

Italian Market Gardeners' Oral History Project

Interview OH872/16 with Aldo Rossetto

(Also present is Johnny Marchioro, Eleanora's husband)

**Interview deposited in the JD Somerville Oral History,
State Library of South Australia**

recorded by Eleonora Marchioro, at Nailsworth, South Australia

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What is your full name? (EM)

Aldo Rossetto (AR): Aldo Rossetto [laughs] [spoken with an Italian accent and then repeated with an Australian accent].

EM: When were you born?

AR: 26 April 1934.

EM: Where?

AR: I was born at Lockleys, and in Keswick Hospital, which no longer exists, and that ties the Hindmarsh Catholic Church, yeah [laughs].

EM: What was your mother's name and date of birth?

AR: Mum's name was Adele, they used to call her Adelina, and that's how she got her name as Lina Rossetto. She was born on 18 June 1904.

EM: What was your father's name and his date of birth?

AR: Father's name was Gelindo, and he was born on 14 January 1895.

EM: How many were in your family, how many brothers and sisters?

AR: Well, there would have been seven if all had lived, seven children, but only three survived, and those three are my sister, Lina, and myself, we were second and third, and Silvano, who was the seventh child. We had an older brother called Romeo, and he died at the age of seven after being in an accident, that was very sad. Then she had two babies that only lived a few months, one was stillborn, so yeah, there were seven children, there would have been had they all lived.

EM: Did your parents tell you any story about what their life was like in Italy, before they came over to Australia?

AR: Yes. Well, starting with my father, he, like they were a peasant family in the Province of Treviso. Bigolino was the town.

EM: That's where they were born?

AR: That's where Dad was born. He was with a family of nine children. My mother was born in Biadene di Montebelluno also in the Province of

Treviso, and she had two sisters and a brother, there were four children in her family.

EM: What job did your mother do before she come to Australia?

AR: She was, at a very early age, she, because they were all poor in those days and didn't have much money, but she became a maid servant at the age of about 13, I remember her telling us. They had a War in 1914, and she had to go as a refugee down in the southern part of Italy, I'm not quite sure where, but as a refugee she had to leave with all the family, yes. She went to Rome, that's right, she went and lived in Rome with other relations.

EM: And what about your father, what kind of job did he do?

AR: He was, like he would have lived off the land. They had a, the land still exists, which I visit every so often, it belongs to the family, he was just a gardener cultivating things, but when the War started in 1914, he was, he had to go to War. He fought for Italy against Germany, and was wounded in the War in fact, and when the War had ended he then became a policeman. He also spent time in France, but I'm not quite sure why, but he had to go to France, and also spent some time in Germany.

On the return, later on when it became 19.., mid-1920s when Mussolini came to power and fascism was getting stronger, he disliked that intensely because he was more a socialist than a fascist. He wouldn't stand for the fact that the fascists used to go around from village to village, and if they didn't convert you to fascism or you wouldn't turn, they would beat you and make you drink castor oil as a result. In 1927 [he] migrated to Australia, that was Depression days of course, with two other brothers on the same boat, and they arrived in Port Adelaide in 1927.

Before that, the year before that, I had another uncle, or Dad's brother, who was second oldest – Dad was the oldest son by the way – and the second son was Domenico, who opened up Rossetto's grocery store in Hindley Street, corner of Hindley Street and Gray Street.

EM: Can we just go back for a minute, back to how did you Mum and Dad meet, and where was it?

AR: Well, yeah, I'm told this, that she worked as a maid servant in Venice, in St Mark's Square. In the building, where there's two big negroes, every hour they'd bang the ...

EM: Time

AR: Time. That's right, they were called, and they'd bang the time. She worked in exactly that building as a maid servant, looking after young children. She would have only been perhaps 14 or 15 at the time, but I'm told that Dad saw her in those years, even though Dad was nearly ten years older than her, and they must have communicated I think, off and on, over that period of time.

- EM: So I think you already told me, but you can tell me the names, who did you father come to Australia with? Which brothers?
- AR: With Adeodato, he was named Atto, and Angelo, they were the two brothers that came with Dad, and Domenico was the one that came a year earlier.
- EM: Do you remember the name of the boat that they came on?
- AR: Oh, I did have it. I can't, I've got it written down but I forgot to bring it with me.
- EM: It doesn't matter.
- AR: 'Carignano'.
- EM: 'Carignano'?
- AR: 'Carignano' was the name of the boat, yes, and they landed at Port Adelaide, uh huh.
- EM: And how old was your father when he came here?
- AR: Well, he came in '27, and 95, that would be 32, he would have been 32, yes, uh huh.
- EM: When did your parents get married?
- AR: Ah, that's an interesting one because Dad was already in Australia, what, three years, and he just, like he kept communicating with my mother who was living in Italy, and wrote her some very romantic love letters, which she kept her whole life. [laughs] They got married by proxy where my father's father took her to the altar. They had a big reception, which I've got a photograph of at home, and then in 1930, that's three years later, she arrived in Australia.
- EM: Do you know the name of the boat that your Mum came on?
- AR: No, I don't, I don't know the name of that boat.
- EM: Do you know if someone sponsored them?
- AR: I don't know, I think it wasn't ... Immigrants in those days had the chance to get cheap fares, cheap fares. I'm not sure to be quite honest, no, I'm not sure. Oh, how do you mean, sponsored?
- EM: Yes.
- AR: Oh yes, it would have been my Uncle Domenico, who had the shop, he sponsored the three brothers to come over. Yes, yes.
- EM: Okay. Where did your father live when he first came here?
- AR: Well, he lived at Frogmore Road with another uncle from my, from my ... who had married my Dad's sister, Rebuli Nana Rebuli was one of the sisters, but Bruno Rebuli also came on the same boat as Dad, the uncle, and they all lived together in Lockleys, in Frogmore Road, yes.
- EM: What work did your father do when he first arrived?
- AR: Oh, he, he was a market gardener, he worked in the garden. There wasn't much money to be made in those days, and it was only through

the fact that he had brothers around assisting, that helped him out, but eventually he, he went to Central Australia in the Mica mines. That was hard times as well, but he spent time there. When Mum came to Australia then he came back, and they had, they were in the garden, they had a garden at Lockleys. Mum had three, her first three children in 30 months, during that time. She also worked pretty hard, because I remember her telling me that even while she was pregnant, she'd be behind the horse and plough, ploughing the furrows in the garden. It was hard times at that time, yes.

EM: So what did your uncles and auntie do for a living, the others, uncles and auntie that you had?

AR: Well, Atto, Uncle Atto, he, he became a wharfie, worked on the wharves, and Angelo went to Queensland, cane cutting. They both, a few later, returned to Italy and then after, Atto did come back to Australia, but Angelo remained in Italy until the Second World War was over, and he brought his family over then. They lived in Melbourne when he came back with his family.

EM: Did they know other Italians who were living in Adelaide at that time?

AR: Oh yes, there was, there was a big Italian community. And, oh yes, after Dad and Mum lived at Lockleys, they moved to Adelaide, the centre of Adelaide, in a street called Fenn Place, which runs off Hindley Street, almost down to North Terrace – it was near the rail yards, it was not far from the rail yards. And that's where Dad then returned to Central Australia, in the Mica mines, [in] which he purchased a share.

EM: So that's really the second time he went to ...?

AR: The second time, yes.

EM: The mica mines.

AR: He purchased a share, and every time, well, Mum got pregnant a few times ... she'd get pregnant, then he'd go back, and then come back for the births, sort of, that sort of thing [laughs], yeah. While she was pregnant she was delivering milk. She had a milk round, because there was no money coming in, and early hours of the morning, maybe 5, 4 or 5 o'clock, she'd have a bicycle with milk cans hanging either side of the handlebars, delivering milk to the extensive Italian community around West Terrace, Waymouth Street, Currie Street, Hindley Street. There were a lot of Italians that had migrated at that time. In winter time she'd get wet, soaking wet, and it was hard, it was very hard times, but yeah ...

EM: Did your parents keep in touch with the relatives in Italy?

AR: Yes, very much so, always communicated, sent photos back and forth, because there was one brother ... I would start by saying that there were nine kids in Dad's family, eight of them came to Australia, and one of them, Eugenio or Zio Nenio, stayed in Italy. He had a family, he took over the property that our family owned, and all the brothers then willed and signed papers so that he could have that property, because

he was looking after Grandfather and Grandmother, you see, because they were on their own and he, he looked after ... Anyway, where was I?

EM: So they kept in touch with the family in Italy?

AR: Oh yes, we kept in touch and all, very much, and we used to always send them parcels during the War, after the War, which they really appreciated because it was bad times then. Dad did go back to Italy for a visit in, I can't remember the year, but it would have been when I was about 14 or 15, maybe 1950 or thereabouts. He went back to visit, then came back to Australia. In 19.. when was it? 1958 or '59, he decided that he wanted to go back to finish off the rest of his days in Bigolino, the home town, and he and Mum, and my younger brother, Silvano, who is ten years younger than I – he was only about 14 at the time – they went back to Bigolino, and whilst, whilst they were ... Dad developed cancer of the oesophagus. He was in serious trouble, had a big operation after a couple of years that he was there. Then Silvano, after a couple of years, saw that there was no future left for him over there. He wanted to come back to Australia ... He did come back, he was about 16 or 17 at the time, played soccer while he was over there, and then when he got back to Australia, he then became one of Juventus's soccer stars and played for South Australia, as a centre-half. So, yeah, that was interesting.

EM: That's very good.

AR: Then I went to Italy, when Dad was gravely ill, Mum was in hospital at Valdobbiadene having her gallstones removed, so they were both in hospital. I got this message, I was working for San Remo Macaroni Company as a sales rep at that time, I flew over to Italy just to be there for them, and eventually Dad recovered slightly and got out, came out of hospital; Mum recovered and they went back to their house. After about six weeks I returned to Australia, and after another year or so Dad passed away, and it was 1961 that he passed away.

EM: So did your Mum ...?

AR: Oh yes, and then Mum stayed on for another ... I'm not sure how many months, perhaps a year, but she missed her immediate family. Although she enjoyed her time and we had relations over there, she missed her three children that were in Australia, and grandchildren, and she came back and settled in our house at Flinders Street, Kent Town, which we had when Dad and Mum left to go to Italy. That house at Kent Town was still ours, and then later on we sold that house and she went to live at, at Hectorville, at St Bernard's Road, Hectorville.

EM: That's later in life?

AR: Later in life, yes.

EM: How was your mother involved in the Italian, in Adelaide community, when she came back from Italy?

- AR: Oh yeah, well she loved going to the Veneto Club because she just about knew everybody, all the Italians that were there, because they were all from the Veneto, and every Saturday night, without fail, and perhaps Sunday night.
- EM: Sunday night.
- AR: Sunday nights was it? She'd be there with her friend, Vittoria, and she loved to dance, my mother. If ever I came down from Darwin, because I was living in Darwin at the time, she'd force me to get up and dance. She used to go around picking partners [laughs] to dance with her, even at the age of 80, between 80 and 90, because I went ... She had her 80th birthday at the Veneto Club, and also her 90th, and we all congregated, the relations, then ... and even when she was 90, I had to dance with her. She really loved that Veneto Club.
- EM: I believe that your Mum was involved a lot with the soccer community in Adelaide too?
- AR: Yes, yes. When we were at Flinders Street, that was not long after the migrants started coming after the War to Australia, and there was Juventus players, like Mario Pozzaroni, Scalamera, Busadoni these were gun players who came from Italy, that played with Juventus, and played for South Australia, they all boarded at our place. She was instantly ... and of course Silvano was playing soccer as well, so she was going to the soccer every week.
- Perhaps I should go back ... I also played football for West Adelaide, and when I was ... she was splitting the soccer and the football, and when I started to make a bit of a name for myself, she came to the football quite often too, so she was torn between the two. But when she, even at the age of 92, before she died, she was an avid Crows supporter, and she loved Tony Modra, she always talked about ... and she watched footy on TV every weekend, yeah. [laughs]
- EM: Your Mum had lots of friends. Can you just name maybe a few of them?
- AR: Yes. There was Santina Burratto who was her guardian really. She lived at Rostrevor, which was across the road, and she'd come around just every day to visit, to see how she was. Mum coped, by the way, on her own, for many years, and she did everything. She used to cook for people, invite people for dinners, she was tireless. There was Pina Dal Corobbo was another one, and there was Giordano Rossetto, who's no relation, but he married a cousin of mine, he'd after go around, and the family. She forever had people there around for dinner, and cooked for them, even at the age of, up to 92 years of age. She died at 93, and Bertina, who was a wonderful, wonderful person, who works, by the way, at the Veneto Club, and she, the day that Mum died, Bertina went around to see ... she couldn't see any sign of life, and she wondered what was going on. Anyway, she had a key, and she went inside, and Mum had collapsed in the shower, and that's how she found her.

- EM: And I believe it was the day of the Grand Final that the Crows won the Grand Final?
- AR: It was, it was.
- EM: Because she was supposed to go to watch the game with Angelina Marchioro.
- AR: No, because I came down the day after from Darwin, and, and that's when the final was on. It was just a couple, it might have been a day or two before.
- EM: The day before.
- AR: I reckon, I remember at the funeral, I mentioned that it must have been divine intervention that the Crows won that game [laughs].
- EM: That's right. Now Aldo, I'm going to ask you some questions about your childhood, and growing up.
- AR: Uh huh.
- EM: Where did you live in Adelaide when you were growing up?
- AR: We, well first it was at Lockleys, which I can't remember because I was under three years of age, but I remember Fenn Place. I was three, just over three, and I had an amblyopic eye, which means I was cross-eyed in one eye, and I had to go and get a pair of glasses, at the age of three and a half. So that was, that was my first memory of Fenn Place, because I remember putting on, I had a patch over one eye, and I remember when we got home with the glasses, everything was spinning, and I could see the gravel on the ground, and stuff like this.
- From there we went to live at 254 Waymouth Street, down the West End, on the corner of North Street, we must have been there for four or five years. From there we moved just a little further up the road, off Waymouth Street, called Crowther Street, and we rented a house. Meanwhile we were always renting at this stage, and we were at Crowther Street from ... I reckon, from, oh ... when I was perhaps 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, that was my age I remember, and 16 ... I reckon we were there until at least I was 16.
- EM: What language did you speak at home with your parents?
- AR: Never spoke a word of English, because they wouldn't speak to me in English, they spoke our dialect. We always conversed in our dialect, which was close to Italian, the Veneto, and it became very handy for me in later years because I, I was offered a job with San Remo Macaroni Company, in the early stages. Aldo Crotti was the boss, and he came and asked me to go and work for him. And we had a lot of Italian grocery stores to visit, and I could converse quite freely, and it was very handy for me to have that second language.
- EM: Where did you go to school?
- AR: I went to school at Dominican Convent in Franklin Street, yeah, which was a monastery, there were some Dominican nuns. I went there until

the age of, until Grade 7, which was, yeah, and my father, who was non-, he was a non-believer you might say – I couldn't say an atheist perhaps – anyway, like Bob Hawke, he was agnostic.

[Laughter]

AR: He, when he said that I'd be going to the school that was closest to home, and the school closest to home was the Dominican Convent, but then when I finished Grade 7 and I had to go to high school, he said, *You're going to Currie Street Adelaide High School, which is around the corner.* So I didn't want to go because I was a good Catholic boy at that stage, and I wanted to go to Christian Brothers' (Christian Brothers' College), or a place like that. So I went to Adelaide High, and did first year and second year high, and left at the age of 14.

EM: How did you used to get to school?

AR: I walked because it was just around the corner, both places, it was very, very convenient, yeah.

EM: But can you tell me about your school years, what did you like?

AR: I ... that's where I developed the love for football at school. We used to always be kicking a football. And we had a group of kids, Italians, all mixtures of kids in Waymouth Street and we used to go down the West Park Lands and kick a football, we used to love, love football, that was the reason. Even though I wasn't bad at school, I did, I had my, I think I got 62% in high school, which was a good pass, I still wanted to leave school because you weren't allowed to play for the Colts whilst you were still at school, you had to play for your school, and I wanted to play for West Adelaide. I said to Dad, *I don't want to go to school*, and Dad, at the time, didn't force me to do, to continue, he, he said, *Well, okay, if that's what you want*, because ... and then Mum didn't mind either because I started to work as a labourer at the age of 14 ... got a man's wage, and all that money that I used to get, I used to take it straight home, as did my sister, when we were living at home, all the money went to them. Then we'd get a small, three or four pounds a week, to spend on ourselves, and that was the way it went, so yeah, that was, that's how it was.

EM: Were Italian traditions maintained in your family, like making wine and making salami? Did your family do that?

AR: No, no, they didn't do any of that. Mum was always busy with the boarding, with boarders, but I know my Uncle Beppi who came ... Oh, that was another brother that I didn't mention earlier. He came in 1938 to Australia. He was the youngest boy, and he used to make *grappa*, which was schnapps, I suppose you'd call it, which was illegal. And I remember going around to his place and he had this, this little distillery where you did the, where you boil the wine and it would go around the coil and would drip in. [laughs] The Italians love their schnapps with a cup of coffee, black coffee. But he was the only one that I knew that made anything like that, yeah, but then it became ...

EM: What, what about your mother, did she, cooking and things like that?

AR: Oh, she, she was a very good cook, I loved her cooking. Then I found that out after I was married, it took me a while to get used to Australian cooking, and then later on Swedish cooking [laughs], but I love Italian food, and she was the ... she was the greatest at cooking, yes.

EM: What kind of social activity did your family enjoy?

AR: Well, Dad was, was away most times, but when he'd given away at work, he, he used to love playing bocce, bowls, at Stocco's. Stocco's boarding house had a few rinks. He was pretty good at it too, and he liked to play cards – he was a heavy smoker – and I remember as kids we used to stand around and watching them play, and we'd cough like anything because all the smoke was in the room. [laughs] So that was his enjoyment, he loved his bowls and his cards.

Mum, she liked to go visiting friends. She had a very good friend in, in Angelina Marchioro, your mother-in-law [laughs], and she loved going visiting her relatives at Lockleys. Even myself as a young ... 12, 13, 14 years of age, every Sunday we'd be going, in winter we'd be going to the Rebuli place on Frogmore Road, kicking a football on the road with Elvio and Vito Rebuli; Guido was only small at the time. And then on Sundays we always went down Henley Beach. On the Henley jetty, we used to dive off the jetty and swim around there, and loved Henley Beach.

EM: Where did you make your first Holy Communion?

AR: When I was seven at, I was at Dominican Convent and ...

EM: What church was that?

AR: At St Patrick's Church, which is just adjacent to ... and I was an altar boy for two or three years, until the time came ... when I was at the altar, and I had to put the water and the wine in the chalice, I put a little bit, I put some wine in and I put too much water. And the priest gave me a little tap across the face. [Laughs] He didn't appreciate putting too much water in the wine.

[Laughter]

EM: What clothes did you wear? Did you have a suit made for the Holy Communion?

AR: No, we had shorts and long socks, and white shirts, it was summer, and at that, we never had long trousers, I didn't have long trousers until I was about, oh, 13 or 14.

EM: Who were your godparents?

AR: My godparents for Holy Communion was Batisto Dal Corobbo. I mentioned his wife, Pina Dal Corobbo, who was a very good friend, but Batisto was in the mines with Dad in Alice Springs for many years, and he also boarded at our place for a time, yeah. As Confirmation, gosh, I'm not sure now.

[Laughter]

- AR: It's such a long time ago, but he was either my godfather for Confirmation ... Yes, he was the Godfather for Confirmation, but I can't remember the Communion, who was god... You don't have a godparent, not you don't have a god ...
- EM: We don't have, no, we don't, just godparents for your Baptism.
- AR: Baptism, yes. Oh yeah, I had godparents, and they were Italian people that lived at Mile End, whom I, whose name I just quite can't remember at the moment.
- EM: How did your family celebrate birthday or other special occasion?
- AR: Not a, not a great celebration. Probably the, the most vivid memory was one year at Christmas I received a bike, unbelievable, and I would have been maybe 10 or 11. It was a Healing cycle, and oh, that was ... that was the most wonderful present I'd ever got at that stage. We weren't great on having birthday celebrations and whatever, except my 21st, that was a big celebration, and yeah ...
- EM: Aldo, what do you remember about games you played when you were a child?
- AR: Yeah! Well we always used to, as little kids, we used to have a little gang of Italian kids, like Stocco, Lino Stocco and his brother, Bruno, there was a few, few of them. We used to go ... we often used to walk across Morphett Street Bridge and go to the River Torrens and yabby, catch yabbies. I remember once when it happened the first time, I'd lost my glasses while we were swimming in the water. I put them aside and then walked home, and Mum, Mum had a group of people looking for me because they thought I was lost, and didn't know what happened to me, they were worried. I got a hiding when I got home. Also, she said, *Where's your glasses?* And I said, *Oh, I must have left them at ...*, and back we had to go to the River Torrens, and we found them! [Laughs]
- So that was one thing, but it was always, it was always cricket and football, they were the two major influences in my life, because I played a lot of cricket with Adelaide in District. At the age of 16 I played District B Grade, and won their bowling, bowling aggregate. And then I gave cricket away because I enjoyed going to the beach. Football, well that never ... I never lost hold of that. That grabbed me right through.
- EM: Now Aldo, I'm going to ask you some questions about market gardening in the area around Frogmore Road.
- AR: Yes.
- EM: Do you know when the first Italian market gardeners farmed on Frogmore Road, roughly?
- AR: Well, it must have been, it must have been around about 1927, because, because that's when Bruno Rebuli and Dad, and his brothers, came to Australia, and there, there may well have been other Italians at

that time. There was the Piovesan's, and the Tonellato, and Marchioro's, that were ... I'm not sure when Johnny's father came.

EM: Yeah, 1927.

AR: '27, I reckon that was the era, because they were all, I noticed on the list of the 'Carignano' ships, list of passengers, it all had *gardeners*, *gardeners*, *gardeners*, along every name, so they were, they were all market gardeners. They cultivated land as peasants in Italy, lived off the land, and obviously that was the way to go.

EM: What do you remember about Frogmore Road?

AR: Well, I don't remember as a little, having been born there, but every school holiday, nearly every school holiday, I'd spend time with my Zia Nana that's Rebuli, at their place in Frogmore Road, and I used to go and help them pick tomatoes; they used to grow celery. Like there was Vito and Elvio, the older brothers, and Guido, the younger one, he was younger than me by seven years. But they were my favourite cousins, if you like, and family, to visit. I did also have Zia Severina that's another one of Dad's sisters, who came after the War, and lived in Waymouth Street, and there was Johnny and Maria-Rosa [Tormena] who were ... and we were very close with them too.

Here's an interesting point ... Up until the age of about 14 or 15, Dad wouldn't buy a radio, he didn't want to have a radio in the house, so I always used to go around to my Zia Severina and listen to the radio. I also used to go around to Urbani the tailor, and I used to sit underneath his table listening to the test cricket in 1948. I remember that the undefeated Australian side of 1948, led by Don Bradman, I used to go in there at night – it would potentially start at 8 o'clock – and I'd be sitting there until late hours to listen to the cricket ... yeah, that's right.

EM: Where was your family garden?

AR: The family garden was on the corner of what is now known as Findon Road, but it was River Road and Pierson Street. It was right on the corner, and just down the road in Pierson Street, is where the Marchioro's garden was. I know we were very friendly with, with that family as well.

EM: How much land did your father have?

AR: Being young at that time, it looked pretty big, it looked an ample sized garden, but I couldn't tell you what the area was. I remember they had to pump up from the river, and Dad would prime the pump with his hand, and then pump the water into the channels, and he used to – we lived at Crowther Street at that time – and he used to, when I was on holidays, he used to donkey me on the bar of his Super Elliot bike, and ride to the, every day to the market, to the market garden, and ride home every night, when he was probably tired. I know I also got a sore bum out of it a few times.

[Laughter]

EM: What did they grow?

- AR: They had glasshouses, and I think they had cabbages and cauliflowers as well.
- EM: Where did your father sell his produce?
- AR: At the East End Market, yes ... and that's another memory that I have, because I remember he used to case all the half-cases of tomatoes, and load them up on the truck, which he eventually bought. And he used to make me come with him early hours of the morning – you had to, you had to be there early – and I'd get up and feel sleepy, and then I'd be awake, sitting down until all the cases were sold, and I'd say, *Oh come on Dad, let's go home, I'm tired* [laughs], but that's where, that's where it was, at the East End Market. I remember that vividly, yeah.
- EM: So I was going to ask you, did you ever work in the garden?
- AR: No, I, I just potted around, and yeah, I didn't really, because I was too young at the time anyway.
- EM: Well, we'll ask you about the Mica mines, okay?
- AR: Yep.
- EM: Aldo, I'd like to ask you about your working life.
- AR: Uh huh.
- EM: What did you do when you left school?
- AR: When I left school Dad had, had bought a whole lot of mica, cased, uncut, and he delivered it at Crowther Street. We had a sort of a sleep-out where we would ... You have to, with Mica, you have – that's an element that was used in toasters in those days – you had to trim it. It would be in books and you'd split it open thin enough to be able to cut it with a knife, into shapes, and then put it in various grades. Dad got me doing that, at the age of 14, after I'd left school, for maybe six months or so, and that's probably where he got the idea of getting me to Alice Springs later on in life, but ...
- After that I worked at a waste paper depot in, in Angas Street, where a couple of West Adelaide Colts footballers worked as labourers. It was a waste paper depot, and I was getting a man's wage, doing a man's work. All the trucks were bringing bales of waste paper. We'd lug them in and stack them, send them up an elevator, and they'd, the paper would be all sorted and go through, and then it would be crushed and taken away. That was for a couple of years.
- EM: Can you tell me about your experience in working in the Mica Mines at Spotted Tiger?
- AR: Yes. At the age of 17, Dad by this time was going up and down because he had shares of the mine, and he'd spend a few months up there, and come back, and so on, but on this, this particular year I had won the Tomkins Medal for the Fairest, Most Brilliant Senior Colt's player, and I was so delighted, and thinking, *Wow, this is great*. And then Dad said, *Come on, you're going to come up to Central Australia and work in the mine over the summer, before next footy season*. So I

went there, begrudgingly, but, but also obediently, because whatever Dad said, I did. He was ...

EM: Please tell me where is the Spotted Tiger Mines?

AR: The Spotted Tiger Mine is about 120 kilometres north of Alice Springs, that's right, in Hart's Range. That was the name of the location, and in Hart's Range we had, there was the Spotted Tiger Mine, which Dad was involved with. And there was another mine called the Billy Hughes Mine, which is about seven kilometres further on. You had voyaged, there was a sandy creek, and when it rained that would flow, but most times it was ... and that's where you'd drive the truck to get to the other mine, sort of, but ...

EM: That's what I was going to ask you, how did you travel there?

AR: Well, when, when I arrived in Alice Springs, the truck came down from Alice Springs, driven by Cesare Daminato who was another Lockleys person, and he drove me to Hart's ... back to the mine. There's a police station there, by the way, and there was also a big tank with a windmill, because it was also a sheep, cattle station in that area. Anyway, we used to often walk from the mine to the police station, and have a swim in the big dam, like the big tank that was there, when it was hot.

Anyway, the mine itself was situated in a sandy bed, or on either side of it, and we all lived in tents, which was covered by brush. There was a frame of wood, and then there'd be brush over the, over the tent to keep you cool, because it's summer. The mine itself, we'd have to go up, maybe half a kilometre up, up towards the mine, to the mouth of the mine, and then we'd go into the mouth. That's where they'd drill and put explosives in. They'll drill holes and then you'd light the fuse and rush out of the mine while it was, while it was, while it was exploding, and then after it had calmed down you'd go down and pick out the books. The mica comes in books, quite large, and small, all sorts, and then from that they were loaded into a truck, track up the mine, and it would be taken outside of the mine where there was an undercover area, where we'd sit down and split the books, and cut the Mica to shapes, into various sizes. So that was the life. Then in the afternoon we used to come down, and there'd be somebody cooking for us in the ... We had a sort of a bigger, kitchen-type brush housing, and yeah ...

We also had a lot of goats, we kept, I reckon 200 goats, and they used to milk the goats. We had milk with the goats, and then every ... we'd have goats' meat as a regular meal, and potatoes and stuff like that. It was a, we lived very healthily. I remember on one, on New Year's Eve we celebrated, I was a non-drinker, and I was talked into having some, because they all drink claret, the Italians, from flagons, during the meal. Anyway, they got me to drink, and ... I had so many glasses of claret forced down, didn't like it, and then my head started spinning. [laughs] I went to the tent, and that night I was sick as a dog. [laughs]

Around, between the tent and the brush area there was a gap of about two feet, and the chooks would come around and lay eggs, and cackle their heads off [laughs], while I had this hangover. I remember that vividly. [Laughs]

- EM: Who else was living there? Can you tell me some of the names of the people?
- AR: Yes. There was Enrico Fantus, and his son, Davide Fantus Zio Beppi my Dad's older, his youngest brother, was there at the time. There was a chap called Adamo and Cesare Daminato and his wife were there. There were quite a few.
- EM: So there were any womans there, and children?
- AR: Just before me there were, because Zio Beppi wife, Zia Bruna and her children, her three children, were, were at the mine, but they eventually went to Alice Springs, and went to school there, and Zia Bruna went with them. So there was no children there when I was there, but there were children before that, yes.
- EM: What work did you do? What was your work in the mine?
- AR: Well that, that was it.
- EM: That's what you were doing.
- AR: I used to cart the stuff out, shovel it into the trucks, take them out and cut Mica.
- EM: What time did you get up?
- AR: Not an ungodly hour, but probably about 7, 7 o'clock, something like that.
- EM: How long was your working day?
- AR: Oh, it was only ... we never ... I didn't ever feel that I was overworked, so it would have been an eight-hour day, I reckon.
- EM: How did you enjoy your work?
- AR: Oh, it was okay because I had a young friend there called Davide Fantus who was recently arrived from Italy. He couldn't speak English, but we got on really well, and we used to ... yeah, it was good to have him there as company of about my age.
- EM: So how long did you work there for?
- AR: Oh, for six months, and then, and then I was able to come back to resume my football with Westies, yeah, then I had another year with the West Adelaide Colts. I was captain when I was 17 and 18, and then, yeah, I resumed football after that, and that was my big thing from then on.
- EM: Aldo, what did you do for work when you returned to Adelaide, what kind of work did you do when you came back?
- AR: Yes! I was offered a job with, with Mosaic Flooring Company. My, my Mum's sister's husband was a gang boss, making cement and terrazzo,

and I remember, well I was a labourer. They were buildings holes at Kilkenny at that time, and we were laying all the concrete for all the big sheds that eventually became Holden at that time. It's no longer there anymore now, I know, but we did all that work. I was a labourer, and there was lots of Italians working at that time, and I was their interpreter. [Laughs] They'd get me to drive them in a ute to various jobs, and things like that, so yeah ... But I remember doing a lot of hard work pushing wheelbarrows full of concrete.

Then after that I, there was an Italian couple of guys who didn't speak much English, and they asked me to go and work for them. They valued me because I was able to help them with doing their books, and I used to send out their bills for them, and laboured, I laboured for them. That was the next job, and the following job. By this time, Dad had retired, and he took on the job as delivering beer in a custom-lined utility. Do you remember that?

Johnny Marchioro (JM): No.

AR: A Custom, we had a Ford Custom Line, brand new, and he used to get beer from the Overway Hotel, corner of Hindley Street and Morphett Street. We'd load ... it up with cartons of beer, and go around to all the Italians in Lockleys, and other areas, and sell the beer, and make half the profit. Eventually that got too much for him, and he said, *Come on, you can, you can take that over*, which I did, but it wasn't a lucrative thing. And the hotel owner, who was Maurice Minervini at the time, said, *Well, okay, since you're not going to do that, what about coming into work for me as a barman*, and that was, that was at the Overway Hotel. That job I did not like because you had to serve drunks, and all this sort of thing. I was only there for six months or so, because I didn't enjoy it.

At that time I was really hitting the high spots with football. I must have been 22 or 23, and I had a real good year, and that's when Aldo Crotti, Pasta San Remo, came and asked me would I like to work for him as a sales rep. Now that was a big step forward, because up until then I'd always been a labourer, and there I was, always dressed up, and they gave me a car. I used to go around selling pasta and continental goods, coffee, and all this sort of stuff, to, to the grocery stores, and I was there for about six years or so, yes.

EM: Who did you socialise with?

AR: Oh, mainly my West Adelaide football friends. There was Doug Thomas and Fred Agius who was an Aboriginal rover; Jack Richardson, who became infamous later, but I won't talk about him. Mainly all blokes from the football team, and of course Johnny Tormena, Maria-Rosa and Lena, my sister. We often used to go to dances. I remember going to a Davis Cup Ball at the Town, Adelaide Town Hall, when Australia had won the Davis Cup; met Harry Hopman, and a few of the tennis players, and whatever. Yeah, that was, that was quite a good time.

- EM: Did you ...?
- AR: I used to dance, I forgot!
- EM: Go on.
- AR: I, I also, I had a good friend called Brian Webber, who was a West Adelaide supporter, and he was a ballroom dancer. He said, *Why don't you come and learn ballroom dancing?* So I took it on, and I did my Bronze and Silver Medal, and Silver Bar and went in competitions at the Palais Royal [laughs], so I was a reasonable dancer.
- That's where I met my first wife, Nancy. She was a ballroom dancer too, and she was a former Miss South Australia. that's when we met, and things progressed from there, and we married in 1958. The marriage lasted, we had a daughter, Amanda, who is now 51, let me see, yes, the marriage lasted about seven years. Unfortunately we were incompatible. At that time I had gone to Darwin, we tried to make a fresh start when things weren't working out, and in 1966 I went to Darwin to join Nancy's brother in a sea, in a marine and sports store. So that's how I went to Darwin.
- EM: Can we talk a little bit about that afterwards?
- AR: Yes, certainly.
- EM: Because I'd like to ask you about, all about Darwin.
- AR: Yes.
- EM: But I'll just give you another couple of questions and we might stop it now. Did you ever observe or experience any racism because you were an Italo-Australian?
- AR: As a young boy?
- EM: Yeah.
- AR: Oh yes, there was, there was the ... because we were 'aliens' during the War, even though ... we hated fascism and that, especially my father and that, the ... I remember there were some Greek kids who used to call us *dagoes* and whatever, and ... there was also a bit of Protestantism. The Sturt Street School kids used to call us *Catholic dogs jump like frogs in and out the water*.
- [Laughter]
- AR: But, but as soon as – that only lasted probably during the War years – but as soon as I became involved with football, never did I experience any racism about my ethnicity. In fact, I know that Mando Urbani who was a friend of the family, when I was playing for West Adelaide, there was a couple of guys called me a *dago*, and whatever, and he went and gave them a punch, punched them up, but I never, never ever had the feeling that I was looked down upon because of that. I was quite proud of the fact that that, yeah.
- EM: Well Aldo, thank you very much for sharing your story with me. I really appreciate it. You've given me such information about your life in this interview today.

**Second interview with Aldo Rossetto
recorded by Eleonora Marchioro on 4th July 2011**

for the Italian Market Gardeners' Oral History Project

Also present is Johnny Marchioro, Eleanora's husband

EM: This is a continuation of the interview with Aldo Rossetto. It's part of the Italian Market Gardeners [Oral History] Project.

Aldo, can you tell me the highlight of your football career?

AR: Well, there's been a few, but probably the biggest one would be the year of 1956, when I played for West Adelaide against Port Adelaide in a Grand Final, I was a centre man. We lost, unfortunately, but it was one of my better games, because I stood Dave Boyd, who'd won the Magarey Medal that year, and I had the better of him, and was named probably best player for West Adelaide. That was probably one of the highlights.

When I went to Darwin, in '66, at the age of 32, I then coached and played for the Darwin Football Club, and we won four premierships in a row, and I was still playing at that point. So they were a couple of highlights that stood out.

EM: Can you give me any idea of different working periods in your life?

AR: Well, I mentioned earlier about – I'm just trying to think – when I went to Darwin in 1966, that was to try and make a new start in life with my first wife. We started up a business called Seafleet Marine and Sports Centre, and my then wife's brother and I were partners in it. I ran the sports store, he ran the marine shop. After, that was, Darwin only had a population of about 15,000 in those days, it's more like 100,000 now, but it was reasonably successful. And after a couple of years I decided I wanted to open my own shop, and have Rossetto Sports Store, instead of Seafleet Marine, and Neil, the other partner, he went on with the marine shop.

It was a good time, because all the footballers in my team, would all buy all their gear, I was their coach, I made quite a bit of a name, and then my brother, Silvano, when he ... not long after he was married, he wanted to come to Darwin, and he came into partnership with me. Then we opened another sports store in Gove, in Nhulunbuy, and later on we had another in the Casuarina Mall, so we finished with about three Rossetto Sports Stores. My partner then was Bob Elix, who played for Port Adelaide, so he was my partner in Darwin.

I got out of the retail side of things because I became the agent, I become a wholesale agent for Adidas and Spalding, and a number of other little agencies, and I was supplying the Northern Territory with these goods, the whole of ... which wasn't a big market, but that became a successful business also. I used to go to all the Adidas conferences, meet all the bigwigs, and become very friendly with Ted Whitten. You might remember him as a footballer, he was the ... But, but it was a great time in my life, and a rich experience, business-wise.

Eventually after a number of years, about ... it came to a point where, I was I think 62 years of age, and I thought I might want to go back to Adelaide one day, because I always had it in my mind to return back to Adelaide. But Maria, my second wife, wasn't keen about that, but she got to the point where she agreed that that would be the way to go, because she was starting to feel the heat. We came back to Adelaide in 2000.

EM: What did you like about Darwin?

AR: Oh, it was, it was a young, vibrant, young-people's town, full of young people, not many old people right there because it's too hot in the Wet season, and it was good to me because I made my business grow and be successful in that time. I was up there for 34 years, and yes, I really enjoyed Darwin, it was a great place.

EM: Okay! What was the experience like when you were in the Cyclone Tracy?

AR: Yeah, well I was, I was driving to Midnight Mass at the Cathedral, about quarter to twelve, all of a sudden this cyclone, we knew it was coming but not with such ferocity, and as I was driving there all the lights went out, and I finished up driving to a friend of mine's place, Benny Lew Fatt, and we all congregated at his place and sat through it. What happened was it lasted 'til the early ...

Oh, sorry, I left his place and went home before it reached its peak. When I got to my unit where I, it was one of eight units, every tenant of each unit finished up in my unit. The water was about a foot off the ground, and there was a howling, roaring experience, and the windows were, you could see them going like this, and it's a wonder they didn't break. Then all of a sudden there was a dead quiet, because the Eye had just passed, and you think it's all over, but it's not. Then the Eye passes and you get the other end of the cyclone which is even more ferocious.

Anyway, about say 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning it ceased, and then when daylight came I went outside and there was this enormous devastation of trees blown down, and houses, rooves off. It took me, it took me about an hour to drive to my sister's place, who lived only six kilometres away, because I couldn't get over lines and trees on the road, it was ... the ute that I had was sandblasted. It had *Rossetto Sport Store* on one side [laughs], and the other side was completely blast,

sandblasted.

As a result of the cyclone, the shop lost its roof completely, all the stock got wet. Luckily we were covered by insurance, but the next few days we were trying to hammer iron onto the roof to protect it from rain, because it was the Wet season. We shifted all the stock into a warehouse, and then later on we had a big sale and retrieved money, but we also got well paid by the insurance company during that time.

That was a time and half, where everybody pitched in, and the community spirit was great. We used to ... all our meals were cooked for us at the Darwin High School. Everybody that was in Darwin at the time would go to the high school, and there were cooks from all the restaurants that had lost everything, they were there cooking the food. We had free food, we were really well looked after.

EM: What did you do when you returned from Darwin?

AR: Okay. I returned, after 34 years it was time to come back. We purchased a house at West Beach. I had retired prior to that, when I was perhaps, three or four years earlier, and just played golf and amused myself keeping fit.

Incidentally, I might mention that after I'd finished that after I'd finished playing football up there, I took on running, long distance running, and I ran two marathons. My wife was a fitness fanatic and that's how we met. My wife, Maria, who is of Finnish nationality, but speaks good English ... came to Darwin from Sydney, where she came from, she was a fitness instructor, and had a running group. Anyway, we started doing long-distance runs up to about 12-13 kilometres. Then the chance to run a marathon came, and we used to run 30ks on a Saturday morning, just for training. Finally we both did two marathons, and that was quite an experience also.

EM: Did you keep in touch with your mother and your cousins when you came back?

AR: Yeah! Oh, I might mention that when we came back, that was the question you asked, we, we both jointed the Next Generation Gym, at Memorial Drive, next to the Adelaide Oval, and did fitness class, and politics, and things like that. We'd cycle from West Beach along the River Torrens, there and back again, two or three times a week, and played a lot of golf. At the moment I play golf four days a week still, and it's my main passion. I don't know what I'd do without it. I don't go to the gym anymore, but yeah, when Mum ...

Of course relations, yes, my sister, Lena, and her family, came back to Adelaide also, they were living in Darwin, and Silvano, my brother, and his family, had also, who were also in Darwin, came back, and we kept in constant touch, and still do. Yeah, yep, so I enjoy family particularly.

EM: What about children, how many other children did you have?

AR: Yes. Maria and I married in 1983, and we've got two children. Jamie is now, he'll be 24 in a week's time, and Jasmine will be 27 in December. I married when I was 50, it's the second time, so it's not bad going for an old bloke, is it?

[Laughter]

EM: Very good! Aldo, have you ever been to Italy?

AR: Yes. The first time I went to Italy was when I went because Dad and Mum were ill. That was back in '61. The second time I went in, with Amanda, in about '74, she was only about 10 or 11, and we visited Bigolino, our home town, or at least my parents' home town, stayed with all the relations. Yeah, we still in ... In fact, one of my relations rang me last night. We, we are very close with the Italian families.

EM: And what do you think of your Mum's paesani?

AR: Oh, our, Bigolino is in the foot of the mountains sort of, you can see the mountains in the distance, and the river, Piave runs alongside the property, it's a glorious place. My dad reckons it was the *giardino d'Italia* (the garden of Italy,) but mind you a lot of people would think differently. It's a beautiful, beautiful spot, yeah. That was in '74.

I went again in '83. I did a cycling trip for six months, with my wife. We went, this might be interesting, we decided when we were in Darwin that – this is before we were married – that we'd, we had bikes and our backpacks, panniers on the bike, and we did a trip from Darwin, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, and then Yokohama. Meanwhile our bikes were packed in a box, and then from Yokohama we went across by ship to Vladivostok in Russia. We went on the Trans Siberian Railway, which is a seven-day, eight-day trip, right across Russia, where we stopped at Siberia, the capital of Siberia. Then we stopped in Moscow, we stopped in Leningrad, and then we got to Finland where my wife was born, and then we started cycling.

The idea was to cycle all around Northern Europe – this is interesting – after 200ks up Finland, I got the, I was getting hay fever, I was grumpy, and I couldn't hack it, I didn't want to go all that way [laughs], just for the sake of cycling. So I said to Maria, *Look, I can't, I want to go back to England and then go and see Italy and France*, where I had relations, and she said, *Well, I'm not, I'm going to go and do my trip*, and she went all the way, the whole way around. Meanwhile I went to London and spent a week, and then across to France where I've got relations, and then to Italy. So that was in 1983. Then we met up again, by the way, when she, when she got back. I also went to Germany and visited Adidas headquarters, and that was fantastic also, in Bavaria, in, that beautiful spot.

When I got back to Darwin, Bob Elix and I, we used to do a bit of running, and I got whacked by a car as I was running across the road. Lucky it hit my trailing leg and I went up and over, and it turned out I had to have a knee reconstruction as a result, but I recovered. Then a few months later, perhaps a month later, Maria had finished her trip,

and she came back to Darwin, and that's when we got together. I was in, my leg in plaster, on crutches, and she came to visit me in hospital. Not long after that we, we got married, yeah.

EM: Aldo, what is important to you now?

AR: Well, it's important to keep healthy. I'm a stickler for eating the right foods. I need to because I've got my, I had non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which is well controlled. Luckily with the cures they've got, the chemo and whatever, it keeps me in good nick. Even though I'm 77, I feel quite fit, and I play my four weekly days of golf a week, yeah. That's my main interest where I've got all guys of my own age, who are with the same interest, and I still, yeah, that's about ...

EM: And I think you go to the football to see the Crows nearly every week too, don't you [laughs]?

AR: Oh, well of course, I'm a member, have been a member since, since 2000 [laughs], and I meet you and Johnny there.

EM: That's right.

AR: But yeah, I've always ... When the Crows came in, in '91, I was still in Darwin at the time. I used to barrack for Collingwood, up until that time, because we didn't, the Crows weren't in it, but as soon as the Crows came into it, I immediately barracked for them. Yeah, I'm passionate with my Crows, yep ... [Laughs]

EM: When you look back on your life, what have you, what have been the biggest change, big change?

AR: Big changes, mm. Well, probably in the last few years the change has been greater, because I know that, up until a certain point a few years ago, I was still energetically going to the gym, but I've given the gym away [laughs], and I feel now, 77, you have your muscles waste, because you don't do as much. And I'm lighter than I used to be, but that's not a bad thing, you don't want to be putting on weight, but yeah, the changes have been noticeable in the last three or four years. You get, as you get older you have prostate problems.

[Laughter]

EM: True.

AR: But, but, yeah, it's not bad, but I must say that I still am enjoying getting older, it doesn't faze me at all the fact. Some people don't like getting old, but I, I think it's a gradual progression, and I'm quite happy to get old, grow old gracefully.

JM: Play golf with your son.

AR: Yes, I play golf, of course, every Sunday morning with my son, and that's a highlight of the week. My daughter is in Melbourne so we don't see each other that often.

EM: Aldo, is anything else that you would like to add to this interview?

AR: Oh, let me see. No, I, I think we've covered it pretty well, and I've enjoyed it thoroughly. If we have to do it again ...

[Laughter]

AR: Yeah!

EM: Well Aldo, thank you very much for sharing your story with me, I really appreciated you giving me such interesting information about your life, in this interview today.

AR: Yeah, I'm looking forward to hearing this on, on a disc, just to see how it went, yeah.

EM: Okay.

AR: And if it, if it's alright, I might even let my relations listen to it.
[Laughs]

EM: Good, very good.

AR: Okay!