

**Italian market gardeners oral history project**  
**Interview OH872/4 with Albert Tonellato**  
(Also present is Mary Tonellato, Albert's wife)  
**Interview deposited in the JD Somerville Oral History Collection**  
**in the State Library of South Australia**  
**recorded by Madeleine Regan at Kidman Park, South Australia**  
**3 October 2008**

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**This is an interview with Berto Tonellato by Madeleine Regan on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 in his home at Kidman Park, South Australia. Also present is Bert's wife, Mary.**

**So we're going to start the interview, Bert, by looking at this beautiful photo that we have in front of us, and it's a photo of your family taken quite a long time ago.**

BERT: Oh, yes.

**So maybe if you could start talking about that photo?**

BERT: We had that photo about a year after we come to Australia.

**And you came with your mum?**

BERT: Mother and my older brother [Lui], my sister Rosina, and Lino and Orlando.

**So five children and your mother –**

BERT: Yes.

**– arrived in Australia – – –?**

BERT: 1935. We arrived in Port Pirie.

**And how did you get from Port Pirie?**

BERT: By car. Oh, the company I think paid for it, I'm not sure.

**So you arrived in Adelaide and you met your dad.**

BERT: Opposite the railway station, that's where – and then, after he came there, he took us home. He took us home, we saw this carriage.

**Railway carriage?**

BERT: A railway carriage. I suppose Mum knew, but he didn't say anything to us. And you can see the carriage behind it, we took a photo, and then this is the photo. That horse and buggy used to belong to Mrs Bush, and then he took a photo to send back to Italy.

**And this carriage, this railway carriage, is called the *Willochra* and there's something special about this carriage, isn't there?**

BERT: Yes. The King – not the King, the what's-the-name of England, not the King, the Duke.

MARY: The Duke and Duchess of York.

**Wow.**

BERT: It was all red carpet inside, red leather on the seat, and they had these little seats on the side, on the passage. Every time Mum used to go she'd fall, it hit her legs and she had all bruises on her legs. (laughter)

**And inside the carriage there was a kitchen – – –.**

BERT: Kitchen, the dining room where we used to eat in the front ....., then the kitchen, then there was my sister's bedroom, then it was our bedroom, me and my brother used to sleep. And it had every bedroom, two beds every bedroom.

MARY: It was all split up into rooms.

BERT: Split it up into rooms and Dad used to sleep, and Mum, in the end one.

**Beautiful carriage. And your dad had been in Australia since – – –?**

BERT: 1927.

**And he had come to Adelaide?**

BERT: Yes.

**And when he first came to Adelaide what had he done?**

BERT: Well, he went to work up at –

MARY: Karoonda.

BERT: – Karoonda, past Tailem Bend. He worked there I think for a year or something. Then he came down and started a garden here.

**And here, Frogmore Road?**

BERT: Just here.

**Just here, yes.**

BERT: And Bruno's father was with him, too.

**Bruno Piovesan's father.**

BERT: Piovesan's father, yes.

**And they'd come from the same area in [Italy]?**

BERT: Oh, yes, same area.

**In Treviso?**

BERT: More near Treviso. Because he was young, was Piovesan, and Dad used to look after him.

**So when you arrived or when the family arrived your father had been established –**

BERT: Yes.

**– as a market gardener.**

BERT: Yes, yes.

**Do you remember how much land he would have had?**

BERT: Around about six acres, I think, six acres.

**And do you remember much about what it was like when you first arrived?**

BERT: I think we got in straight away. We made friends – when you're a child, you start making friends with the children.

**Because how old were you when you – – –?**

BERT: Ten.

**Ten, yes.**

BERT: They used to call us 'dirty Dagos'.

**At school?**

BERT: At school. And we thought, you know, like, 'Why?' We didn't know why. And one day two of the kids that used to go to school came down and they said – Mum said to us, she said, 'Tell them if they want to stay here for lunch or dinner – – – .' And these two boys said, 'All right'. And after that day they were best friends. And they said, 'Do you always eat like that?' And we said it was nothing different: roast chicken, because we used to have a lot of chicken. That's how we used to make friends.

**So when you arrived did you go to school here?**

BERT: Yes, a little bit.

**Where did you go?**

BERT: Flinders Park. Hindmarsh, Catholic school on Grange Road.

**And what do you remember about the growing up on Frogmore Road?**

BERT: I think it was pretty good, because Dad was good and we used to have these old bikes and we used to fix the bikes up and go, just as a child, I think we did it very nice

because Dad was a nice man and my mother was nice, so we never had — — —. I used to be worse than Dad and Mum.

**And when you finished school how old would you have been?**

BERT: About fourteen.

**And was it something that you wanted to do, to work with your dad?**

BERT: Oh, yes. I used to work in a fish shop, got a job working in a fish shop.

**Where was that?**

BERT: Up in town.

**You mean like cleaning fish?**

BERT: Yes, cleaning fish. Cleaning the shop. And I didn't like it there so I told Dad and Dad said, 'You can come home any time you want to', because I used to go up and down, I used to board there.

**In the city?**

BERT: Yes. And I used to go home — I had a bike, used to go home.

**Why would you have boarded in the city?**

BERT: He thought it was too far to go up with a bike up and down. Because we used to start at seven o'clock in the morning or before to go to the market, fish market.

**Oh. What was the name of the fish shop. It wasn't Cappelletti's?**

BERT: No, no. It wasn't far from there, but it wasn't Cappelletti, no. It was an Italian woman, what's her name?

MARY: 'Maggi' was the name of the shop.

BERT: Maggi. Her brother used to have a making ice those years.

**So you didn't stay very long at the fish shop.**

BERT: No.

**And you came home, and you were the second brother.**

BERT: Yes.

**Was Lui working already with your dad?**

BERT: No. Louis went to work in what's-the-name. They used to work for a bricklayer. And he worked that many months in Parliament House here, he build Parliament House.

MARY: It was granite, wasn't it, or marble?

BERT: Granite, yes.

**So he was like a stonemason or a ---?**

BERT: Oh, I suppose.

MARY: He used to probably work for them.

BERT: Work for them.

**And so you began working with your dad, just you and your dad.**

BERT: Yes.

**And then what about Rosina, what did she do?**

BERT: I don't know.

MARY: She helped her mother.

BERT: She helped Mum and Dad.

**Right.**

BERT: Sometimes used to come out and work in the garden, too. When they had the beetroot in bunches. That's what she used to do.

**And your younger brothers, Lino and Orlando, did they work in the gardens, too?**

BERT: Oh, yes. When they grew up they went in the garden, too.

**The same area –**

BERT: Yes.

**– like did you work together?**

BERT: No, no. Everybody had their own. We had our own and my brother had his own.

MARY: No. The two younger ones were working with the father.

BERT: With Dad, yes, they started to work with Dad. Still, me and my older brother went out; not too far out.

MARY: But on your own.

**Yes.**

BERT: On my own, yes.

**So did you rent land?**

BERT: Yes, we rented off Bush, about two acres I think they were. And then 1952 or '51 we bought the land on Findon Road. With no money, never had any money.

Those years, friends were friends. You asked them can they lend you a bit of money, if they had them they'll give it to you. And they did.

**So you were fortunate.**

BERT: Yes. Then you work hard to pay him off.

**So, Bert, you had the land before you and Mary got married?**

BERT: Yes, because we had a piece. Dad put a piece on the other side of the river in my name, I don't know why, but he bought the glasshouse and rented the land, right next to the bridge, Keele's bridge there. And when the War broke out they called us in the army, so my brother didn't want to go, so they sent him up Lobethal to chop timber for the blanket –

MARY: For the woollen mills.

BERT: – woollen mill. He went up there, they sent everybody, and when they were talking to me and he said, 'What do you do?' and I said, 'I'm a gardener', they said, 'If you're a gardener, get on the side'. You know, the captain, I don't know who he was. And a week or two after they came down to have a look what I was growing. I used to grow carrots, cabbage and potatoes, for the army.

**How did that happen? Like, did you sign a contract or something?**

BERT: No, we didn't sign anything. Just that they said, 'You've got to grow the stuff for the army', and they tell you what – they told us to grow carrots, cabbage and potatoes. Used to bring them into the – they had a drier in the city, I think it was, and they used to – – –.

MARY: They used to dry the vegetables.

BERT: They used to dry them to send to England, I think.

MARY: For the troops.

BERT: The troops.

**And was it possible for you to have other things to grow, or not?**

BERT: We had the glasshouse, but we were always in with Dad. They had four or five glasshouses there.

**That's interesting that you were growing for the army.**

BERT: Yes.

**And how long did that go for?**

BERT: Two or three years, I think.

**And then once the War was over.**

BERT: That's finished.

**So it was possible then for you to grow what you wanted?**

BERT: That's right. But Dad was going to the market. After we finished with the army, Dad used to go to the market. He bought himself an old little truck – he used to go with the horses first, and because they were friends with Piovesan he used to go to market first. Then, when Dad broke up – not broke up; just he said, 'I've got the boys with me', so Dad started going to the market, East End Market. Then when we got married *I* started to go in the market.

**Because you had *your* produce to sell.**

BERT: Yes.

**And what was the market like in those days?**

BERT: Well, they had all the troughs for the horses, and then most of them got a truck, they used to pull the trough – we used to call them the trough, where the what's-the-name used to sleep, the people who used to get drunk, they used to go in the market and sleep (laughter) on the horse feeders. What do you call it?

MARY: Oh, yes, where they used to feed the horses.

BERT: Feed the horses.

MARY: They used to put their chaff in the troughs, yes.

BERT: But everybody was nice.

**Yes. And early starts?**

BERT: Oh, yes. Early starts.

**How many days a week did you go to market?**

BERT: We used to go twice.

**What days?**

BERT: Tuesday and Thursday.

**And so when would you do your picking? You know, like if you were selling tomatoes, when would you have picked?**

BERT: Well, we used to wait for the tomatoes to get a bit ripe, just a tinge of ripe, then we used to pick them, then bring them in the market. About five o'clock in the morning used to go to market.

**And would you have picked them the day before?**

BERT: The day before, yes.

**And do you remember what quantities you would have had?**

BERT: Oh, no. All depends, you know. Sometimes you have a few more. We had the customers used to come from Port Lincoln, used to come and buy – he went for years and years buying the tomatoes off us.

**Because they knew your tomatoes and the quality.**

BERT: The quality, yes. We never had any troubles ourselves, because we used to grow quality, most of it, wasn't it?

MARY: Yes, most of our stuff was quite good.

**So how would they transport the produce from Adelaide to Port Lincoln?**

BERT: They used to have a semitrailer to take it down to Port Adelaide and load it on the *Troubridge* – I think they used to call it the *Troubridge*.

MARY: *Troubridge*, they used to call it the *Troubridge*.

BERT: And they used to go to Port Lincoln. And he used to fly here, the owner, and used to fly back – no, he used to go back with the boat, I'm sorry, with the stuff he used to buy for the shop. And went for years.

**Every week.**

BERT: Yes. Twice a week.

**Twice a week, wow. It's interesting to think about that, transport.**

BERT: I think we did all right.

MARY: It used to go into Kangaroo Island too, the *Troubridge*. Yes, and then to Port Lincoln.

BERT: I think we did all right because we were growing two crops in one year.

**So tell me about the rhythm of the year, then. Like when did you first plant?**

BERT: Most of it was in about February, March.

MARY: February, yes.

**So you'd get the land ready.**

BERT: In the glasshouse, used to get them ready.

**Did you do that with a little tractor?**

BERT: Yes, we had a little – oh, in the beginning we used to dig them with a fork. That went on for about a couple of years, I think. Then we bought a tractor, a little tractor.

**And how deep would you dig?**

BERT: About that deep. (indicates)

**How deep's that?**

BERT: About a foot, foot and a half. She used to drive the little tractor and I used to be behind with a plough, on a plough. A special plough. She used to be our driver.

**She looks like she would have been an excellent driver. (laughter) And so you got the land ready so it was all nice with furrows.**

BERT: Yes.

**And then did you have the seed from the previous year?**

BERT: Yes, we used to keep the best tomato for the seed.

**And then you'd plant by hand?**

BERT: Oh, yes. First we put the seed down and make it like twenty feet long, about six feet wide, the seed, and when we used to plant them we used to pull them up and plant about that big, the tomato.

**So about three inches.**

BERT: Yes, three or four inches.

**So then you'd plant those.**

BERT: Used to go like that.

**Yes, with your finger.**

BERT: Used to water – it was easy to plant, because you'd just go – you got your plant here, you'd grab it and you'd go like that. (demonstrates)

**Push it in.**

BERT: Yes. We were that used to it, you see.

**How big were your glasshouses?**

BERT: Well, it was about a hundred and twelve feet by fourteen feet.

**And height?**

BERT: We had some in the beginning they weren't really high, with a roof. And then we changed – two or three years we had them, then we made them higher so you can walk in even on the side.

**And you told me when we were talking to Mary that you moved the glasshouses every couple of years.**

BERT: That's right, yes.

**What a big job. Can you tell me how you ---?**

BERT: We used to pull all the glasses down and put them in boxes, and then what we'd do we'd shift them say from here to here.

**So a few feet.**

BERT: Yes, the whole glasshouse. We had to pull everything down.

**And the structure, was that wooden or metal?**

BERT: No, that was steel.

MARY: It was wood posts.

BERT: Wood at the beginning and then we changed it into steel.

MARY: And steel rafters up on the roof.

**So much work. I wonder how long it would have taken to move.**

BERT: It would have taken us nearly a week.

**For one?**

BERT: For one glasshouse.

MARY: Easy.

BERT: Easy.

**And you had to time that so that it was in between your crops.**

BERT: When the crop was finished, if you knew you had to shift them and you start shifting, you know, pull the glasses down ---.

MARY: The crop would finish just before Christmas, and then you had time until February.

**So your first crop you planted in February, and then when did that finish?**

BERT: Wait a minute, May or June.

MARY: No, because you used to shoot, cut the top and then another shoot would come up.

BERT: When the tomato was that high we used to cut them about halfway and roll them up and then you'd get a new shoot to come up and those used to get -- so the tomato started to get again the flowering.

**So you got more.**

BERT: More.

**So how long would your first crop last, then?**

BERT: See, we used to last for a while because we used to plant the beans underneath. The tomato, like I say, planted there with string and we used to plant the beans on the side, and you used to make it go up on the string.

**The same string.**

BERT: Yes. And I think that's why we used to do not too bad, because we used to get the two crops.

**Did you have two different crops of tomatoes in a year, or just one?**

BERT: No, two. Because one was Grosse Lisse and the other one was a standard tomato.

**And why did you have two different kinds of tomatoes?**

BERT: The Grosse Lisse is a better tomato, used to be a better tomato, but it was no good early, so you had to plant them late. So we'd plant our crop first and then we would plant the Grosse Lisse to get the next crop.

**When it was a bit warmer.**

BERT: Yes.

**And if you remember the seasons, you know, like can you remember what it was like say for winter when you were working in the glasshouses?**

BERT: Well, we used to get frost in the morning, frost, and we used to burn coal, old motor car tyres, we'd put them in buckets, used to put about – three or four buckets, wasn't it? –

MARY: Yes.

BERT: – hanging up in the glasshouse and light them up about –

MARY: About midnight.

BERT: – midnight, to keep the frost – – –. A little bit of the frost used to burn all the tomatoes.

MARY: The frost used to burn the tomatoes.

BERT: Frost.

**And how many frosts would you have had in a year?**

BERT: All depends.

MARY: All depends the year, too.

BERT: The year, the cold. You could hear the glass cracking when they used to get the frost on it. It was the ice.

**And thick?**

BERT: Yes. Not *that* thick; just, you know — — —.

**And what happened when the glass cracked?**

BERT: No, they weren't cracking; the ice used to crack up.

**Oh, on the ice.**

BERT: Only ice.

**And then in summer did you put something on the glass?**

BERT: No, we used to spray sometimes calcamine, the chalk. It used to wash off. We had to wash it off, after. When you spray that stuff it keeps the frost off.

MARY: Then, see, the calcamine was easy to wash off when it was time that it needed no shade.

**Yes, so in summer when you wanted the warmth.**

BERT: The warmth, yes.

**And your main crops were tomatoes and beans?**

BERT: At the beginning we had about three or four years of capsicum.

MARY: Cucumbers.

BERT: Cucumbers on some of them, some on capsicum. Capsicum, not like these are today, today then get capsicum. We used to get them that thick, that long.

MARY: And thin.

BERT: And thin.

MARY: Thin flesh, you know.

**Ah, so a different form of capsicum. Were they red, the ones that you grew?**

BERT: Oh, if you would have left them there.

MARY: If you wanted to.

BERT: But we never used to leave them there because if you could sell them we'd pick.

MARY: They were so short. (laughter)

**And were they popular?**

BERT: Oh, yes.

**And not many people were growing them?**

BERT: I don't think so, because we used to sell them easy.

**And did you keep all your seed every year for everything?**

BERT: For the tomato we used to.

**And what about the beans?**

BERT: Not them, no. We used to buy the seed.

**And where would you buy the beans?**

BERT: In the market, East End Market.

**So there was someone there who was selling – – –.**

BERT: Oh, yes. Selling, yes. They used to come and tell us off. He said, 'Your father used to stay here, smoke his cigar, sit in the back of the truck, and you young whipper-snippers,' he used to say, 'you order the stuff and if I'm not there in time you go off'. We'd say, 'I want it before eight o'clock', or else we used to leave it there till the next market. I think Dad was more easier-going. We used to come and eight o'clock we used to be home from the market – eight, nine o'clock. But that was the life, I suppose.

**Yes. When you got home at eight or nine in the morning after being at market, what would you do?**

BERT: Work.

**Straight back to work?**

BERT: Yes.

**So long days.**

BERT: Oh, yes. But I don't know why, we never used to worry about this at the time.

**Yes. You just, like Mary was saying in her interview, just got on.**

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Yes, got on. And one day – I feel sorry, she used to wash, every after tea, used to wash their clothes, because she used to come out and help me. So one day I was in the market and I was looking for a few times a washer.

MARY: Washing machine.

BERT: Washing machine. And I thought, 'Well, I'm going to – – –.' I had a good morning and I thought, 'I'll go and have a look if it's still there', he used to sell steel

washing machines. I was looking at it two or three times. I went up to him one day, I said, 'I want to buy that machine you've got in the window'. He said, 'You can't have that'. I said, 'I need it because my wife's birthday I want to give her a present', I didn't know what to say. (laughter) And I went home, I covered it up. She said, 'What you got on the truck?' I said, 'Nothing'. I feel sorry for her and I got a Pope washing machine with a roller.

MARY: With a wringer.

BERT: With a wringer. It was all motorised, no hands. She was happy, happy.

**Ah, what a lovely story. That's beautiful. What were some of the hard things? You know, like *were* there hard things about being a market gardener?**

BERT: Like I said, you get used to it and you say, like, 'That's it'. Your brain works. You got to do that, so you go and do it.

**You told me that you used to go to Truro to pick up wood.**

BERT: Yes.

**That would have been on weekends, maybe, would it?**

BERT: It all depends the time we had. I used to leave about four o'clock in the morning, before.

MARY: The more busy time was when we had picking to do, when the crop was ready to pick. That's when it was busier, that you had to do it, you know.

**Yes, no choice.**

MARY: Like the pruning and whatever, that could stay for one day, you could do more the day after, really.

**When did you take your holidays, because you said that you used to ---?**

BERT: After Christmas.

**After Christmas.**

BERT: Yes.

**And you used to go with the kids?**

BERT: Oh, yes. And the caravan.

**Tell me some places.**

BERT: We went to Mount Kosciusko. We left the caravan in –

MARY: Cooma.

BERT: – Cooma and we went to drive up to Mount Kosciusko. And the kids, they were all happy throwing snow. There used to be a lot of snow.

MARY: Because you could go up with the car right to the tip.

BERT: Up to the top. Don't know if you've ever been?

**Yes, but not in a car.**

MARY: Not up to the top, no.

BERT: We used to go right up to the top. And the second time we went there –

MARY: Up to the top, too.

BERT: – yes – second time we went there we weren't allowed to go up.

MARY: No, this is after Diane.

BERT: Yes, after, yes. First holiday we went with the caravan, we went along the Coorong and it was all bumpy. And they reckoned there's no shops, so she said, 'We'll get a box of spaghetti and we'll put it in the caravan in case we can't get any food or any spaghetti'. (laughter) Well, those years, there weren't any around.

MARY: Our first trip with the caravan was in 1954.

**Wow. And you went along the Coorong.**

MARY: Yes, yes. We had three children then.

**And what did you eat? Spaghetti.**

MARY: No, no.

BERT: No, we had them in case.

MARY: We saw shops every now and then, you know.

BERT: That was nice.

**So it was important for you to take holidays.**

BERT: Not important, but, you know – – –.

MARY: I think we were the first ones that did go – – –.

BERT: Most of the Italians, they say – I was in the market one day and the chap opposite our place, Berno, he comes up to me, he goes, 'Albert,' he said, 'I heard you're going for a holiday'. And I said, 'Yeah, why?' He said, 'You're going to lose a crop'. When I die I lose everything! (laughter) We had five or six months in Italy on holiday.

MARY: Oh, that was when we went to Italy.

**But you obviously thought it was important to do other things as well, like you work, you earn money, so ---.**

MARY: That's how we saw it, yes.

BERT: Yes.

**And give your kids the opportunity to see different things.**

BERT: Yes.

MARY: That's important.

BERT: But the kids were really nice. Some kids, now they say it's boring. But never heard them say anything like that.

**They were interested. They were probably pleased to be in different environments.**

MARY: I've got some photos of the little ones, when they were little, and especially when we went even up Mount Kosciusko, we had the car there and they were throwing – you know, they were enjoying themselves throwing snowballs.

**How beautiful.**

BERT: It was beautiful. But the whole thing even now is beautiful. Our kids, they drive up nearly every day, in and out. The daughter was just left when you ---.

**So your children live quite locally?**

BERT: Yes.

**Because, Bert, you're eighty-four and Mary, you're eighty-four, aren't you?**

BERT: She thought, 'I won't let *him* go'. (laughter)

**And what about your parents, Bert? Like when your dad arrived in Australia in 1927, do you know why he had come to Australia?**

BERT: I think, one, he never liked Mussolini and he used to see too many ---. He had a good job, really.

**What did he do?**

BERT: When they irrigate the water – that's right, isn't it?

MARY: Yes.

BERT: And he was in charge, was in charge of the water, because in our town there they all had this water to water their garden.

MARY: And they all had traps, like, to release the water into their block.

BERT: To release the water.

MARY: And so that would be blocked. When he finished watering one block, he would close that one and open up the other .....

BERT: So you had an hour of water or half an hour, and when that half an hour was done he's there ready to shut the water to do the next neighbour. And he used to look after the water, because if you look after the water – you know, they give you ten minutes or five minutes every time you shut and open – and he was doing all right. Mum was saying there was no worry about food. But he didn't like the country, how the country was going, I think.

**And you told me that your father's twin brother had already gone to Canada?**

BERT: Canada, yes. That's where we were supposed to go. And his sister. His sister, too, there.

MARY: That was his sister in that, yes.

BERT: Yes.

**Had gone to Canada?**

BERT: Yes.

**And you told me that the immigration changed.**

BERT: Yes, stopped, and they wouldn't allow them to go to Canada, so they turned around and come to Australia.

MARY: Canada or America, all through that area there.

**So your dad came with someone else?**

BERT: Bruno's father, but he used to look after him because he was young.

**That's Bruno Piovesan's father.**

BERT: Yes, father.

**What was his name?**

BERT: Angelo.

**Angelo. So they both arrived in Adelaide first?**

BERT: I think so.

**And then he worked for eight years before he called your mother and all the five children.**

BERT: Yes. I think he worked for about a year on the road or a bit more.

**At Karoonda?**

BERT: Yes. And then they come down. I don't know how they got this land here to work.

**It's interesting, isn't it? Be interesting to know.**

BERT: To know, yes.

**Because they leased the land.**

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Was there another friend sold it, another friend here, the one with the chicken?

BERT: Oh, yeah ---.

MARY: I don't know, I didn't know him.

BERT: Yes, that's right. He used to have the what's-the-name down Henley Beach. Out at the jetty he used to have two little shops selling ice-cream. Now, this chap -- and he had a poultry farm next door to Dad. I think he's the one that called them ---

MARY: I don't know, dear.

**And he was Italian, he was from Treviso maybe? No?**

BERT: I don't know.

MARY: His name was Bergamin.

BERT: Bergamin was his name.

MARY: I don't know him.

**That's interesting. And what about your mother, like how do you think the experience was for her?**

BERT: My mother was so happy. Dad wanted to take her back for a holiday in Italy and she said, 'No way I'm going back there anymore. I had enough of it'. He said, 'You go'. My father, he said, 'You go and I'll wait for you back'. She didn't go. Dad went.

**When would he have gone?**

BERT: He went living with his sister.

MARY: No, when.

BERT: Oh, when? Just before us.

MARY: About '64.

**Oh, right. And your mum stayed.**

BERT: Yes.

**She wasn't interested to go back.**

BERT: No, no.

**Isn't that interesting?**

BERT: My father used to say, 'Isa, you're going to get too fat', because she was skinny, they used to call her ..... – I don't know if you – you know, the post, they go up and catch the chicken up on top – and when she came here she started to eat. Dad was saying, 'Don't eat too much, you're going to get sick'. She said, 'I was sicker in Italy without any food. At least I have a bit of fun now'. (laughter)

**Did she have other friends here, did she make friends here in Adelaide?**

BERT: Yes. Well, they had all the women around here ..... Bruno's mother, she was living right next to Dad and Mum.

**Right, so they got on well?**

BERT: Oh, yes. She was so happy, she said, 'At least I've seen my kids doing something for themselves'.

**And living well.**

BERT: Living well, yes. We used to work, but we lived all right.

**Did your mum help your dad in the garden?**

BERT: No, no. She had enough to do.

**With cooking and ---.**

BERT: Cooking and ---.

**And this beautiful railway carriage, the *Willochra*, how long did your family live in that carriage?**

BERT: We lived till we got married, in there. That's right. And when they got married they all left, so my father used to rent it out.

**Who did he rent it out to?**

BERT: To the migrants, Italian migrants who used to come out.

MARY: The young boys that used to come here.

BERT: All the young boys used to come out from Italy and he used to rent the room to them.

**Where did your parents live then, did they have ---?**

BERT: They built a house. Still a couple of houses down.

**On Frogmore Road.**

BERT: On Frogmore Road, yes.

**So renting it out was a good idea.**

BERT: Oh, yes. And then some kids burned it down.

**When was that?**

BERT: It was children, schoolkids. You know, kids that started mucking around.

**When would that have been?**

BERT: That would have been about 1950.

MARY: Yes, the end of 1950.

**How awful.**

BERT: Yes. By the time the fire brigade came it was all finished.

MARY: But I don't think there was anything to do with the museum, they weren't interested.

BERT: Those years they weren't interested.

MARY: Because if that had been still around now it would have been in the museum for sure.

**Yes.**

MARY: Having been one of those carriages there, been done up for the Duke.

**For the Duke and Duchess of York.**

BERT: Yes, but inside it was beautiful. Inside it was really, really something – we never see a thing like that.

**It must have been like a dream for a ten-year-old boy.**

BERT: Oh, yes. And it was so long we used to run up and down the passage. It had a passage on the side and the rooms like that. We used to run up and down the passage.

**It's a really unexpected sort of accommodation.**

BERT: Yes, that's right.

**On a market garden property.**

BERT: Yes.

**And you told me, Bert, that you think your dad paid fifty pounds for it.**

BERT: Fifty pounds.

**And he bought it at the Islington –**

BERT: Islington.

**– Railway Yards.**

BERT: Yes.

**How would they have got it from Islington?**

BERT: Semitrailer with different wheels. They used to put the trailer, say usually catch about say 20 or 30 feet, semitrailer, and the rest they used to put wheels, double wheels, I suppose, they put it underneath there, that's how they came.

**It must have looked spectacular.**

BERT: I think so.

**Yes.**

BERT: Sometimes you think – it had a bathroom, shower. I remember Mum washing the bath. It was those tin ones, you know, those years. And she washed it because she thought it was getting dirty – Dad painted it – and she put White King [bleach] and it took all the paint off and Dad was going, 'I used paint!' But I never seen Dad and Mum having a quarrel. I think they might have had quarrels because Dad used to say, 'If you don't have a quarrel with your wife something's wrong with you. You've got a girlfriend or she's got a boyfriend'. (laughter)

**So what did you learn from your parents, then?**

BERT: I think we learned a lot. When we started to go to the dance at Flinders Park –

MARY: Close it off. (laughter)

BERT: – and Dad goes, 'Kids!', he said. Because we always had our meal on the table, you know, like not one sitting down. At the table. Mum used to get a cloth, used to have your plate, everyone had a plate, fork and knife, and – – –.

**So your dad used to give you rules?**

BERT: Yes, he gave me some rules. He said, 'Watch these women. You go to the dance, these women have got a little trap. If they catch you in a trap you're in trouble'. (laughs)

**So you remembered that.**

BERT: Yes. Those things, they always stay in your [mind].

**But you would have also learned from your dad about hard work?**

BERT: Oh, yes.

**Like very hard work.**

BERT: Yes. Never used to bother about work, I don't know why.

**What did your parents do for their social life? Like I guess it was the people around, you know, going and visiting and ---.**

BERT: Sometimes Mum used to go to town with Rosina, my sister, and then she used to buy a pair of shoes or stockings, I don't know what she used to do, and she used to come home and show to Dad. 'But I only pay so much.' And Dad used to say, 'How much you pay?' 'So much.' He said, 'I'm not *that* stupid'. (laughs)

MARY: No, they used to have a family that they were from the same township in Hindley Street, used to live there.

BERT: Nearly opposite our house, he used to live.

MARY: Yes, right. But here, and whenever they used to go to the market they used to stop there.

**And a have coffee.**

BERT: Cup of coffee.

MARY: Coffee or whatever, yes.

**And what was their name?**

MARY: Battaglia

BERT: Battaglia.

MARY: And it was in the houses where Brazzale used to live.

**Oh, okay.**

MARY: Peter Brazzale, I don't know if you ---.

**I've heard the name.**

MARY: Yes, right. They had the mica mine, factory.

**In Alice Springs.**

MARY: Yes.

**That's right, in the street off Hindley Street.**

MARY: Hindley Street ---. And they had all that row there of shops, they were shops but they were all rented out as living quarters, you know.

**So up near the west end of Hindley Street, near West Terrace.**

BERT: Yes.

MARY: And Bailetti was there on the other corner and they had all these as far as Pulteney Street – not Pulteney Street, what’s it called?

**Morphett?**

MARY: Morphett Street, yes.

BERT: Morphett, yes.

**And they rented them out as accommodation.**

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Yes.

MARY: There was no accommodation those years. Even the young boys that used to come out on their own, and they couldn’t find accommodation. So that’s why anything would have been handy for them to go into.

**Like the railway carriage.**

MARY: Yes, yes,

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Or sheds, you know, anything.

BERT: We went to the Casino the other night. We met that bloke, we met a chap there –

MARY: I can’t remember which one you’re thinking of.

BERT: – anyhow, and he said, ‘Those years I lived in a *vagon*’. They call it a ‘*vagon*’.

***Vagon.***

BERT: Yes, *vagon*. He said, ‘That many years I’ve been slept in there’. And the kids used to come out from Italy and they used to say, ‘Go in the carriage. Secondo will lend you – – –.’ (laughs)

**So this man you met was one of the boys who had lived there.**

BERT: Yes, yes.

**Ah! And I guess the Tonellato family would have been quite famous because of the carriage.**

BERT: Yes. And when we were in Italy at Castelfranco, we went to have a cup of coffee. We’re going to have a cup of coffee and a woman was coming out of the coffee bar – remember that one?

MARY: Yes.

BERT: And she goes, ‘Hey, Tonellato, how are you going?’ And I thought to myself, ‘Jesus, who is she?’ Anyway, she told me who she was and still it never clicked. And she was having a cup of coffee in the coffee bar at Castelfranco, and she lived in the *vagon* I don’t know for how long.

**She had lived there?**

BERT: Yes.

**And she’d gone back to live in Italy?**

BERT: To live in Italy, yes.

**Wow. And had she come here as a single woman?**

MARY: No.

BERT: No, no.

MARY: I think they were married.

BERT: They were married.

MARY: Yes. They did get married here, they must have been married.

**So you’re famous all over the world, your family! (laughter)**

BERT: But in Italy when these boys went back most of them came back when we went back, a lot of them.

MARY: Oh, yes.

BERT: And everyone we spoke to them over in Italy, they all said the same thing: ‘With the money we bought this café, coffee bar or restaurant. We worked it out it’s better to stay here and buy because the stuff was so cheap that time to buy.’ Every time we used to go out from where we were staying. ‘Are you Americani?’ ‘No, Australiani.’ And he goes, ‘I’ve lived in there for ten years in Australia’. Most of them. Went to have an ice-cream one day, my brother and his wife, they go in and he spoke about ..... .., my brother’s wife, spoke in English, and he goes, ‘Ah, you’re Australiani, uh?’ And she goes, ‘Yeah’. ‘I lived in’ – where was it, in Sydney?

MARY: Sydney.

BERT: – ten years or so.

MARY: They used to go out there when they were young to get married, you know, they thought maybe or they knew some girls out there so they’d go back to get married, and

then after they'd buy themselves a business over there. So that's why they remained there.

BERT: Yes.

MARY: You know, if they'd get married there they remained there.

**So they thought that maybe they'd just go back and marry and then come back.**

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Yes.

**But then – it's interesting, isn't it, because there were also men who had the proxy wives.**

BERT: Oh, yes. Piovesan – – –.

MARY: No, not Piovesan. Marchioro.

BERT: Yes, ..... She came out with – – –.

MARY: Didn't they know each other before?

BERT: Oh, yes, they knew each other.

MARY: ..... Marchioro's mother –

**That's right.**

MARY: – she came out that way.

**Yes. Such a big risk, isn't it?**

BERT: Yes.

MARY: Yes, yes. A lot of them came out.

**Did you know any families that had that arrangement?**

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: I know that she was a dressmaker and they used to live – she's still alive – they used to live up at Newton way, that way. And they met each other at the railway station. This man, and this man had his mother with him, and this girl got off to meet her future husband that she came here for and then as soon as she saw him she didn't like him. She said, 'I don't like you', so she didn't want to have anything to do with him. And his mother, 'You don't have to eat him to like him'.

BERT: 'Eat him.' (laughter)

MARY: No, no, but this is what it was like. It would have been a hard decision.

**Yes, and to come to a country where you don't speak the language.**

MARY: No, and you don't know what it's like.

BERT: It wasn't bad for them. Dad and Mum, like Dad and Piovesan there, they had nobody. Worse still, they were a lot worse than us.

MARY: Being the first settlers.

BERT: In the first that came out.

**In the '20s, yes.**

MARY: Yes, yes, yes.

**And maybe there was racism, too.**

MARY: Yes, a little bit.

BERT: A little bit, yes.

MARY: And then the language, you see, that was the worst part, when they had to go and buy something they have to make signs and whatever.

**And no real opportunities to learn the language –**

BERT: No.

MARY: No.

**– except on the job, or – – –.**

BERT: That's right.

MARY: Yes, that's right, yes.

**And now for you, do you feel like Australian with a percentage of Italian or do you feel half-and-half?**

MARY: No.

BERT: No.

**What do you feel?**

MARY: I'm no Italian, for sure.

**No Italian?**

MARY: Definitely.

**So you feel Australian.**

BERT: Australian, yes.

**But you also have your heritage.**

BERT: Oh, yes. When we went over to Italy I drove the car from Castelfranco – we bought a motor car in the morning – in the morning, wasn't it? Straight away. We went to where we came from, at Caselle, and I made a mistake at one door. I went away when I was a kid and I still remember this street, the road, you know. The only thing I thought the road was wider, the front of the church was huge. It wasn't. When I went back there was nothing there. I think Dad loved Australia.

MARY: No feeling, like there was nothing to be feeling for, really.

**And do you think that that would be because you were small children when you came?**

BERT: Yes, it might be that, too.

MARY: I think so. And, see, you left no friends there, you don't know of anybody there. So I think that would be – because the ones that come I think around the 20 years old, you know, they would have memories of whatever, you know, that they went through over there.

**And friends and a life, really.**

MARY: Yes, that's right.

**Because at twenty you're already formed.**

BERT: That's right, yes.

MARY: Yes. Be a good part of life.

**Yes. But it's interesting, Bert, that you say that your mother was very settled here –**

BERT: Yes.

**– and didn't feel the need to return.**

BERT: No. No, no, no. She said, 'I'm not going back there. Here,' she said, 'we've got everything'. She used to make biscuits, she used to make – – –.

MARY: Well, no. I think although your father had a good job out there, you still were restricted with your food.

BERT: Oh, for sure.

MARY: You couldn't get whatever food you wanted.

**Because of poverty.**

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Yes. But things changed there, too.

MARY: Now –

BERT: Now.

MARY: – they're different, but those years – – –.

**Yes. One last question about your father: when you said that he didn't like Mussolini, was he a political kind of man?**

BERT: No, no, no.

**But he had a strong feeling about fascism?**

BERT: He could see what was going on. Because my mother's brother – that's right, the two brothers – they were against the fascists, and one of the fascists was a friend of his. He said, 'You'd better take off, go somewhere else, or else they're going to kill you'.

MARY: They used to go and pick them up.

BERT: The fascists, they was going to go and pick him up, pick them up and – there was two of them, and he said, 'You'd better take off', he said, 'before the truck pulls up'. And they went to – – –.

MARY: From the Veneto region they went into France.

**So they could – – –.**

BERT: Walked.

MARY: Walked, through the mountains.

**To be safe.**

BERT: Yes.

MARY: Yes.

**That would have taken many, many days, to do that.**

MARY: Yes.

**And what did they do when they got to France?**

BERT: I don't know. They didn't come back anymore. But they're still alive because when we went we wanted to go and see them, and talking to a bloke there and he said –

MARY: In '68, this was.

BERT: – 'I wouldn't go, if I was you'. I don't know why, must have been sick or something.

**What a dramatic story.**

BERT: Yes.

**And young men having to suddenly just – – –.**

MARY: Run off.

**Yes. So things were quite serious already in the '20s.**

BERT: Oh, yes.

**Enough for your father to say he would leave.**

BERT: Yes.

**And now, we're nearly at the end of the interview, what would you say about your kind of life and what's been important for you, Bert?**

BERT: Well, I think we had a good life, really good, with a family, all pretty good. You know, like nice. They always come and see their father or their grandkid, you know. Life I thought was nice, we had a good life. To me, I thought. We never have a fight.

MARY: Ooh!

BERT: We haven't.

**And you've worked really as a team, haven't you?**

BERT: Yes.

MARY: Yes.

**Like in different work and – – –.**

BERT: I think that's what's-the-name today, the wrong is today, because the woman works for herself, the husband works for himself, like in an office. They never see their family, or they see it when they go home. But ours was different, I think. Ours, they used to come in the garden, I used to go and pick the kids at school, they'd come down, they wanted to come. Raymond was about eight years old, he used to fly around with this tractor, and they were happy. I don't know, to me, everyone was happy. I suppose I was doing all right for them, too.

**Yes. And so like your ability to work and provide and to be also part of a group of strong friends –**

BERT: Oh, yes.

**– because you even now have strong friendships.**

BERT: Even now, oh yes, for sure. When we sold out the business, instead of bank the money I bought different blocks, built units, and the kids got them. Not yet, but – – –.  
(laughs)

**Yes. So it was you planning for the future.**

BERT: Yes. Even the friends we got, even Bruno, when he was a kid I used to take him around because they used to live next door and when their father died we took them away for that day, took them up to Basket Range, just for the drive to get like out of it, their father. His father was very nice, Bruno's father.

**So living with good friends has been a very important part of your life.**

BERT: Yes. Oh, most of it, because ..... was a good ---. I'm still friends with her brothers. One lives next door, the other one just lives two or three houses up.

**This is your brothers?**

BERT: My brother, yes.

**And your sister lives nearby too, doesn't she?**

BERT: Opposite, just opposite. She's been coming here ..... for thirty years, having coffee every Saturday. (laughs)

**So that close community life is important.**

BERT: Yes.

**Oh, that's great. So to end off, then, is there anything else that you would like to say?**

BERT: Be happy with your family, and that's it. Got to take and give a bit, because sometimes I've got to give - she's not here, otherwise she'll deny it. (laughs) No, she's terrific.

**That's lovely.**

BERT: Yes.

**Well, thank you, Bert, that's great.**

BERT: My daughters are terrific. The son's got a bit of cheek, but they say, 'He's like you, Albert'.

**Oh, that's lovely. Well, thank you very much for the interview.**

**End of interview**