond what is physical, in search of a meaning that goes beyond physical contact. And the artist doesn't, by --- looking through his eyes, looking at the world, at the people that surround him, right? And portraying them, portraying what he sees. And in the case of *The Vivisector*, the way that Patrick White wrote that novel, [laughs] it's quite, quite profound, quite vicious at times. But it's never bad because his scope was always that of --- I think that White's talking about himself. He's not talking about an artist, he's talking about White, *the artist*. At the end of the day he questions that of recognising his space and his, his belonging to the ambient in which he lives but he needs to go beyond that because there must be something more to life because there's got to be more than something ambient that within you lives, I won't say a God, but okay but there is spirituality that goes beyond White's concept of life.

I won't say that it's my concept but I've always been fascinated by this, this sense of belonging. And "The Vivisector" actually, you know, narrates the life of this artist, as he goes through his life, coming to terms at the end of his life which I think is brilliant with the certain certain, colour of indigo, i-n-d-i-g-o [spells out] Hurtle Duffield comes to terms with himself, I think in the creation of the colour of indigo, *indi-god*, he mentions, he adds the word [letter] 'd'. And there are many references to this sense of belonging that goes beyond beyond physical simple, you know, day-to-day belonging. There are many references within "The Vivisector" itself that touch that theme, many, many, many, many ... It's fascinating.

**OH:** Really fascinating. And there are two things that I'm thinking as you are talking. And one is that you did that study of 'The Vivisector' at the age of 23.

**GR:** 24.

**OH:** 23. And like at 24, that's quite young, really.

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** And the other is that your memory of it is fantastic and you know, sharp.

**GR:** Mmnnn. It's not that sharp. --- It got me over-involved. I have the thesis here which is a mess because I corrected it and re-corrected it. I typed the thesis myself, I did the work off my own bat. At times I pick it up and read it and it's full of --- it's full of quotations. You have to, you

just can't, I could never write an opinion or ideas on White's work, I need quotations from people from --- texts that I read. I've read Jung because he was strongly influenced by Jung. And existentialists. I used to be nuts and quite involved in understanding a little about Philosophy. So, understanding White for me was understanding myself basically the way he unravels the need for an identity of his characters, of his major players in his novels. Yeah, it was quite fascinating.

**OH:** And what...?

**GR:** Very, very difficult.

**OH:** Very challenging.

**GR:** Very challenging, as I said I got lost quite a lot of times. At the end I said: "That's enough. Full stop. I won't go any further. I'm repeating myself too many times. I'm, you know, this is it." And at the end of the day, although it could have been done a lot better, I didn't have the time. I didn't have the will to --- pick up the thesis and re-write it again the way it should have been. I said, "No, this is the way it's going to be." And, you know, at times, I'd pick it up and you know, "Shit. That's bloody good."

[laughter]

**GR:** You basically understood something then. It amazes me now, that you know, I got so close to understanding quite a few aspects of White's thought.

**OH:** What did Bernard Hickey have to say to you about what you were writing?

**GR:** Bernard would never interfere. Bernard would never go into depth with your thoughts, never. He'd let you express your thoughts, he'd question them but never contrast them. He would, if he would contrast them, he would do it in an unseemingly sort of way. He'd let your mind just act on its own.

**OH:** But you ....

**GR:** I wasn't far off track in understanding.

**OH:** You would have been assessed on that work that you did for your thesis?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** What was the assessment?

**GR:** Well, the assessment when I discussed the thesis was excellent. They asked me why I got 18 because the lowest vote you could get to pass the exam was 18 out of 30. And I got 18 for American literature. 18? Because I had an argument with the Professor.

[Slight laughter]

**GR:** And I said: "Look if you don't, you know, don't like the way or you don't agree with what I'm thinking, just give me 18 and send me away", I said. "For me the only thing I'm interested is finishing university. You know, I don't care if I get 30", I said, I never have cared.

**OH:** And what did you get for your thesis?

**GR:** 107.

**OH:** Out of?

**GR:** Out of 110. Or 105, I can't remember, something like that. Yeah It wasn't bad. No, I was complimented on the thesis.

**OH:** That was fantastic.

**GR:** No, the thesis was very involving.

**OH:** Did anyone else in your family study?

**35:02**

**GR:** Richetto's son was, let's say, the brains of the family. He was less of a rebel, less of a free spirit, more, much more balanced.

**OH:** No one in the wider family studied?

**GR:** Well, my other cousins studied. Angelo Caon studied, he's a pathologist.

**OH:** But here in Italy, no one would have had that experience that you had had?

**GR:** No.

**OH:** So how did people see you at that time that you...?

**GR:** I don't actually bother about what other people see or think of me. I never have.

**OH:** So you did five years study?

**GR:** Uh huh.

**OH:** And what did you think was going to happen as a result of having done that study?

**GR:** --- Ah, well I was 25, 26 and I had to do military service too.

**OH:** Because it was compulsory?

**GR:** It was compulsory to do military service which was very bad for me. Anyway, I did my military service. For me, I was offered a position as a lecturer at the University okay, that which I refused. Because I said, I studied a lot of theory, a lot of talk, a lot of reading. I'm not a big reader, I prefer seeing things, touching them with my own hands. You know, I want to live the experience of what I read. So I refused, I said no. I thanked them for the proposal that they made me and I did my military service and I said I'd better look for a job. and I found a job. As I said living in Italy, in the Veneto in that period, wasn't difficult at all to come up with a job. I came up with a job in commerce, right? It has nothing to do with literature, had nothing to do with teaching, I could have taught if I had wanted to, I didn't want to teach, I wanted to see the world because I wanted to experience of the world. And I found a job, initially, the first couple of months, I couldn't get a job. Then all of a sudden I got a job at a furniture manufacturing company down the road, not very far. This area here, the area of Piene di Soligo, Conegliano, Pordenone, Prato di Udine are the focal points of the industry, furniture industry in Italy and include Milano, include Brianza, include Marche in Pescara, or Pesaro in Marche in Italy, Enormous industry, world renowned industries back in the '70s. Very big companies. I was called by a company they needed an export manager. I had no ideas of what they were talking about. He said: "Well, let's hear your English." So I spoke in English to him, alright and he said: "You'll do."

[laughter]

**GR:** "So we'll teach you." And I learned quickly. I learned quickly because I was enjoying what I was doing. After a month I was there, I did my first trip with the owner and we did a trip into ---- into the Middle East which meant Kuwait, I'm talking about 1975, 1973, no 1975, into the Middle East, Kuwait. Middle East countries in those years were not the countries they are today. The airports were tin sheds, the taxis, they used to have taxis but they were pic- ups, a lot of pick-ups. That was an experience, it was a different era. People were kinder, you could talk to people.

People would stop automatically if you needed help. So we did, I remember the first trip we landed in Kuwait. From Kuwait we went to Dubai and then from Dubai we shifted by car to Sharjah back to Dubai, then into Abu Dhabi by air. Abu Dhabi, we did Doha, Qatar, two weeks trip or nearly three-week trip. From Qatar we went to Bahrain which is half an hour's flight and then from Bahrain to Darhan and Alkhobar, that's when the Americans had their base in Saudi Arabia. And then back into Italy. That was my first trip.

**OH:** A big experience?

**GR:** I was flying! Mentally, I couldn't have asked for better because I remember as a kid in Australia, I always wanted to, I always used to dream of working for Fiat. Dream. But working for Fiat, not as a mechanic because I'm not a mechanic but working somewhere in an office, not in administration because I detest administration, but you know, I found what I enjoyed doing, basically it was working in commerce, basically knowing about products because I know about products, I know about production.

40:31

**OH:** And you've worked in a number of different firms, haven't you?

**GR:** I've worked in the furniture, but working in a furniture company, I didn't limit myself to selling furniture. I wasn't an agent. I was in commerce and I was in charge of an area which was the Middle East. To be able to sell anything or to propose, not to sell but to propose any products you have and to give them, to sell them to a possible customer, you've got to know about them. And that even fascinated me even more. The fascination was learning about new countries, their culture, their traditions, the way they thought, where they lived, okay? So, for me, it was an eye opener and also learning how furniture was produced. I was very much involved in learning something new, how furniture was produced, if it was real wood, if it was veneer, if it was paper if it was ... because back in those years, the Japanese had developed a technique where they photographed what we called, or what I called paper and it looked like wood. Sheets of paper, very, very thin sheets, one millimetre, thick or less than a millimetre-thick paper and they'd glue that onto the plywood. So it was very, very interesting. So I used to travel in the production section of the company to see how things worked so that when I went to visit the customers with my suitcase and with ... we used to have a projector where we'd film the production cycle, and the company etc we didn't go there bare-handed. Ah, the customers could see what we produced, where we produced it, how we produced, and the samples we had to show them. So it was all, it wasn't inventive, it wasn't, you know, a salesman's gimmick, it was all ... from a marketing point of view, it was very, very far advanced then, we're talking about nearly 40 years ago. We weren't Coca Cola or Ford, but you know, we were good at what we were doing. So I did that for 12 years.

Then I quit, then I set up, I was invited to set up clothing company in making cycling clothing and I knew nothing about clothing - with four partners. That lasted six months because at the end of the day I was the only one doing anything at all, okay? So I had learnt basically everything [laughs] about --- cycle clothing and I'm not exaggerating. I'm not bragging, I had to because we had a couple of customers in the States who were relying on us so I was forced to learn about buying, cutting and printing and pricing, and shipping. But I enjoyed it. Whatever I did, I wasn't forced to do it but I enjoyed it, I loved it.

**OH:** And did you travel for that job as well?

**GR:** Yes I did. My first trip for our brand of clothing, it was back in 1986, I went to New York for a week, we had a show, there was a show there, a specialised show for the bike wear in New York. We were staying near Central Park. I did visit the Twin Towers, one of them. I have a photograph of a guy sitting, it was a statue in, I think it was in bronze, and I embraced this statue, this guy with his 24-hour briefcase reading some articles and I'd embraced him and that's gone, that went when the Twin Towers collapsed, back in 2001. So that was the first show. Then after a year I went to Long Beach in California, for another show. But I had left the partnership, broken off after six months and I had offered my services as a consultant salesman in marketing, put it this way, to a small company that used to produce, that does still produce cycle clothing, bicycle clothing in Riese [Pio X] and he agreed. I said to him: "Look, I'll look after the sales for you, the international sales right? And I'll set up markets for you all over the world", which I did.

**OH:** And how long did you do that for?

**GR:** Ten years. You know, it wasn't easy at the beginning because at the beginning you're not making money, you're spending money. And I wasn't on a salary, I never wanted to work on a salary, it's always been on a commission basis, for me. So if I'm good, you pay, if I'm not good, I change. That's how I've always seen it. So I brought the company up to a very good ... now, the company's still going, they turn over about 9 million euros today.

**OH:** [shows surprise]

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** And then ...

**GR:** When I went there, they used to turn over 150 thousand euros. I'm going back to 1987, '88 so you know, it's grown. I was only there for ten years, anyway. I left that company and I was called by a friend of mine who owns the brand, North Wave, North Wave, who's in, well the company's about three kilometres in Cornuda, Pederobba Cornuda. He was a world leader in the production of snowboard boots, snowboard bindings called North Wave. And I had suggested years before when I was working for this --- cycle apparel company, I said: "Why don't you make, you know, you're making snowboard boots, why don't you make bicycle shoes?" I said.

"Snowboard is for winter, what do you do in summer?" So he eventually started producing bicycle shoes, bike shoes and he called me. He asked me to go and work, if I wanted to work, he's a very good friend of mine. Never work for good friends! I'll just anticipate that. Very good friend, we're still very good friends but I left the campy after three years. Excellent company, excellent brand, international recognition, a brand that's acclaimed all over the world in the bicycle sector, called North Wave, you can write that. I had a great time when I was there.

And --- as I said, I've always travelled since working in the furniture game where I used to travel all the Middle East countries, three or four times a year. And then when I went to work in the apparel industry, sports apparel, I used to do the shows so with furniture it was Milano and Germany, as far as shows were concerned, exhibitions. A couple of times you went to Senegal, into Africa and into London and the UK. With the clothing, it was the same but then it started to change with the Internet, things started to change but we used to have shows in Milano in Germany, in Koln or in Cologne in Germany and then they shifted into Friedrichshafen which is on the Lake of Boldensee, Lake Constance in Germany. On one side you've got Switzerland, the other side you've got Germany. So did the fairs, always did a lot of traveling in countries, I used to travel Europe basically, Scandinavian countries, Germany, England, France, Spain, whatever. The States, I've been to the States so many times, it's not funny, for shows, basically for shows.

And that's it, basically, that's what I've worked at, the last ... when I left North Wave as a company, I really regretted leaving but I left the company because of very bad internal management, very bad internal management. Excellent product, excellent image, lovely people - but the management, it was shocking.

So I left, I walked out, as I usually do. And I was stuck without a job at the age of 56. But that normally doesn't worry me because if you're good, you know, suddenly something will crop up. So after, I think four months, I was called by another company ... which is the company I worked with for 14 years. But I worked as a consultant basically full-time but I worked out of home. Now the company is based in Bolzano, it's called TEXmarket and they produce, they're still producing sports apparel, only private label sports apparel which means that they're so well structured from a production point of view that they're in the position to produce sports apparel including cycling, running, football, rugby, you name it, they produce it. Okay? And its production for other brands, not their own brand. So when they called me, the owner called me, Heini, Heinrich Widmann, he said: "if you're interested, we'll fly up to Timișoara", which is the headquarters in Romania, their production headquarters in Romania. "Tell me what you think, my idea, and then we'll play it from there."

So I visited Romania *with* him and when I saw the production facilities, 1,000 employees, I said: "This is it. You've got the biggest production set-up in apparel that I've ever seen," I said. Very well organized, clear ideas, a very good man, very honest man. Eh, in partnership, it was a partnership with his brother an brother-in-law and when I looked at the company, I was there for a week going through the production with him, I said: " I will work with you, I'll work with you definitely." And I suggested to him: "Don't ever make a brand of your own." --- Because he is a producer, intent in production, he was, I can understand him being a manufacturer, he was not a man in marketing, he was not a man with the knowledge or the will to invest money in promoting a brand. Do you follow me? He was a man into producing, into constructing, anything. He has different enterprises, not only apparel. He said: "Don't worry, I won't make a brand." [laughter]

**GR:** So that's how it worked. So working with that company, it was the best period of my life.

**OH:** Did you travel with that job as well?

**GR:** Enormously.

**OH:** You worked from home?

**GR:** I worked from home, yes. I had a very good relationship with them. As I said, I've always worked on a commission basis but at the end of the day when they saw I was travelling they said: "We'll pay your expenses and we'll give you a certain amount on a monthly basis to cover your expenses which goes to show, first of all, they trusted me, as a person. And they were honest people, themselves. So I set out, I explained what my work for them was going to be, an analysis of different world markets and the finding of customers who would be enthusiastic to use them as suppliers so I succeeded to bring to that company the major accounts that they have, they still have to day, form the UK, from all the Scandinavian countries, Germany, --- the States. I worked for , the companies that I brought to them to produce --- for them, from the States, were Trek, Armstrong, who was the number one who's being destroyed from a media point of view. But we were producing Trek for Europe, America and for the world. Uh and I visited Madison the headquarters of Trek quite a few time and we'd go north to Canada. Then I worked in Australia, New Zealand, you know, I've worked everywhere, I've travelled quite a lot --- for this company.

**OH:** And when did you finish that work?

**GR:** I finished last year. The contract expired and they said, you know: "You're not doing anything any more, basically you're living on commission." They said: "You know you've been living on a commission for too long." [laughs] And I said: "Oh that's fair enough," I said. "Have I ever complained?" They said: "no." [laughs] We came to terms quite well. So we stopped. Last year I was 69 years old. So, I stopped with them. They said: "If you ever come up with customers..." Right? "We're here. Give me a phone call." So there's always been an open door for me whenever ... if I felt I had someone important to ... and the day after, I won't say the day after but two or three days after, one of the owners Christof, said to me: "If you come up with Nike," he said. [sound of a bang on the table] "We're here for you." Two or three days afterwards I found the buyer for Nike for them, in Portland. And I'd spoken to her and strangely enough, it was an incredible coincidence so we communicated on the phone initially and on email in three days. She said: "I know Bolzano." Which is the headquarters of Texmarket, administration and shipments, "I know Bolzano, I've been to Bolzano quite a few times", she said. "And I ride a bike too," she said. So when I told the owners this, they said: "Are you joking?" I said: "No." [laughs] But what she said to me was that they don't need new suppliers at the moment. I didn't insist because that's how it works. But the important thing is introducing yourself, having someone reply and maintaining the contact. So that was the last --- my last piece of work with them. I still have ... we still hear each other.

**OH:** And you're still doing some work now, aren't you?

**GR:** I work for a small company that makes bike shoes at the moment.

**OH:** Oh.

**GR:** From Treviso, it's a good company, small company. It doesn't get me over-involved, okay? I just I presented several agents for them in the UK, France, Spain and I cater for several customers, you know, look after several customers for them.

**OH:** Is that enough...?

**GR:** And India, too, strangely enough.

**OH:** That's enough work for you, at this point?

**GR:** I don't want to do any more. I don't want to travel any more for work because you know, I don't have the will to get up and catch the plane and go and repeat myself over and over again to young people. I like young people, for heaven's sake but it's become too stressful.

**OH:** And thinking about your travel to Australia, you mentioned that you did some of that for work

**GR:** Hmnn...

**OH:** And that you've been to Australia many times, like how many times would you estimate?

**GR:** Oh, for heaven's sake, I don't know, 20 times, 25 times.

**OH:** And when you go to Adelaide, what do you do?

**GR:** I go, I go to Richetto's place, I live with my uncle. I just relax and enjoy myself. I go sightseeing.

**OH:** [laughs] Sightseeing in Adelaide?

**GR:** Yes, well, so you know, go for a drive, go to Kangaroo Island, I go to Flinders Ranges or wherever. I have the husband of Rosanna's daughter, Bianca, who's called Steve Marafiotte, he's the CEO, he runs Sundrop Farms in Port Augusta, if you know enough about Sundrop Farms,

and that's enormous. He brought me up there with Rino Mattiazzo, one day, we were there a few days. So I do things like that because you know, I get along very well with Steve, he's excellent, he's a very, very smart lad, very intelligent, a hard worker, he's got very clear goals in his mind. Lovely family. So I get around when I'm there.

**OH:** Who else would you see when you're in Adelaide?

**GR:** Usually the people I know, that I used to know when I was there.

**OH:** And you, apart from Richetto and your cousin, Rosanna, you've got other relatives?

**GR:** Ivan, Caon, Cosetta who's in Altamura at the moment with, her husband, Ivan's little sister. I might have told you she alternates Adelaide with Altamura. She may be coming up here now because her daughter, I think has an interview with a manufacturer of extremely high quality luxury sunglasses in Padova, maybe coming up at the end of this month. Yeah, keeps me going.

**OH:** How strong is your connection to Adelaide?

**GR:** Ah, I'd like it to remain as strong as it is at the moment. --- Strong, I'd just say strong, it doesn't have to be stronger, it's strong. And it has to maintain, it's got to be like that.

58:57

**OH:** So the last time that you went to Adelaide, when was that?

**GR:** Two years ago.

**OH:** And when will you go next?

**GR:** I was hoping to go down in December this year. --- But I'm working out a few things, you know, the house, the work I'm doing at the home now. And looking after the two or three animals that I have at home. I have a female dog that's been mucking around, if you know what that means. She didn't tell me anything but I caught her while she was mucking around. And so I've got to think, I've got to take her to the vet to see what, if she's been or if she hasn't been. And if she's been, I'd like to be here because ...

**OH:** For the birth?

**GR:** She's nine years old, she's not a little girl. So you know, I wouldn't like that she suffer or something occurs, that's the only reason.

**OH:** Yeah ...

**GR:** That's why I am not sure if I'm going down in December, that's the only reason, believe or not, because of my dog.

**OH:** Well, I can understand that attachment.

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** Ah, in terms of your identity now, what would you say it is at 70 because sometimes in interviews I'll say to people: "Do you feel Australian?"

**GR:** I feel myself ...

**OH:** Do you feel Italian?

**GR:** I think I could live in any country of the world. It's not a question of being Australian, it's not a question of being Italian. It's a question of being me, a part of this world. Does that make sense to you?

**OH:** Hmmnn ...

**GR:** It's quite simple --- I don't like barriers, I don't like distinguishing. I don't like distinguishing, it gets you nowhere, it just creates barriers. If you distinguish okay, I can understand Australia, you know, the pros, it's got enormous pros.

**OH:** But in terms of your heritage, you can speak about heritage, can't you?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** And what would you say your heritage is now at 70?

**GR:** Do I have to say something?

**OH:** You don't have to if you don't want to. [smiling]

**GR:** No, I don't think it's necessary. I don't think ... I think I have blended heritage. Does that make you happy? It makes me happy, thinking that I have a blended heritage, it's a bit and a bit there. But it's not rooted exactly in one place. What is rooted, what I find totally, I find myself totally embedded, right? It's the Australian landscape, does that make sense? The space, the emptiness of Australia, the open spaces, the immensity of the ocean --- the colours ...

**OH:** And they're different ...?

**GR:** Totally different.

**OH:** ... From the experience of landscape that you have here?

**GR:** Totally different, totally different. I can understand the Aborigines' Dreamtime there. I've never studied the Aborigines but I can understand them --- the --- they don't have a need to impose themselves onto nature, they live within nature, I can understand that. That's where they belong. It's always, everything's connected, can you follow me?

**OH:** Yes I can, I think that's really important. you know, we've talked about identity and the whole idea of Australia and understanding that and now memory, what part does memory of your childhood play?

**GR:** I try not to live on memory. I do, but I try not to dedicate too much importance on the memory. Do you know why? Because I'm not old yet. --- I'm still going, I'm speaking very seriously now. I don't dedicate, I don't feel the need ---

**OH:** And are you saying that memory is much more a part of an older person's way of being in the world?

**GR:** Well, perhaps, perhaps it is. Ah, perhaps it's, yes, perhaps it is. I won't say it is because I'm not there yet --- but perhaps it is. Because I don't feel, I don't feel ... even when I'm speaking, I never speak of you know, "When I was..." And I don't think, "When I was ..." I don't. I think of what I will do.

**OH:** But ...

**GR:** Not because I'm forcing myself because that's how I am at the moment.

**OH:** Yeah.

**GR:** I'm slowing down though.

**OH:** [chuckling] Well, that's probably not such a bad thing.

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** Uh, you talked previously or you might have written in an email about people who are forced out of their natural habitat.

**GR:** Hmmnn...

**OH:** Is that what you would think migration does?

**GR:** Yes. Yes. Definitely.

**OH:** Can people remake a natural habitat?

**GR:** Yes. --- There's a solution for every problem. I see it as a problem. If you have to remake something, if you are, whenever you're ever confronted with a problem, 'problem' is perhaps not the right word --- with a conflict, with a barrier, with a necessity, you have to solve, a necessity [repeats softly], you have to find solution, not talk about it, you have to find solution and then go ahead.

**OH:** So I'm thinking that you found your solution in your 20s, to that question of like belonging and identity ...?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** Which you have obviously built on?

**GR:** That's right. That's a nice way of expressing it.

**OH:** Oh thank you.

[laughter]

**OH:** And in comparison to, say, that young man of 19 or 25,

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** How do you understand Australia now?

**GR:** Now I understand it, before I didn't. --- Does that make sense? I think it should. --- Then, I didn't understand it, now I can understand it. Now I follow Australia, I am on the Internet fortunately. I read Australian papers, I follow Australian politics ...

**OH:** Football?

**GR:** I love football. [laughs] I love my football. Ah but I do, I do follow Australia, at times it's saddening seeing what's happening. But I do enjoy, which means that it is part of me. So I can't live without participating without being part of it. For me being part of it doesn't mean owning, can you follow me? I'm not into that, I never have been into that. Being part of it means being part of it emotionally.

**OH:** Yeah, and your need to understand?

**GR:** That's right, my need to understand. [clears throat]

**OH:** We're coming to the end of the interview and I know that you've look at the website for the Veneto market gardeners and I'm just wondering if you any observations or suggestions of how it could be different or improved?

**GR:** Oh --- it's realistic, okay? But it's very basic. I think you know what I mean?

**OH:** What do you mean by 'basic'?

**GR:** It doesn't go into depth, it doesn't talk about sentiments, emotions, it does, to a certain extent. Perhaps because it's the way I think because I think on two levels, I think. [chuckles] One

is the visible, one is the metaphysical. Metaphysical with a very small 'm'. That's how I've been born, that's how I was born.

**OH:** Hmmnn ...

**GR:** I think, you know, that aspect is missing, it would have a bit more poetry, a bit more insight.

**OH:** How do you think ...?

**GR:** That's all, full stop.

**OH:** Yeah. How do you think how it could be added?

**GR:** Don't ask me that now. [laughs]

**OH:** Okay.

**GR:** Don't ask me that now. It could, I think you have the knowledge and the sensibility, the sensitivity of finding that out, I think. Every person has his own --- what I call his own eye, his own personal being and that being is common to everyone which means in my emotions, I speak of emotions etcetera, that's common to everyone. People express it in certain fashions and people don't express it but it is common.

**OH:** How could that be included on a --- a website?

**GR:** --- In what way, what do you mean by included?

1:08:00

**OH:** Eh, the idea of that emotion, that "eye" that you were talking about ...

**GR:** Hmmnn ...

**OH:** You know you were saying that you think it could be improved by having that so I am just wondering how you could introduce that perspective.

**GR:** Ah -- I think that fundamental all Italians, including Italians who immigrated to Australia, even those who remained, feel Australian etcetera, they always within themselves acknowledge their Italian roots, all of them even thought, some of them may deny them, in a good way. I think that -- - their being, this basis where they do acknowledge them, right? --- Which is an emotion which is - -- the recognition of a broader reality of their life of their living of their life. It's a broader reality, it's not limited, to one heritage, as you were saying. It's a multiple heritage, it goes beyond simple living [sound of mobile phone tone] becomes emotional, we're talking about good, bad, we're talking about something bigger in this life which makes life worth living. Life is not worth living simply because you've built ten buildings and I'll be in nine - it's because of the emotions and senses, the love, the hatred, the badness, the goodness, because these things, this is what I think needs to be included into ... in some way. Don't ask me how, that's your job.

**OH:** Well, thanks for the suggestion, Gianni [spoken with irony]

[laughter]

**GR:** If you can. It doesn't need to be done in an imposing way, it should be done very lightly, subtly. If you could follow what I mean?

**OH:** How important do you think it is to maintain this website?

**GR:** I think it's very important. Not only for the Veneto but for Italians in general, for immigrants in general. I think you broaden your views on this. Okay? No, no, I don't believe in imposing, right? In over-imposing myself but I believe in using myself as a --- a light, a light and just making

suggestions and if you can make suggestions, suggest possibilities, can you follow me? Not only for the Veneto but suggest possibilities and other people can have an insight and maybe recognise their own reality --- You should, it doesn't limit your work, it doesn't limit it but it broadens it out and gives other people an insight into their own existence. Gee, that's improving this.

**OH:** That's.

**GR:** I'm marvellous!

[laughter]

**OH:** That's really, it's really interesting and challenging for me and I appreciate that. Ah, two final questions. One is do you have any reflections on this experience of having been interviewed. How has it felt for you?

**GR:** It's been, it's been very good for me because I succeeded in explaining to a person, of a worth, of understanding, of understanding, my thoughts --- My thoughts and my life. By thoughts and my life, the way I think, the way I think and the way I think many people should be looking at immigration, should be looking at living their life as immigrants, should be as --- it's a way, you know, helping me feel more comfortable with myself, understanding myself better. Because for me this is like a valve, right? Well it's pressurised and full of pressure and I've just let it go now. It seems as if I'm giving you know, you a person of understanding a bit of knowledge onto a reality that I've lived and certainly myself I have lived. And I think all immigrants have moved to, all, I say all Italians, in particular but I think all immigrants have lived this reality.

**OH:** Well, that ....

**GR:** It's given me a lot of satisfaction.

**OH:** I'm really pleased to hear that. thank you. And is there anything else that you'd like to say to complete this interview? Is there anything that comes to mind?

**GR:** Eh --- no, not really. the only thing that comes to mind is that you know, I am today, I can say really --- knowingly that I'm very, very happy with the fact that I have come to terms with my, my childhood in Australia, that I understand and admire Australia as it is. I love the country that I can see through my eyes, I can understand it.

**OH:** What ...?

**GR:** That it, it should seek to maintain it and not distort it --- for what it is not for what it *should be*, sort of America, it shouldn't ... Australia should become Australia as a reference, a strong reference point as far as its culture, its way of thinking, its way of developing. It should not be manipulated as America has become and newer countries. This won't happen. Australia used to be called the 'lucky country'. I still call it the lucky country because *it is*. It takes a bit of effort to maintain it but ...

**OH:** What keeps you here ...?

**GR:** A good question.

**OH:** In Italy?

**GR:** What keeps me here in Italy is that I have a lot of friends here, I have a house here, I have my customs, my traditions. If I were to go, I have thought about going to Australia, I often think about living here and living in Australia but where do I go? Who do I frequent when I'm there? I'm

changing my life-style so I say well, I can live a bit here and a bit there. Why not, you know, I can do it. When I grow old, I'll tell you.

[laughter]

**OH:** Well, Johnny, I really appreciate the time you've given to the interview and the thoughts and the contribution you've made to the Veneto market gardeners project as a relative of one of the pioneers ...

**GR:** Yeah.

**OH:** Brunone ...

**GR:** Definitely. Definitely.

**OH:** Rebuli.<sup>14</sup>

**GR:** They were the ones who suffered, they're the ones who did things, who suffered, who lived and created, you know, the reality that Australia is, today - and who gave us an identity. I can acknowledge that today. Not then, now I can acknowledge it.

**OH:** That those pioneers...?

**GR:** Yes, yes. --- It's what I said, this was the emptiness that I felt as a kid. It should have been there then. I'm not angry about it but it should have been there.

**OH:** It should or should not ...?

**GR:** It should have been there, it should have been a knowledge that was passed onto us then, when I was a child.

**OH:** What should have?

**GR:** The fact that Brunone was there, what he went through and the lives that they led. Something should have been taught in schools. I'm getting back to teaching, teaching is fundamental.

**OH:** Did you know about that through your family?

**GR:** No.

**OH:** So how did you learn it?

**GR:** When I came to Italy.

**OH:** And one thing

**GR:** When I came to Italy, getting involved, talking to people and just going into depth about it and when you start talking, other people start talking about it, you get people involved ...

**OH:** One thing I didn't ask you was when did your *nonno* die? How long did you know him for?

**GR:** In 1970. He was 82. It was written it, I corrected Richetto's summary. He was a bit off, he was 82 years old. I knew him for two years. My grandfather passed away in this house. He came to live with us when the house was built. He passed away in his bedroom which is the little bedroom here. He'd been here for what for? Oh, he'd been here for three months or six months, I can't remember. And I remember it was a Friday, it was on a Saturday and I came home from the cinema and he'd always been - coughing [makes the sound] a bit of heartburn. Every night he'd

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<sup>14</sup> Brunone Reboli had emigrated from Bigolino in 1927 and had become a market gardener on Frogmore Road near other *veneti*

be going through this little routine and that night it was about 11:00, 11:30 and he wouldn't stop, and he said, all of a sudden --- *Verdi la porta che me bute zo* "Open the door and I will throw myself down." "Open the door, open the door, open the door. So I went and said: "Nonno, what's wrong with you?" He said: "... *non respire.*" But he wasn't normal. I said: "Are you joking?" *Aperta la porta.* He'd had a heart attack, he had a heart attack. I can't remember the month, it was winter. It was 1980, 1970, sorry. And we called an ambulance, we didn't call an ambulance, we had to go to the hospital or someone called, I can't remember how it went but anyway the ambulance came, took him to the hospital and he died the day after. He recovered from the initial heart attack then he suffered a second heart attack and then he went away peacefully.

**OH:** So you did have some time...

**GR:** Yes

**OH:** Of getting to know him?

**GR:** This is what Richetto regrets enormously that he never had the possibility of seeing his father again.

**OH:** And that's a story of migration, isn't it?

**GR:** Yes.

**OH:** That separation?

**GR:** Yes, for him it would have been the tragedy, the tragedy of his life ---

**OH:** And as we have said, you know, the many layers of migrants' lives ...

**GR:** Many, many, many.

**OH:** But at the end, it is about the emotion.

**GR:** It is simply about emotions, you know, it's not about how much, the quality is very important.

**OH:** yeah. Well, thank you again, Johnny, for all the thoughts you have provided in this interview. I've really appreciated this opportunity.

**GR:** Thank you.

**OH:** So thank you.

Interview ends at 1:19:47

