

**Interview OH872/13 - for the Italian Market Gardeners' Oral History Project**

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**First interview with Oscar Mattiazzo,**

**recorded by Madeleine Regan at West lakes, South Australia**

**13<sup>th</sup> April 2011.**

**Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, is also present.**

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**Oscar, thank you for being in this interview. I'm going to ask you first about your background. Could you give me your full name please?**

Oscar Mattiazzo.

**And your place and date of birth?**

15 December 1923, born in Bigolino Provincia Treviso, Italy.

**Thank you. And your father's name and place and date of birth?**

Angelo Mattiazzo, date of birth I can't remember. It would be in the 1890-something, and he was also born in Bigolino, Treviso.

**And what was his occupation?**

He was a *contadino*, gardener, and that's all, that's ...

**Yeah! And your mother's name and her details?**

My mother's name was Virginia Buffon, and she also was born in Bigolino Treviso, and yeah, she married my father in, I did know the date but ... something that was after the First World War, and that's it for my mother.

**Thank you. And I know that your father first came to Australia. Can you tell me a little about those circumstances?**

Yes. Unfortunately in my father's family there were five brothers, there were five brothers, and when my father married my mother she wasn't too well, and in a traditional farming family in Italy everybody's got to pull their weight, you might say, and because my mother wasn't able to do that, he was asked to leave the family and therefore we had to move from the family home of the Mattiazzo and went into rented, two rooms rented, in Bigolino

there, and my father then borrowed some money to come to Australia, and he came out here in 1927, and of course they were bad years. Here in 1927 there was the big depression on and work was difficult to find, and therefore money was not easy to save up. First of all he had to pay for his, for the borrowed that he ... for his voyage, and then save some money for mum and I to come out, which we did in 1934, and that's about it.

**I'm thinking about your father having to leave the family home.**

Yes.

**That must have been a difficult situation?**

Yes, because as I said before the ... especially, we call it *contadini*, that's a farming property – they were quite rich really in a way – but they all worked really hard, but because my mother could not, as I said before, pull her weight as far as working concerned, she was completely ... she had rheumatic problems and therefore he was asked to leave. It's hard, it's hard, but they were hard times, and of course my father for all the years afterwards that we've talked about Italy [sic] and I said "Do you want to go back to Italy for a trip?" He said "No, I've suffered too much over there", so he never wanted to go back to Italy.

**Did he keep in contact with his family?**

Only with a sister, he did, yes.

**And why did your father come to Adelaide?**

He came here because my uncle, Domenico Rossetto, married a Carmella Buffon, which was a sister to my mother, and they had been out several years in Australia, and so when my dad, in fact it wasn't my dad it was Rossetto that made the application to bring him out here, and that's why he came to Adelaide.

**And did your father tell you about his early experiences of life in Adelaide?**

Oh, yes. Well mainly that work was impossible to have. I remember a story that he worked six months for a market gardener up in the hills of Adelaide, and after six months the owner said "I can't pay you", and he gave him his watch as payment, but of course ... and I still have it, really, to today, you know, it just shows you how hard it was for him to save money to bring us, to bring mum and I out here, and so it gives you an example of how hard those days. I mean everybody was in the same boat, it was depression, depression, depression, very hard.

**Do you have memories of your father before he left Italy?**

No, no. I was about nearly three years of age when he left but I don't remember, I don't remember, no.

**And did your mother continue to live apart from family in that time that you were ... after your father had gone?**

Yes, oh yes, we still kept these two rooms that we were able to have, and yes, always apart.

**And what about your extended families? Do you have memories of grandparents, aunts, uncles?**

Yes, I remember my grandparents from my father's side. They were very nice people actually, especially my grandmother. She always used to put an egg in my pocket to take home when I visited them, and of course it might sound funny but an egg was like a luxury in those days, and on my mother's side I can only remember the grandfather, because they were merchants, and he travelled quite a bit and I always waited for him to come home, and he always had some sweets in his pocket, or something, so that was good. But the grandmother on my mother's side had already died by the time I remember.

**And do you feel that you left anyone behind when ... I mean your father must have felt like he was leaving you behind. It must have been a difficult situation for him.**

It was difficult but it was ... he had no choice really. There was no hope of him getting any work in Italy, but that was a general trend there in those days, and it was hard for everybody, and a lot of people migrated, so he took the punt and came to Australia, mm.

**Thank you. I'm going to ask you now ... before we finish that, did any other relatives come to live in Australia after your father and your family, your mother and yourself?**

No, no, not after my father. There was already two brothers of my mother here in Australia when my dad came along, and when we arrived. One was always working in Central Australia – in those days we called it Central Australia, now it's the Northern Territory – and the other one mainly worked in Kangaroo Island making eucalyptus oil and things like that. Yes, they were here for many years.

**Thank you. So now I'm going to talk to you about your childhood, Oscar. You told me where you grew up, in the village of Bigolino. Can you describe that village, you know, do you have memories of it?**

Oh yes. I guess ... I remember being poor as we were, and as I say, I must say that a lot of people were poor there, I remember that when you're going to school, because you were

poor you were taken to the Sisters, the Convent, where they gave you lunch for free you might say because ... and I remember being taken to, during the holidays for two weeks, to the seaside by this organisation, to take young children that were of poor families, to give them something to look forward to, and I remember that distinctly, yes.

**And do you remember what kind of food you ate at home?**

I can't remember because we never had much to eat (laughs).

**How did your mother survive, like ...?**

Oh, it was very ... she did a lot of sewing, she was very good at that, and although she was crippled in many ways, but she did a lot of sewing and got by that way, but not by money but by being given, I don't know, some semolina or something, eggs, or something to, something to eat all the time.

**Her parents wouldn't have provided financial support?**

No, it was a strange thing because they were the richest family in the town, a merchant, and they felt that my mother married out of caste you might say. Can I call it *caste* or ...? She should have married a better, in a better situation than a *contadino*, you might say (laughs). I mean they looked at those things in those days. We don't worry about it now but in those days they looked at these things and they said "Well you should not, you know, serve you right, you went out and did your own thing and now you're being punished for it", but it wasn't all that bad because her brother, who was alive when, still alive when we come away, helped her a little bit, but not in money but just food or maybe some wood for the winter, things like that, just to help along the way.

**And do you remember in your family kinds of celebrations that you might have had when you were in the village? Do you remember Christmas?**

No. The only times that I remember something is when a friend of my father, who was my *santalo*, and he gave me a, well some, some, it's like a cake, a round cake, you hang it around your neck or something – I can't remember what they called it – and I thought I was king.

**Laughter**

I thought I was a king that day because that was during the, oh, it must have been Easter or something, something, some celebration like that, and that's about the only thing that I remember, like getting the thing.

**And what's a *santalo*? Like a godfather?**

A godfather.

**Right, yeah. Was your mother strict with you when you were growing up?**

Beg pardon?

**Was your mother strict with you when you were growing up?**

Yes, yes, she, she told me the rights and wrongs about things and, and we were pretty close because there was only the two of us, and I'd grown up with her as a youngster over there, and then coming here, my dad was, when we came out he was also working out of Adelaide, and often I was home with my mother only, and so my mother actually would be the one that brought me up completely, and that's it.

**And do you remember friends of your own that you might have made when you were a small boy in Italy?**

Yes, I made two friends there, and we were pretty close with one in my little town, and the other one was in Valdobbadiene, which is a town about four kilometres north of Bigolino, because to go to Grade 5 – in our town we only went up to Grade 4 in our school – so to go to Grade 5 I had to walk to this other town, Valdobbadiene, and I made a friend there, and we kept writing to each other after, after I came to Australia, and the friend who was in Bigolino, he also came to Australia in later years, and went to Melbourne, and naturally he became captain of the Juventus Soccer Club in Melbourne, but by that time I had given my soccer away so I didn't play against him, but I did see some of the games that he played.

**So does that mean that when you were in Italy you really enjoyed playing soccer?**

Well I don't think we had a ball to play soccer with (laughs). No, I don't remember having a soccer ball over there, no, no.

**What kind of things would you have done with your friends?**

What did they call those ...? There was little games they would play but ... I don't know what it's called, it's with a stick and you have a little pointed, another little stick, and you hit it and it goes up in the air and off it goes, and then you try and hit it on the air there, like that. I can't remember what it's called but it's a ... the other thing that I did play later when I was getting a bit older, is the *tamborino*. Tamborino is a round, what would you call it, you know, like Salvation Army you've got those ...?

**Oh, like tamborines?**

Tamborines.

**Yeah.**

And you hit the ball from one end to the other, yes. In fact only because probably our little town, although it was small, they had some good players, the older ones, and they had some good players, and they had a good name around the district, so I guess the little kids like me wanted to be the same.

**So it was a musical instrument but also you could play?**

No, no, no, it was not, it's not ... no, a tamborino, it was only made the same way with a, it's a round frame and a skin on top tight.

**Right, yeah.**

And hit the ball like that. It's a ... it's like same as tennis but tennis is done with all strings and this one was done by just the skin of the ...

**And did it have a handle?**

It had a sort of a leather, piece of leather strap around at one end, and you ... well it was round anyway, so you put your hand in under the strap and held it like that. Yeah, and I think they still play a little bit somewhere in Italy, that game, but not in our town I don't think, but ...

**And when you went to school you told me that you had to go to Valdobbiadene.**

That's correct.

**What was the discipline like at school?**

Oh, pretty strict. Yes, I don't ... yeah, pretty strict. We had to, you know, sort of do our lessons and study and, yeah, I remember I did mine because I loved school. In fact I had to stop home so many weeks one year because of tonsillitis, and I was all swollen, and I went there and I couldn't walk up to four kilometres in the snow, and I had to stay home, and I used to cry because I had to stay home, so I don't know whether that was good or bad, but (laughs) that's the way it was.

**And what did ...?**

But I've always loved school.

**What did you like about school?**

I don't know, I just liked learning, always have, and yeah, so they couldn't, a lot of the people couldn't understand why I was crying because I was stopping home from school (laughs). I must have been rather a strange kid or something (laughs).

**And Oscar, we're now going to talk about the time when you and your mother left Italy. Can you remind me how old you were?**

I was, when I arrived in Australia I was eleven years of age.

**I think you arrived on your birthday?**

That's correct.

**Yeah. Can you remember what happened when the decision was made for you and your mum to come?**

Well the decision wasn't made, it was always on the cards because my dad, when he came out he said "Well as soon as I can save money, enough money to bring you out, then you'll come out". As I said before unfortunately the wrong time with the 1927, the big depression, it was difficult for him to save the money for us to get out quickly, but when he could, he did, and so we came out.

**And do you remember the day that you and your mother left, say from the village or from ...?**

Well the only thing I remember is that I was having a motor car ride to go to catch a train. I can't remember exactly where we caught the train but we had to go to Genova, and to me, you know, it was like something, I don't know, an adventure of some sort but, you know, at that age, at ten and eleven, you don't, you don't worry too much about anything. My mother was the one that was worried all the time (laughs).

**Did you feel that you left anyone behind?**

No, not really, no. Again I think the age makes a difference, yes.

**And do you remember much about the trip on the boat?**

Yes, I remember getting drunk one day.

**Laughter****How did that happen?**

Because I made friends with some other children there, and so after lunch we went around the tables to see if there was any wine in the bottles (laughs) left on the tables (laughs), so we finished (*inaudible*) (laughs). That didn't go down too well with my mother (laughs).

**No, I can imagine. What time of year did you travel?**

November/December.

**Right, so you would have left in cold weather?**

Cold weather, yes, and came to good weather. I remember getting off in Perth, a gentleman there took me, he took me to the, probably the City of Perth, I don't know, whatever, some ... and he bought some bananas, and I thought to myself "Wow, this is ..." (laughs).

**Had you had bananas before?**

I had bananas on the boat because my mother bought some and ... No, I don't think she bought any but it was given to her because we didn't, wouldn't have had the money to pay for bananas I don't think, but, but then again the other thing I remember is an ice-cream which, you know, that was a delicacy – little things like that when you come over, and then ...

**When you were on the boat, I'm just thinking 1934, what were the conditions? Did you have a cabin with your mother?**

Yeah, there were six of us in the cabin.

**Did you know the other people?**

No, no, it was quite ... yeah, well this ... I remember, I remember there were six people but of course as a child you don't take much notice of, you know, whatever, as long as you slept and ate and drank (laughs), and I drank. I'm only saying because of that episode (laughs), that was a once-off, another once-off situation (laughs).

**So it would have been quite an interesting time for you?**

Oh yes, yes, everything was something new. I remember looking over the, the rail of the boat and being told off by the sailors there who were obviously in charge, because we could fall over, naturally, but we were looking at the birds, these flying birds, you know, flying birds in front of the, they get in front of the boat and they fly with the speed of the boat – we wanted to see them fly – and yeah, get into strife like that, but ...

**And how was the boat powered?**



Oh!

**Would it be steam?**

Yes, *montenave*, that would be ... I imagine it would be oil, yes, yes.

**And do you remember the name of the boat?**

Yeah, 'Viminale' was the name of the boat, yes.

**And were there many Italians on board?**

I think most of them would be Italians, but I wouldn't know how many, I didn't, couldn't ...

It was a lot of people.

**And did you arrive in Adelaide?**

No, we arrived in Melbourne.

**And what happened when you arrived, apart from it being your birthday.**

**Laughter**

Well as soon as passed, as soon as we went through Customs they put us onto the train and we arrived in Adelaide the next day.

**Just you and your mother?**

Oh, there was other people that were coming to Adelaide, but yes, we arrived the next day.

**And was your father there to meet you?**

Yes, he was, mm.

**And you didn't, you told me you didn't really have a memory of your father?**

No. Well I don't know whether I recognised him or not, I probably did, I'm not sure, but I'd probably had like see photographs and things like that. I imagine my mother would have teed me up about it.

**And what happened when you arrived? You met your father and then what next?**

We were here for ... in Adelaide we went to stay at my Auntie Rossetto in Hindley Street.

They had a grocery store, but they also had rooms, spare rooms, and we stayed here two weeks in Adelaide, then my dad had a, had work in Naracoorte to go to, so we all, the three of us, went down to Naracoorte and lived there for one year.

**And what work was your father doing?**

He was clearing scrub, scrub clearing, like that.

**And was that for a private farmer or ...?**

For clearing, and you said even today, if you drive down that way there's been a lot of clearing in the past. In fact it's been said that they cleared too much and more or less not ruined the land, but they could have done less of that, and he used to go away on Monday, they used to camp out in a tent in the scrub, and go out Monday and come back Friday night, and that's it.

**And where did you live in Naracoorte?**

And we lived, again we had two rooms in a house. The only other Italian person that was there was a vegetable gardener there, and he supplied a lot of vegies to the Naracoorte community, and we lived in two rooms, in the back rooms of this particular house, and yeah, and so ... but we were home on our own for ... I used to go to school then of course.

**And I was thinking, what about learning English like ... because did you have any English at this time?**

No, no, no, I had no English. They sent me to school at the Naracoorte Catholic School and just pick up as you go along. There was no one really there to do much or teach much, but I remember one incident that because I couldn't talk and the children running around, and I was sent down to the bench at lunch time and Sister came out with a, with a ball of wool and two needles, knitting needles, and she gave me, showed me how to knot, so I had to occupy my time during recess time, and by that time then all the children were around me laughing like mad, and I was a bit embarrassed in that way, so the next day she came out again and so I put the, I got the needles and the wool and put it in the rubbish tin, and then when they call you up for, to march into school she asked me, she made me understand *Where is the wool?* etc, so I grabbed her hand and I took her to the rubbish tin, and I opened the lid and I said "There it is" (laughs). She never gave me the wool anymore (laughs), but I used to get into a lot of fights in those days, fights, you know, between children, because they used to call me Abyssinia all the time, because if you remember in 19, what was it, 1935, the Abyssinian war was on, and so I was being called Abyssinian, so I didn't like that very much so I used to just put my head down and just fly out (laughs).

**And were you a strong young boy?**

Not particularly, no. I used to come home with blood. We used to wear blouses like if I remember, a white blouse and shorts or trousers, but I used to get to go home with blood all over, and my mother wasn't very happy about that.

**No.**

But, you know, eventually I made good friends with all of them. In fact two of them, although we don't see each other now, but if we do see each other we, we're still as if old friends as we've always been.

**Boys from Naracoorte?**

Boys from Naracoorte, yes.

**Wow! So you spent a year there and what happened then?**

And then dad came to Adelaide because they ... he was offered to go to Central Australia to work on the mica mines and wolfram mines, and so we came back to Adelaide and we stayed here a year in Adelaide.

**So your father went off to ...?**

Went off to the, to the mines.

**How would he have got that job?**

I don't know. Through other connections of friends or ... yes.

**Italians?**

Italians, always Italian connections, yes, but ... and so ... but of course again there he was unlucky, he didn't find much, he wasn't very lucky at all, so I remember that mum and I had to go to, I don't know what they call it, it would be like Centrelink now for help. They used to give you certificates for bread or groceries, or kerosene for the stove, meat, all a certificate, no money, but all these little certificates that you'd go to different avenues to purchase that with these certificates, so I had to stop home from school on the day that we had to line up for this, and it would take hours to ... you start at one end and by the time you get to the other end it would be about three or four hours afterwards because there were so many people asking for help.

**Was that in the City of Adelaide?**

I beg your pardon?

**Was that in the City of Adelaide?**

Yes, in the City of Adelaide.

**And were you living back on Hindley Street at that time?**

Yes, always lived in Hindley Street, yeah. I can't remember, recall, we had two rooms in different places. We changed the places if it ... in those days naturally it was sixpence or threepence or whatever, if you could find a room sixpence cheaper than the other, well you would change because sixpence was sixpence in those days.

**Were those rooms furnished?**

No.

**So you had to ...?**

We hardly had any. I mean I remember just having a bed and a little table, that's all, and mum had a cupboard, wardrobe you might say, not very good but they kept my clothes as well in there. No, very, very sparsely (*inaudible*).

**And was it shared kitchen?**

No. Well it was a kitchen, kitchen *cum* laundry and what's name, because we didn't, we couldn't afford the electricity so we only had candles and kerosene primus, little primus stove, and that's why you got kerosene from the, from the government to buy kerosene for the primus stove, so we never had electricity as such, and so that's how we used to (*inaudible*) [sounds like *what's name*].

**I'm thinking of your mother and thinking she came from very poor circumstances in Italy, probably hoping that things might be better.**

Better, yeah, it didn't turn out that way for her, unfortunately, but she never complained, she was not one to complain about things. She was always in pain anyway. She was, yeah, very difficult.

**And how did she manage her illness? Did she see a doctor in Adelaide, or get medical help?**

Well in those days you didn't have the medical help that you've got today, and the little money that dad sometimes sent was for doctor or medication. Adelaide Hospital helped a lot, but not enough really to ... but then later, in later years my mother was ... my father

went ... see I'm jumping a little bit here, but in later years, say in 19..., three years after, after Adelaide we went to Nuriootpa for two years.

**Right.**

And there was ... oh, by the way when we come back from Naracoorte I went to school here, and they put me in Grade 5, so that's where I started schooling really. The first year in Naracoorte was only to learn the language and general things, and then when I went to 'Nuri', that was in Grade 6 and Grade 7, and because my father was working in the brickyard up there, and he had worked for two years there, which was good.

**And what was it like at Nuriootpa at that time, because we're talking about 193-?**

'37-'38. It was a very typical German town really, certainly a lot more Germans than now and they were quite vocal, I thought, but I didn't take any notice of those things, and they ... in fact when the war broke out, this was in 1939, they all had to give up their guns and whatever they had, pistols or whatever, and instead of giving up their guns to the authorities they, they got two coffins and they put them in the coffins and march to the end of the street and buried them (laughs) in the cemetery.

**Wow!**

So ... and another one coming into Lyndoch, there was a shed, the wall of a shed that when you're driving down it hits you straight on, like that, and always there they had some signs on there, but when the war broke out they painted three big suns, the sun that shines, one, two, three, and on it they put *The sun will shine again*, (laughs), all typical of the way they felt up that way at that time. I think they're quite different now, we all are, but they were a very strong German influence there.

**And when you were at school did you continue to enjoy learning there?**

Oh yes, yes, yes.

**Was German taught?**

I had the opportunity to learn German but then, I don't know, somehow or other I went off the track a little bit there. Again we had two rooms there in a, in a house, and the German people that we, that were our ... we were their tenants there, he was willing to teach me, but he was only available only one day a week because his job was to come down to Adelaide for whatever, he was a chiropractor or something, so but it didn't sort of fit in sometimes with me because I used to go, in my spare time I used to go and work and clean

motor cars and cut lawns, and things like that, to get a few little shillings, and yeah, that took a little bit away from my spare time.

**What ... so you lived in Nuriootpa, and was that like the centre of the Barossa, a main town at that time?**

Well I suppose it's difficult to put Barossa, Nuriootpa as a centre, because Tanunda there's Nuriootpa, there's Angaston, there's a couple of other little towns there that makes a complete Barossa, so it was fairly, fairly, fairly important, but because my dad used to, he never drank, he couldn't afford to, he used to go down to the pub on a Saturday and have two glasses of beer. But I used to go, I had to push the bike from Nuriootpa to Tanunda with a two-gallon jar in a sugar bag hanging on my back, to go and get these two gallons of wine from a, from a winery in Tanunda, which is about five-six kilometres away, because it was sixpence cheaper than in Nuriootpa you see (laughs). Anyway that's part of ... that was it.

**And in Nuriootpa the housing situation, how did that compare with the previous year without electricity and ...?**

No, we had electricity there, fortunately, but then we couldn't afford very much of it, so we had the wooden stove and dad used to get some wood, and I used to help him. Because I mean, apart from all that, even while I was in Adelaide and Nuriootpa, I had to do all the washing the clothes for the family because my mother couldn't touch water. She was completely crippled that way, and I used to remember that on a certain day the boys used to walk through the footpath there and call me the woman because I was (laughs) washing the clothes.

**And you were washing by hand?**

Yes, oh yes.

**So you probably grew up taking on quite a lot of responsibility in the house?**

Oh, I don't know about the responsibility, I just did what my mother used to tell me to do, and that's it.

**Was your mother able to cook?**

She was able to cook, yes.

**And how would she have spent her time say, you know, in Nuriootpa and also when you were in Naracoorte and ...?**

Sewing was her main occupation – when I say occupation, if she could make a little bit of money that way, but she suffered a lot. In fact I still believe to today that the medication given to her for arthritis and all the pains that she had, eventually she had, she got leukaemia, and that was more or less the end of her life in a way because when we left, we left Nuriootpa to come back to Adelaide because of my mother's problems and she needed a lot of changing of the blood, changing the, you know, white corpuscles eat the red and all that, whichever way it goes, so she was quite often in the Royal Adelaide Hospital for weeks to change her blood over and back again, so my father came back to Adelaide and went to work for a doctor at Beaumont, Dr Thiersch at Beaumont, and we lived in his property. He had the big house and the little outer house which was one bedroom, one kitchen and a bathroom, and I used to live under the main house in the cellar, not live, used to sleep under the main house in the cellar (laughs), and so that was how we set up so that my mother could get the benefit of having a doctor at home, more or less, and he was in charge of the Pathologist Department in the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and so I think by his ... he was really attached to mum to help her, or help all of us, and dad was the gardener for him there as well, so it all worked in very well, but at the end mum ... I called him one morning, I said "Mum's not too good", and he said "You'd better not ...

***Break in the interview.***

**So we'll just resume the interview.**

Yeah, and he said not to go to work today because mum had to be taken to hospital.

**And Oscar, how old were you?**

Seventeen.

**Seventeen.**

Seventeen and a half at that time, mm.

**A hard time for your family.**

Yes, it was because we had a, you know ... I mean we're not the only ones, there were so many families that had stories like this in many ways. I can only recount my family and see what happened there, but ... Then of course, soon after that, they come around and picked me up and put me in the Allied Works Council, that's when I started a new phase.

**So if we just go back to your school life here in Adelaide, when did you leave school, how old were you?**

Oh right. I was Grade 5 in Adelaide, which was 1936. In 1937 and '38 we were in Nuriootpa, and there I was in Grade 6 and Grade 7, but I'll have to sound my trumpet here but I was top of the class each year, so I'd better (laughs) ...

**Wow! Oscar, that is amazing given the fact that you had arrived only, you know, in 1934. Your ability to learn English must have been fantastic.**

It was OK. And so I became dux of the school as the saying goes.

**That's fantastic. And also one other thing in Nuriootpa, you were part of the pipe band I think?**

Oh yes, yes, I was part of the pipe band, and we played football and cricket, and anything with sport I was quite, I was happy.

**I remember ...**

Pardon?

**Sorry, go on.**

Only I didn't have shoes, boots, to play football, and a friend of mine who I think is still alive in Nuriootpa, I saw him last year, and he, he bought me a pair of shoes and put it on his family account at the store (laughs) because I didn't have shoes to play football, and a pair of swimming trunks (laughs).

**So you were kitted out?**

Yes, so I was fitted out by this fellow (*inaudible*), but then they were a family pretty well off, and I guess they wouldn't (laughs), they wouldn't have known.

**He probably thought *If Oscar gets a pair of boots he'll be great with our team, and we need him.* Oscar, I remember you telling me a story about writing to the Italian Consul about your interest in sport.**

Oh yes, that was in the first year of Australia, in 1935. I was always interested in sport in Italy. I guess as children we barracked for different heroes over in Italy, and my heroes was Binda and Guerra, and what was the other one now? I'll think of it in a minute. And so when I came to Australia I didn't get any news about all the sporting activity, whether it was soccer or whether it was cycling, which was the two main ones for me. And so I wrote, from Naracoorte I wrote a letter to the Italian Consulate in Adelaide and asked if



they had any sporting papers, if they could send me some sporting papers that related to the Italian sporting place. I didn't receive a reply so I wrote the second letter, again I didn't get a reply, but strange enough in, let me see, 2011, I think about 2006 I went to the Archives here in Adelaide, in Angas Street I think it is, and there, lo and behold, are my two letters in the original form, the paper. There was my letters that I had written to the consulate for these papers, the first letter and the second letter for which I have a copy here, a photocopy I got, and, you know, it's strange, and I think, when I think back to all these things, is that because I had written these letters asking for something to do with Italy, and they saw fit to put it in their Archives, whatever they call it, because they were keeping a tab on every migrant that comes out. They've got what they do, what they don't do, all that type of thing, and this is why the reason at that time, when the war broke out with Italy, they come to pick me up to put me in an internment camp, but because I wasn't eighteen, I wasn't taken at that time, and I believe that those two letters was the reason why because I can't remember, other than joining, you know, we started a soccer club, the Italian Soccer Club before the war, and we only played a few games before the war that started with Italy, and we had to abandon the club and we resumed it after the war in 1946, and called it Juventus, the first club was called Savoia, and now I think apart from those two little items ...

Another item is that when I arrived from Italy as an eleven year old, I had the uniform of a *balilla*, which is like a boy scout here in Australia, but over there *balilla* was the first step to become a Fascist type of thing, not that you become a Fascist but that's the, that's the schooling you go, so I had the latest type of uniform, and we used to go to, Saturday morning we used to go to Italian school, in 1936 we were going to the Italian school at the cathedral of today, St Francis Xavier, there's a hall next to that. They used to have these lessons, Italian lessons, for Italian children to keep the Italian language, and there also they had about half a dozen or more of girls and boys dressed up in this uniform because they also came from Italy with their uniform, but because I was the latest one that arrived, I had the latest model, so they put this big photo in the paper, the *Smith's Weekly*, which was a, you might call it a rather, oh, scandalous paper, you know, that's all they did, scandals and things like that, and, and so they ... I mean from those two points, first the letters to the Consul, then this other business about the uniform, etc, and I believe that those two things put me in a, in a situation where I'd be classed as a dangerous person to Australia because of the, of those two points. But as I said before, they came to pick me up but I wasn't

eighteen, so they can't put you in the internment camp until you're eighteen, but as soon as I turned eighteen of course they picked me up and put me in the Allied Works Council.

**I think that's a good point to end our first part of the interview, so thank you Oscar.**

Oscar

**Second interview with Oscar Mattiazzo,  
recorded by Madeleine Regan at West lakes, South Australia**

**13<sup>th</sup> April 2011.**

**Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, is also present.**

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**Oscar, we're just going to start this part by going back to the end of your school life, and I've got a couple of questions for you. The first one is what were the main differences say between school in Italy and school in Adelaide, or South Australia?**

Oh, I didn't find any difference. That question was asked of me at school if I could ... especially when I was in Naracoorte, "How did they teach you in Italy?" or "What did they do?" and I said "There's no difference to what I've been taught here", although I wasn't in any class at that time because the first year I was sort of just sort of learning English, but I didn't find any difference. I told them then and I still say now that I didn't find any difference at all. It seemed to follow the same pattern and the same questions, or the same routines, like that, so I didn't find any, I didn't find any difficulty to pick up here as well because ... and that followed right through the whole schooling that I went to, because I sort of changed from Naracoorte to Adelaide, Adelaide to Nuriootpa, and different classes, different teachers, and etc, but no, it was good.

**And at what age did you leave school?**

At sixteen.

**So where had you done the last years of your schooling?**

Well one year in Naracoorte, one year in Adelaide, and two years at Nuriootpa.

**Oh, so after Nuriootpa you didn't go to school anymore?**

No.

**So you were how old?**

I was sixteen.

**Right. And what did you do when you left school?**

I immediately found employment with a firm called Southcott in Gillies Street, Adelaide, as an apprentice fitter and turner.

**And that year would have been 19...?**

1939.

**39, and at the end of that year you would have turned ...?**

Well at the end of the year I would have been, I don't know, I'll have to work that out  
(laughs).

**Well the way I work it out is that in 1934 when you arrived you were eleven, and five years later you were sixteen, so the end of the 1939 you would have been sixteen?**

That's right, and 193... sorry, '38 ... sorry, 1935 I would have been twelve, wouldn't I, twelve, thirteen in Adelaide, 1936, '37 and '38 which is fourteen and fifteen, and sixteen then in '39.

**Right. So you were sixteen at the time that the war began or, you know, fifteen going on sixteen?**

No, the war began a year after. There must be a year (*inaudible*).

**Well '39 the World War began, but 1940 I think the Italians ...**

Came into the war.

**... entered the war.**

Well I went to Southcott in Gillies Street as an apprentice fitter and turner, but ... and then I changed and went to down here at Pope Products because I thought they could give me a better, a better apprenticeship, and ... but shortly afterwards the war broke out with Italy and they dismissed me because I was Italian and not naturalised.

**Wow!**

And therefore they could not ... because part of their plant was doing munition work and they could not have any aliens working there, and so they called me into the office, they said that they're very sorry because they had picked out two, two children, or children (laughs), two youths to carry on certain extra ... to make them for the firm, they picked out myself and another person, but they had to release me because of the authorities could not allow an alien to work in munition factory, and so I went home.

**And what ...**

And then I went to work with the cement, doing a bit of cement work.

**Who was that with?**

With Floreani, and after that I left, I went to Walkers Furniture Company on Anzac Highway, Ashford, and until the day that they picked me up to be, to, for the Allied Works Council.

**And this was when you were seventeen and a half?**

That's right.

**The first time?**

Yes.

**And can you tell me what that was like that day?**

No, I was, I was ... after ... no, I was eighteen then because they come to pick me up to go internment camp, and they couldn't pick anybody up to put into internment camp until they're eighteen you see, so they let me go and it turned out that as soon as they had whatever opportunity came along, I think my mother died in May, 1942, and as soon ... somehow or other, soon after that they come to pick me up and put me in the Allied Works Council.

**And did they pick you up from home?**

Yes.

**And ...**

Some sort of order to report at a certain place, and that was it, so, so my first six months with the Allied Works Council, and of course by that time we were called *aliens* because that's what it was, I was working at the salt pans at Dry Creek making all those salt pans that are there now, and after six months there, six of us ... there was a hundred of people, of us, in the camp there, and after six months they asked myself and five other members of the group to go to Port Augusta, and we were sent to Port Augusta. We were called in on the Friday and we had to catch the train on the Saturday morning, go to Port Augusta, and arrive there in the afternoon of, late afternoon on Saturday.

**And no choice?**

No (laughs).

**And were you able to let your father know?**

Oh yes, we ... because dad and I had a room at my auntie, again at Rossetto, and we, we had a room there, we slept in that room. I must say that I wasn't a very good son in many ways because he saw me once in three months I think one period there.

**Laughter**

I started to, I started a little bit of gambling then and a bit of playing cards, and things like that.

**This is before you went to the Allied Works Council?**

Yes, yes, and followed it up afterwards (laughs). Anyway, that was bad.

**Just going back to your working life, that's a number of jobs in a ... you know like the apprenticeships and two jobs with Floreani and the Walkers, in a short period, so there was work around?**

Well there's a story, because I left Floreani, it wasn't for the work or anything, it was just one of the bosses there he said ... I said to ... I always asked for ... I was always asking for a rise, for more money, and he said "But you can't get your wage" and everything, so and so and so, and I said "But ... I can get more", so for ten shillings, for ten shillings, I got this job at Walkers, and they were paying me ten shillings more than Floreani, and I said to him "Look, I'm giving you notice, I'm going to work in such and such a place, I'm getting ten shillings more a week, I must look at that", and he said "Oh, you can't, that's impossible that you get that money, it's impossible", so we had about a week's wages, four pounds, and he said "You can't", so after I went to work for Walkers, the first pay I took it to Floreani, a gentleman there, and I said "Here", and so he had to give me, give me the money (laughs).

**Fantastic deal.**

And that's the reason why I left Floreani, not for anything that ... I was happy there, it didn't worry me.

**But ten shillings would have been ...**

Not my, not my cup of tea, but here was making furniture, which is better than making cement (laughs).

**And ten shillings was a lot.**

Ten shillings was a lot of money.

**Yeah! And in that time that you were working and had the apprenticeship and that kind of thing, what were you doing outside of work? What was your leisure?**

Well, you might not believe it but, you know, I used to make model aeroplanes, you know, little fiddly things with balsa wood, cut them all pieces, get plans and make them, make them all. I had the ... I didn't have the light, I had the kerosene lamp there over the, over my little desk, and glue, and bought all this stuff there, yeah, model aeroplanes I used to make.

**A lot of detail?**

Yes, well I mean I enjoyed it that way, and then of course, you know, you grow up a bit more and then, you know, you tend to go out dancing and start dancing, or start learning to dance, at Kings Hall then.

**Where was Kings Hall?**

In King William Street, and then you graduated from learners up to, you know, you feel you've got flying feet then, so between dancing and playing billiards, and etc, I wasn't, I wasn't a very good companion for my father.

*Laughter*

**And when you went dancing did you wear, you know, get dressed up and wear a suit?**

Oh yes, a yeah, we were really dressed up in those days, and tie, and everything, yeah, yeah.

**And did you have a suit made for you?**

Yes, yes.

**Was it made by an Italian?**

No, it was made by an Australian chap, it cost me three pound ten, I remember that, and all the rest of the times, other suits that were made later, were made by Zappia and his father. I know his father well, I know ... in fact I know Phil Zappia today, and he's still a great friend of mine, and we've been friends for many, many years, and a great man, and yes, he made all my suits.

**And were you doing the sport at this time too? Was this when you were cycling and ...?**

Cycling I used to do, yeah.

**And where did you go cycling?**

Whilst I'm having my apprentice..., as soon as I ... when I started work I wanted to start cycling but I didn't have a bike, so one hour and a half, or thereabouts, each morning I used to take milk, deliver milk to the homes around the West End there for a gentleman, and I used to get paid one pound a week for doing that – this is before going to work – and so when I got to sixteen pounds, the Bianchi bike, Italian bike, beautiful bike (laughs) it cost me sixteen pounds. When I got sixteen pounds, I stopped delivering milk because I was getting tired. I mean I was working all day and delivering milk in the mornings.

**How early in the morning?**

Oh, an hour and a half before half past seven, and so quite up early every day of the week, and so I got my racing bike and that's when I started my racing bike then, the racing then, yeah.

**And where would you have bought the bike?**

I bought it from Bailetti in Hindley Street, they sold bikes, and they were great friends, and that was our main meeting place of, of our generation. I suppose there was about ten of us and, and in fact two of them were brothers of Assunta,\*[Assunta Giovannini nee Tonellato] in the same gang, because we used to. we used to do a lot of riding, do a lot of ... especially weekends we'd go climbing, quarries and, and anything that looks like danger we'd be in it and ...

**And whereabouts did you cycle, like out of Adelaide?**

Oh no, cycling was ... I joined the Sturt Amateur Cycling Club, I belonged to the club, and yeah, and you'd start off naturally as a youngster, which means you started off in third, third class races, and then when you win so many of them you go up to second class, and when you win second, enough second class, you go into first class, and I just got into the first class when, what happened there, I was called up in the ... sent to Port Augusta, and that was the end of my cycling.

**You weren't allowed to take your bike with you?**

Oh no, I took my bike after, yes, yes, because I was fortunate enough, after about three months that I was there, to be in charge of a camp there, and I needed a bike to run around the town of Port Augusta, and I had a really good job there. I was an interpreter and used to be in charge of camp of all these prisoners of war, or internees used to come through,



they'd go to work on the Commonwealth Railways, which was hundreds of them, and yeah, so I really had a good time.

**If we go back to the beginning at Port Augusta, what was it like, you know, you arrived one afternoon. Is that right?**

Yeah, oh yeah, we arrived one afternoon and we were taken down to a ... near the beach. Port Augusta is divided in two. There's a bridge that goes, that connects up to Port Augusta and Port Augusta South, or West, Port Augusta West it was, and by the bridge there was an old mill that had burnt out, or partly burnt out, the walls were crumbling, some roof or some, some part was covered, some not, and we were told "This is your, where you've got to sleep", but I said "There's nothing here". There was stretches made of cyclone fencing with two legs and big hessian bags and a heap of straw, and we had to fill up these hessian bags with straw to make our mattresses, and, and find yourself some spot in the, in this broken down building and sleep there.

**This was the six of you who'd come from Dry Creek?**

And there was other people there as well by that time, from the, from the, from the internment camp.

**So they were actually prisoners of war rather than ...?**

No.

**No?**

No, they were, they were mainly from Queensland.

**Oh!**

Yeah, aliens.

**They were Italians also?**

Yes, Italians, mostly Italians. There were several Bulgarians came through at different times, but mainly Italians, yeah.

**And did your conditions improve quickly after you arrived?**

Well, only because of persistence that I used to go to the office and say "You can't, you know, this is incredible" or "This is ...", you know, you had ... I put a stretcher over the part of my body so when stones, when stones fall down ...

***Break in the interview***

**Oscar, we're resuming the interview and talking about the Allied Works Council camp at Port Augusta, and you were talking about just your arrival there.**

Yes, it was very, very primitive. As I said you had to fill up this big hessian bag with straw to make yourself a mattress, and I filled up two, one for the, as a mattress, and one as a ... because we had no blankets or anything like that. We used a lot of newspapers for blankets for a while there and, yeah, it was pretty primitive there.

**Were the people running the camp, were they military or were they civilians?**

No, no, no, it was just, just the Commonwealth Railways officers. They stayed on to ... there was nothing military about anything. We were told we weren't to go out the perimeter of Port Augusta, and that's it.

**It sounds like they weren't very well prepared for you?**

Well, they weren't as far as that goes but then, as I said, persistently I went down to the head office and saying, complained about different things that happened, and I said that it would be a good idea if, if ... because we had to go and eat and have our meals at a boarding house where they served, those days, Australian meals weren't very good really, as far as we were concerned they were serving us this bowl of nothing up all the time, which is ... I can still smell it now, and so I asked that they should consider making a mess camp out of it, get a cook from, from one of the prisoners, or one of those aliens, and select a person who can cook, and make him a cook and cook for the, for the people who are coming through there.

**And were there many other people there at that time?**

At that time when we arrived there was another ten or so all living under these conditions, and there was always around about between twenty and thirty people stationed at Port Augusta, all the time, because there was a lot of railways there that needed attention all the time, shifting or whatever they had to do, so there was a lot of work for fet..., they were called *fettlers*, looking after the lines, and of course a lot of people came through there to go to lines which went from Port Pirie, Port Augusta, to Alice Springs; Port Pirie, Port Augusta to the border of Western Australia, and South Australia, which is a lot of, lot of lines, and a lot of miles, and every twenty kilometres, twenty miles rather in those days, there was a

camp under the tents, and each of those camps had ten kilometre, ten miles of fettling to do to look after the line on one side and then ten miles on this side, and then the other camp takes over the other team and so so. It went right through, and so there was a lot of, lot of people up on the, on the lines.

**Were those lines already made?**

Oh yes.

**This was maintenance?**

Yes, this was maintenance. See this is ... the line at those days went from, as I say, from Port Pirie to Alice Springs, but lately, the last few (*inaudible*) three, four years now, and so we got 'The Ghan' going up to, to Darwin, but yes, and of course, the line was a ... not in the right position and a lot of wash-aways and troubles like that.

**So maintenance was important?**

Maintenance, yes, so by persisting to go down to the camp, eventually we got a cook and a mess and so things were a little brighter, and again by persistence they built us a camp with little huts. The huts had a double room and a single room, and so there was three people to each hut, and also a mess hall, a mess camp you might say, a mess ... yeah, little hall with a kitchen and the, and the dining, and that was very good then. So I was in charge of the whole show that came through there.

**And do you think that you were made that ... given that role because you were somebody who advocated?**

Well because I never kept quiet.

*Laughter*

**So if we give you a role (laughs) ...**

Well as a matter ... a man at the front desk of the Commonwealth Railways, you had to see him first before you could see any other superior officer in the, in the show. His name as Frank Simmons, and he and I were at logger heads from the very beginning, and then we became best friends, so that's how it worked out but, you know, I wasn't afraid to, to go above him if ... several times I went to see, what do they call it, the Commissioner of Railways, which was Mr Hannaberry. He lived in Melbourne and he often came to Port Augusta because he was Commissioner of Railways, of the Commonwealth Railways, and he used to go to church, Catholic church, 11 o'clock Sunday morning, and so I took it to go

to church at 11 o'clock Sunday morning (laughs), and baled him up. If I can't get satisfaction from the front desk at the office, I used to tell him, and he was very good, and so next time I'd go to the front desk Frank would say "You b.b.b. so and so, you went above my head, didn't you? I'm going to get you", you know, all that type of thing, but anyway it worked out alright.

**So you know when you described that camp being established, you know, so you had sleeping quarters and mess and kitchen and things, how many people would it have accommodated?**

It would take about, let me see, there was [counting] about thirty.

**So you were the main stays there and people would come in from ...?**

Yeah, see we had about twenty men there and then there's always spare beds for either they'd come in up from Adelaide and then they may stay overnight or a couple of nights, or whatever, or there might be people coming down from the lines who have been hurt or had to go to ... I had to take to the doctor or hospital, things like that, so that it was like a transition camp for them there, and yeah, that's the way it was.

**And when you say that you were interpreter, who were you interpreting for?**

For the Italians and then ... because there was a lot that couldn't speak English.

**What kind of age group would they have been?**

I would say from say twenty-eight and above.

**But you were younger?**

That's right.

**You were much younger.**

I know.

**You were about nineteen?**

I was always the baby there (laughs).

**So was there ever a sense that... *Well, how come this young guy is taking on this?***

I don't know, perhaps, perhaps. I mean I think some of them can't, couldn't speak very well, they couldn't, they couldn't ... so they'd get around to do things and, and others ... it never occurred to me about that point there.

**There weren't any others around your age there?**

No, not my age. There was, yeah, I think the nearest to my age would have been, I don't know, at least four or five years older than I, yeah, nearer six.

**And I'm trying to think about the time that you were there, the years, because I know that the Allied Works Council went from February 1942 until February 1945, so were you there for ...?**

All the time.

**The whole time?**

Yep. Not February because I was here six months in ...

**Of course.**

... in Dry Creek, but the remainder was up at Port Augusta, and the reason why I didn't come away straight away is because they offered me, when they Allied Works Council finished, they offered me an apprenticeship up there as an electrician, because there was a big workshop up there at Port Augusta, a railway workshop, a very big workshop, and I thought that was a good opportunity for me to learn a trade, because I was most disappointed not being able to do my apprenticeship, and so I said yes, but then my Uncle Domenico Rossetto who, with my auntie, ran the store in Hindley Street, Adelaide, died so I, I came down to Adelaide to help my auntie in the store.

**Just going back to the Port Augusta experience, were you allowed to leave, you know, did you take leave to go anywhere?**

No, you weren't allowed to go out of the, of the perimeter of Port Augusta, and you could ask for leave and you might get it, you might not, but I'd never ... when I asked the first time and they refused me, so in some sort of way I made my way to Adelaide and got away with it. It's a bit of a story but, but the following week one of my friends did that and he got caught, so he finished up two weeks in jail, so that was the way it goes, but we weren't allowed to go outside the perimeter, no, so ... I mean, you know, there's stories in every (laughs) ... it would take too long to explain everything (laughs).

**Did you have a social life there?**

Oh yes, good. In fact I think, if I remember rightly, when the war finished I, I think I shed a tear I think, because I thought my beautiful days were over, you know. Just to give you an example, when an order came through the office, the head office in Port Augusta, the

railway office, which is the head office, that Oscar was wanted because there was a man coming off from Timbuktu on the line that needs attention, to be taken to the doctor or hospital, whatever the case might be. They would send the office boy out looking for me and they would say “Go down to the camp and see if he’s there. If he’s not there go to the billiard halls”. There were two billiard halls in Port Augusta. “If he’s not there well start doing the round of the pubs.

*Laughter*

**Pretty hard life, wow!**

Well that’s why I shed a tear.

*Laughter*

**But what about the other five who went with you from Dry Creek? They didn’t have that kind of life, did they?**

No, no, unfortunately, you know, very early in the piece they were sent up the line, I can’t remember exactly the different ... whether it was forty miles or eighty miles, a hundred and eighty miles, eight hundred miles, you know, it’s a ... so they had a pretty rough time, mm, and yeah, that was a pretty, yeah, view, but I think I kept my time at Port Augusta because I spoke up, and in some sort of way I believe now that although the man in the front desk, Mr Simmons, seemed to go mad at me, I think he liked me a little bit, some how or other.

**And maybe ...**

Because I was straight out with him, I wasn’t, you know I wasn’t fiddly. I mean ... and what I said really made sense in many ways, to make the people happy, to make ... I even organised some, some of our boys who had nothing to do at the weekend, to go and do some work on, on, for pensioners, you know, put a fence up or cut the lawn or do a bit of gardening, or something like that, which they appreciated, you know. In the beginning, no, I wouldn’t take ... I mean I know when we first got there, we come up from Adelaide, you go to the dance, you know, you dance pretty well after a while if you keep on going, and you go through a town, you can’t get a dance perhaps you’re an alien, you know, not that the girls didn’t want to dance, it’s just that they would be ostracized if they were dancing with an alien, but after a while everything died down and they took it as we’d come.

**What, even during the time that you were in Port Augusta, it died down a bit?**

Oh yes, yes, yes. It only lasted about two or three months, like that, and then things went alright.

**Did you have to wear a uniform?**

No.

**So just civilian clothes?**

Yes, yep. See like we were sent to Port Augusta on the railways, Commonwealth Railways, but then under the umbrella of the Allied Works Council there was the forest, different forest in Adelaide, where they sent twenty or thirty to cut timber, to cut things. There might be other places where they were needed for something else, quarrying or something like that, you know, not such a big number as Port Augusta but, you know, fifty or a hundred or whatever in these different places. You were allocated where they needed labour and of course that's, that's how they ran the Allied Works Council, and, and the supply came from prisoners of war, internees, and people like me, aliens, who were not interned but on the books as being called up for the Allied Works Council.

**And you weren't naturalised?**

No, I wasn't naturalised, that's right.

**And you'd written those two terrible letters (laughs)?**

Oh yeah, that's right (laughs).

**Did you receive any payment for the work or for the ...?**

Yeah, yeah.

**You did?**

We were getting six and six a day, that's a soldier's pay, six shillings and sixpence is a soldier's pay, but of course remember the soldier also had their uniform, they had their food and whatever else they had, what's name. We had to sort of, we were given something for food but, as I said before, we were in this, the boarding house where they, I don't know where they got all the mutton from but they must have got mutton in Adelaide, in Australia, to cook for us because we came out like looking like muttons, and we were really, you know ... I mean I got to the stage where I refused to have lunch, I couldn't stomach any more, but then I had a nice friend who would give me a shilling and I'd get a pasty and a schooner of beer, but that's another story.

**And during this time did you see your dad?**

Only once when I run away, yes.

**Could you receive letters and send letters?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Were they censored?**

Sometimes they were, they were, what's name, censored, but most time they came through pretty alright, yeah, yeah, yes.

**So in a ...**

Of course I was a bad boy in many ways because I used to get dad to send me up some wine from Patritti, a wine merchant here in Adelaide, barrels of wine, you know, we're talking about forty or fifty gallons, and I used to get the boys who were coming off the lines who were ill or sort of they couldn't work, I used to get them to wash the bottles and bottle the win, and then I used to sell it for five shillings a bottle, and I not only sold them to our gang but sold them to the police up there as well, you know, the what's name, but then at the end, you know, the account came along to pay for the wine, I didn't have any money because I used to play Two-up too much you see, and, and I used to write to dad and say "Dad will you pay" (laughs) "will you pay it, will you pay it?" (laughs). It's not ... I should be ashamed really but there you are there, that's what happened.

**Well you were a young boy and ... young man, really.**

I was always broke, always broke, that's like ... I remember the time when he said, they said to me "Well we can make you work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and send you wherever we want to", and from that moment I made up my mind that *che sara' sara'*, whatever will be, will be, and that's still, it's still in my mind today. It doesn't matter what happens or how it goes, that's it.

**You must have had a sense that you felt strong?**

Well I was strong in a sense that I could see it was useless, once the order came from the, from the head office, that you had to leave Port Augusta to go up the line, there was no re-address, that's it, you've got to pack your bag, take it on the chin and go up. So what's the good of worrying about it, but as it turned out for me I was happily in Port Augusta all that time, and yeah, that's it.



**And you would have made friends?**

Yes, yes, I had some good friends, some good Australian friends there, still got some good friends there at Port Augusta, uh uh.

**And friends amongst the Italians?**

Oh yes, yes, a couple of sortees [sic] with some of them, but that's only because I was running the camp and I wanted everything nice and straight, like nothing political, it's all fun and eat and whatever goes with a camp, but not ... I didn't allow any political because, you know, you get many people with different ideas, all sorts of ideas, and if you allow free rein on that, well you finish up with trouble all the time. So I had two rather bad incidents but it worked out alright. I don't, I don't regret them, I think I did the right thing, but it just happens. If you want to keep control of something you've got to, you've got to be hard on some things like that.

**In your family had politics been things that you'd talked about?**

No, never, never.

**Right.**

Politics, it's never been anything, politics, I mean when you're young at that age, who wants to talk politics? I mean you're thinking of dancing, you're thinking of going to play billiards, you're going to church when you have to have, yes, you'd go there and ... but, you know, you ... I mean play cards and who talks about politics, a waste of time (laughs).

**But obviously for some people in the camp it was an issue?**

Oh yes, there was ... I must say that those people, boys, that came down from Queensland there, and there was a lot of them, and it's only because of this rather strange idea of drawing a line on a map and saying *All those above that line goes to camp, and all underneath are free*. You're not free but I mean they're home. It's so ridiculous because you could have all gangsters down here and all free, and all the good ones up there in all the camps (laughs).

**Oscar, can you explain that line again?**

Yeah, apparently somewhere in the War Office they drew a line from, I think it came from Broome, Western Australia, to maybe Townsville or Cairns, one of those cities in Queensland, and they drew this line across the map, and anybody above the line that are

not naturalised were picked up and sent to internment camp; below that line they were free unless they were really, really, you know, die-hard something or other, and so a lot, a lot, a lot of people, sugar cane workers, which were above this line, Innisfail and all those places, I mean you could tell them, poor buggers. They had a shoulder lower than the other from carrying sugar cane, because in those days you had to carry it out from the fields, and they, they were walking like that, one shoulder high and one shoulder low, because they were carrying these huge bundles of what's name, I mean ... and a lot of them were perhaps communist-minded, if you call it, but not for any particular reason, because they had no, they didn't have any, how can I put it, any naughty things in their minds, they didn't have any, you know, they talked things but nothing really what's name.

**They weren't going to do anything to harm ...**

No, no, they wouldn't.

**... the country?**

They wouldn't harm, no, but then of course I can't blame the authorities because they had to draw, do something about whatever was going on, but at the same time I think it was a pretty hasty thought-out situation drawing a line like that, so [sound effects], *You go to jail, the other one ...* No, sorry, *You go to camp and if you don't ...* It doesn't seem to make sense when you think of it, but that's what happened.

**So a lot of those people that you would have known in camp were married, had children probably?**

Oh yes, oh yes, yeah, quite a few had children, and quite a few that were not married. You get a bit of everything because they're all sugar cane workers mainly, from up there, yeah.

**So you had a very interesting period of early adulthood there?**

Oh yes, yes, oh yeah. I grew up spoilt and, what else can I say (laughs)? Yeah, that's why I had to cry when it all finished (laughs).

**Yeah.**

No, I didn't cry but a tear came down (laughs).

**Well look it would have been going from something that you knew and you were in control of, to ... because you didn't know what was going to come next really?**

Well no. Well I came down to Adelaide to help my auntie because of my uncle passing away, and I couldn't drive, I mean you didn't have a chance to drive up there because you

weren't allowed to have a car or radio or things, anything like that, but I had to, I had to learn to drive the car in one, in one hour, one afternoon, and the next morning I'm out delivering groceries (laughs).

**Did you have to pass a test?**

Yes.

**And after one hour's ...?**

One hour. I remember Mr Griguol took me out by the weir, you know, the Adelaide ... where the weir is. There's a, what do you call it, what's the name of that place there, there is a name for it, anyway even now there's a few little tracks there, by now, and then the next day go to the ... and get a licence, but then it was easy.

**And what was your job with your auntie?**

I was serving in the shop and delivering groceries. You must remember those days there wasn't many continental groceries around, shops. Three main ones were in Adelaide, which was Star Grocery, Rossetto, and Crotti in Currie Street, and, and so they each had deliveries in the west part of Adelaide, and the east part of Adelaide. We used to go out on Tuesday, we'd go to Payneham and Paradise, Campbelltown, that area, because of the market gardeners there, and on Thursday we'd do Lockleys and Findon, Flinders Park. We only called it Lockleys in those days, we didn't, we didn't call it Flinders Park or Findon, or anything, we just called it Lockleys, that was it, that was ...

**Everything west?**

Everything went down to Lockleys, yeah (laughs).

**And how did people make their orders, Oscar?**

Oh, they gave me the orders on the day that I went there to deliver the previous week order, that they had ordered, or they rang up during the week, yes.

**And the Star Grocery, Rossetto, and Crotti, were all very close to each other, so did the ...?**

Sorry, Rossetto and Star Grocery were in Hindley Street, and Crotti was in Currie Street, which is the next street to Hindley Street.

**So were they competitors?**

Oh yes, I mean but we were all friends, you know. Whoever run out of something, we'd go and borrow or buy, or whatever the case might be, no, friendly competition, yes, and in fact Crotti, taking Crotti for a start, they branched out later years in making spaghetti, and their name was San Remo spaghetti, which goes, it's conglomerate today, it's very, very big. They not only do spaghetti but they do all sorts of pasta, naturally, but other, other food lines in that particular what's name, which are very, very competitive and they make good, must make good material or they wouldn't last this long. Star Grocery, they were more in making tomato puree and olives, condiments like that, bottled or in barrels, and things like that, and Rossetto, in later years they branched out in the wine, you know, had wine shops and things like that. Unfortunately through mismanagement Rossetto went a little bit bad at the end, whereas Crotti, San Remo, is still going strong today. Star Grocery are finished as well, I think the main persons there passed away, and my auntie, they went, through a little bit of mismanagement there, they didn't go on, but they had a good reputation and also ... and they had these good wine shops as well.

**And when you worked there, how ... I want to get an idea of how big that shop was and where did they get the produce that they were selling?**

Well, in the beginning there was no ... we take pasta for instance, spaghetti, etc, that came from Sydney, a company called Fiorelli from Sydney, supplied the pasta, and then continental, slowly continental goods came in from overseas, but through different agencies and you bought from them and naturally you'd sell them in the shop, so slowly, slowly you built up this continental shops like this, but of course in later years, because of the influx of migrants and market gardeners getting a lot more and bigger, and a lot of people coming in, some of these continentals stores then started in the suburbs, which of course cut out the little bit of the city ones, so that's why it wasn't necessary then for the three main ones to go out and deliver to the market gardens outside of Adelaide because they had their own little continental stores in different areas, and growing it, and that's how it is today.

**And at that time in the west of Adelaide, were there many Italians living?**

Oh yes, yes, quite a few, quite a few, yes. Of course the main ones, there was more Italians in the eastern part than perhaps Lockleys and this area. There were more Italians up Campbelltown and Paradise and all those areas up there, more opportunities for more gardens and developments. It's a big area up there with a lot of, a lot of Italians up there.

**And in the city, like itself?**

In the city yes, I think there was more years ago than now. Probably the city worked out the same as the grocery stores or the continental grocery stores. When the suburb became bigger they got their own grocery stores around there. In the city they had a lot of, in the beginning, the early stages, they had boarding houses where a lot of these single men, Italian single men, came out and they would live in the boarding house, and there was quite a few in the West End there, quite a few, but of course as the growth come from the suburbs, a lot of them moved out, maybe even started their own gardens, or whatever the case might be, so the boarding house eventually went down, so there's not so many Italians in the West End now as it was in those years because they moved out to the suburbs, and made a place for themselves.

**And in 1945 when you went to work for your aunt, did you live again in Hindley Street?**

Yes, I lived with them.

**Oh, right, and your dad?**

My dad, we had the same room again, yes, and yeah.

**And for how long did you work there?**

Until 1949, until I got married.

**So quite a long period of time that you were doing that work?**

My auntie had two children, a girl and a boy, Modesto. Anna would have been at that time, I think perhaps twenty, and Modesto was sixteen, fourteen, sixteen, or something, and they grew up naturally, and Anna got married and therefore they had another person to be able to take over in the shop, as well as her, and also the boy growing up to a point where he could go out and deliver groceries, etc, and so I saw that it's ... they didn't ask me to leave at all, an opportunity came for me to purchase a business on Torrens Road, Croydon. The area wasn't too well developed but was an ongoing area, which every area was in those days, and so I took the plunge and got married.

**And you bought the ...**

Got married (laughs).

**... business?**

*Laughter*

Bought the business, got married on Saturday, went in the business on Monday (laughs).

**Wow! And I think that's a great place to leave this part of the interview, and we will begin the next part of the interview next time, talking about the beginning of your married life and business life, so thank you very much Oscar.**

And also about Lockleys and the ...

**And Frogmore Road.**

Frogmore Road and etc. That became part of my life even before buying the shop because that's where I met my future wife there, and so I was quite well versed with the gardens, especially in the western side of Adelaide.

**Great! Well, thank you very much, Oscar. I look forward to that. Thank you.**

**End of interview**

**Third interview with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded on 25 May 2011**

**Recorded by Madeleine Regan at West Lakes Shore, South Australia**

**Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, is also present and contributes occasionally.**

**Oral Historian (OH): Oscar, thank you for this third interview, and we're going to start with the story of your connection to Frogmore Road. Can you tell me how you came to know people on Frogmore Road?**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Yes. When I was released from the Allied Workers Council, from Port Augusta, I came down to help my auntie because my Uncle Domenico Rossetto had died, and at that time our children were young, and she needed someone to help her out in the shop, so I came down from Port Augusta, which I was allowed to do in those days because the War had finished, and of course I got to know Frogmore Road, Lockleys, and that area through having to deliver groceries to the market gardeners' families down there for the Rossetto shop, and I came to know quite a few people around the area of Lockleys. We call it Lockleys but in those days that was it for us, Lockleys, Frogmore Road, Findon Road, and different roads there, but for us it was always Lockleys, so I'd come to know quite a few families there.

**OH:** **And who were the families that you would have come to know well?**

OM: Well there was the Ballestrin's and Tonellato, Piovesan, Gazzola; there was Rebuli, Santin [six families who lived on or near Frogmore Road], which eventually I finished up and married the girl from the Santin family, and there was – I'm just trying to think of the names, they don't all come to me at the moment.

**OH:** **Well you've mentioned quite a number of them. What would have been your regular contact, if you can describe that?**

OM: Well my regular contact was, firstly was to deliver groceries on Thursday, and every Thursday I'd go down and deliver groceries to the families down there, and then eventually I became friendly with Virginia Santin, and of course because we were going out together Lockleys became a more focal point for me for other days than Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. It all depends how the weather was blowing [laughs], and also on Sunday down there we used to go and play bowls, Italian bowls, *le balle*, and so the whole gang, especially the brothers of Virginia – she had three brothers – so we all used to go and play bowls in the afternoon at this particular place, and so Lockleys for me became a more focal point when I started going out with Virginia.

**OH:** **And did someone have a green, a bowling area, in their home?**

OM: Yes, the chappie's name was Sbrizza, he had two or three bowling alleys, like, yeah, and so there was quite a number of people every Sunday there playing bowls, and mainly we drank beer, not quite legal to have beer, but anyway it was done.

**OH:** **Why was it not legal?**

OM: Because you see it's like gambling because we were paying for the beer. It was against the rules of the, the licensing rules but, you know, they had to catch you giving money to the chap as you get the bottle of beer, to be effective as a criminal charge, but nothing ever happened. I think the police knew what was going on and everybody was happy because everybody's keeping the peace and enjoying a little bit, and that's it. I think that's a fair way to describe the situation, and it was very good for all of us, and yes, that's how I came to know Lockleys.

**OH:** **And what do you remember that it looked like at that time, so we're talking about the late-1940s?**

OM: Well they were all market gardeners, and I guess they were always busy working in the garden when I went down to deliver groceries, and the women worked just as hard as the men in the garden, and everybody, everybody actually helped each other in many ways, and also a point of help for the market gardeners was when a lot of immigrants came out, young lads, 20-25, you know from 20-25, and they used to live down there, and they used to work at Holden's [General Motors Holden], but in their spare time they'd go and

work in the gardens for the market gardeners, which was a help for them because whatever they got paid, whichever way, I'm not sure how, but it was a help for the market gardeners as well as for themselves that had the job at Holden, but they would work, after work they would go and work in the garden, or the weekends, and all that time of thing, which was very, it was helpful all around really that way.

**OH: Mm. Were there glasshouses when you were delivering?**

OM: Oh yes, everybody had glasshouses, and of course they grew vegetables on the open ground as well, like cabbages and cauliflowers and celery, lots of celery down there. Yeah, it was quite interesting really.

**OH: And would you have considered that the families who were doing the market garden were your generation, or were they the generation before you?**

OM: No, they were a generation before me, but they had a lot of children of course that I'd come to know, and some around my age, and some a lot younger, and yeah, so over the years you'd come to know the family, you'd come to know their children, and the whole family life of each of the families that you knew there.

**OH: And the deliveries, Oscar, that you were making were not obviously fruit and veg, they were more like the sort of dry groceries, were they? What sort of things that you were delivering?**

OM: Ours was the groceries.

**OH: Yes.**

OM: Yeah, all that. We used to have a connection, my auntie used to have a connection in Sydney, where they supplied, where most of the Italian-type food was coming from, spaghetti, oil, olives, many, many things.

**OH: Coffee?**

OM: Coffee, yes. No, coffee came from D & J Fowler, which were on North Terrace. They've got very good coffee makers there, and they made a lot of coffee beans, so they used to roast the coffee beans, and also make a coffee and chicory. It's not used much these days, but in those days coffee and chicory was the main coffee used by Italians, and of course the more affluent you get then the better the material you use, so now we're all on coffee, you know, pure coffee.

**OH: Yes, yeah. And the fact that those families that you've named were from the Veneto, was that important to you?**

OM: No, no, there was other, there was Calabrese there, I suppose Calabrese or Napolitano, I'm not sure, but I'm trying to think of the name, Gazzola was, not Gazzola, there's a few names that I can't just remember at the moment, but



they were from the southern part of Italy, Fazzolari was one of them, and yeah, I'm trying to think, yeah, quite a few, but to us, to me anyway, it didn't make any difference whether they were from the North of the Italy or South of Italy, it's all friends, all Italians, and all part of one life. I think when you're in Italy you might just distinguish between South and North, but when you're in another country you're all Italians, in my view anyway.

**OH: I just wondered whether you would have had a stronger identification with people from the Veneto, because you were from the Veneto.**

OM: Not necessarily because I was delivering groceries, deliver groceries up at Payneham and Paradise, and those areas on this part of Adelaide, and most of them were from Southern Italy, there was very few Northern Italian up there, and to me, as I said, it didn't make any difference at all, we're all in business and good friends. In fact the man who helped me get into my business was a Calabrese, so I can't thank him enough for what he did for me.

**OH: We'll talk about that in a moment, but I was wondering would your father and mother have had any connections to the people on Frogmore Road?**

OM: Not my mother, and my father was ... no, not really, he was always, he lived in Adelaide with my auntie, my auntie, because we had a room there, him and I. He used to eat in Currie Street at my mother's uncle, who's a butcher, Mattiazzo Emilio, and so he used to eat in one part and sleep in another, and he used to work in some flower gardens in Plympton somewhere, but he was never ever connected with the farming, like the garden community down here, the Lockleys, no, not to work, no. He knew a lot of them because they met somewhere, but not, not to work or anything like that.

**OH: So would the different communities of Italians like, you know, the Veneto or the Calabrese, they would have had sort of meeting places in Adelaide at that time?**

OM: No, not really at that time. it was a pretty ... no, not really, I don't think. The only thing that was, if you might call it a meeting place, as far as we were concerned, where we used to go and play boche on Sunday, so we met a lot of people there, different, that lived in the area, but nothing really organised meetings or go to meetings, or things, unless there was a wedding or a, mainly a wedding and you were invited to a wedding, so you'd meet up with some other people like that, but not really a meeting place, no.

**OH: If we can go back just a little bit about Frogmore Road, do you remember anything about the Torrens [River] like in your day did the Torrens ever flood, do you recall?**

OM: The Torrens? No, I don't remember the flooding of the Torrens. No, I've never remembered that, because of course you must remember that I'm only down there one day a week mainly, and then on the weekend, and then when I started to go out with Virginia I used to push the bike down sometimes, or sometimes my auntie usually let me have the car, and I don't remember it ever flooding, no.

**OH:** **And where did Virginia's family live?**

OM: Frogmore Road. First of all they lived in Valetta Road, it was a big, rather large home, and it was a home that was split in two. Berno, that's the other people that was down there, Berno brothers. Now the Berno's used to live on one side of the house and the Santins used to live on the other side of the house, and they both had land working there, and land elsewhere as well because the Berno's were very, very active in the market gardening, and they had a nice, big garden off Grange Road, so they were very, very big in their garden, yes, but in the big house there was a Santin on one side, and the Berno's on the other.

**OH:** **And would that have been like an old farmhouse?**

OM: It would have been, it would have been an old farmhouse, which probably the way I see it, it was a big home and it would have had a lot of land around it, years in the past, but I suppose in time the land was split up in twos or threes, whatever the case might be. The Santin's lived there for, I don't know when they went away from Valetta Road. They purchased a place in Frogmore Road, 12 acres of land there with a nice big house again, and there lived, two brothers lived in there, Romildo lived in one end and Vito on the other end of the big house, and Luigi, the third brother, he built his own little house on Frogmore Road, but on the property, but on Frogmore Road, which eventually, now it's all split up into blocks of land and houses being built, and all that type of thing, but there was 12 acres of land there, and they grew a lot of celery and vegetables outside, and tomatoes of course one of their main things there.

**OH:** **And how did you meet Virginia?**

OM: Well [laughs], well one girl gave me the brush-off I picked up with the other one.

*Laughter*

OM: No, you can't put that in [laughs]. No, it just happened like that, you know, I think I told you that I was a bit of a gambler and didn't worry at that particular stage of my life, money was nothing, I was always broke, etc, and I was engaged to be married to an Australian girl who came down from Port Augusta, called Jane, but at the end she said *You don't seem to save money, you don't seem to get worried about getting married, I think we'd better finish it, and that's it.* So she told me that on Christmas Day or the day before Christmas, so the next day or the next time I saw Virginia, I asked her to go out, which was only a couple of days after.

**OH:** **But you would have known her because of your deliveries?**

OM: Yes, yes, yes, she used to come into the shop to bring the order in for us to deliver on the Thursday, and so I used to see her quite often. So I said *Let's go out*, and we started from there, and yeah. I mean you must remember I was just a no-hoper, you know, in many ways. I mean this is why when eventually Virginia had to ask her parents if she could marry me, her father said *You know*

*he's not much good, but if he can't keep you, you can always come back home, so that explains their attitude toward, not attitude but their, what they thought about me, because I was just no ...*

**OH:** **But you had a job.**

OM: Oh yes, but I mean had a job but then, you know, you play cards, you play the horses, you play billiards, you go to dances, you know, you don't save money that way.

**OH:** **And would it have been important to Virginia's parents that the future husband was someone who was a saver?**

OM: Well apparently not because they let me marry her [laughs], under the circumstances. I mean I wasn't a bad guy but I was just, didn't care about anything, you know, I wasn't committing any crimes or anything like that, but I just liked doing what I wanted to do and that, yeah.

**OH:** **So how long would you have known each other before you married?**

OM: Oh, a couple of years, about two years I reckon, yes. I mean that was a sacrifice for me to push the bike from Adelaide down to Lockleys at times.

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

OM: I can't remember how long it took, but it didn't matter in those days either.

*Laughter*

OM: When you're young you don't care [laughs], but that in itself is a recommendation for marriage.

*Laughter:*

**OH:** **So how old were you and how old was Virginia?**

OM: I was 26 and she was 23 I think it was, something like that, yeah.

**OH:** **And what about the process? Did you have to go to Virginia's father and ask for his daughter's hand?**

OM: Ah yes, well when I was, when I found out that I could, this man that I mentioned before would allow me to have 2,000 pounds as a loan, I immediately, that same day, night, I went down to Lockleys, to Virginia's family, and asked her, because we had talked a little bit before, and so she said *You must ask dad and mum, but dad mainly*, so I straight away went to the father and asked if I could marry, and it was a bit of a shock to them because, you know, marriage wasn't on the table to be talked about, and so that's when he said *If he can't keep you, you can always come back home*, he said to his daughter, Virginia. I guess, yeah, it was a bit of a shock to them as much as ... to me it wasn't a shock, I mean I just took everything as it came, it doesn't [pause] yeah, because ... then we had to put bans out.

If you remember those days you had to put bans out, and we put them out at the Hindmarsh Catholic Church on Port Road, and I went to see Father Church to arrange the situation, but because my other friend that I had before that I was engaged to, she still thought she might be able to marry me, and she took the bans herself, because those days, I don't know about now, but those days, according to what I understood, if you want to go to be a Nun in the Convent, you have to take out, you have to get married to Jesus, so the bans had to be put out by her as well, so she put out the bans at the same time as I put out my bans to get married. She got married to Jesus and I got married to Virginia. That's it!

I remember one night Father Church rang me up and he said *Oscar, are you marrying the right girl?* I said *Why?* He said *Well I don't know, are you marrying the right girl?* and I said *Well don't you want to marry me Father?* *Yeah, yeah, I can marry you,* he said, *but make sure you're marrying the right girl.* So I don't know what happened there, maybe she went to Confession, I don't know. You know what happens in life. In fact he made me go down to Hindmarsh to have a good talk about things, and I convinced him that I was marrying the right girl, and so the marriage took place.

**OH:** **And what about the wedding, were there a lot of preparations for the event?**

OM: I don't remember much of it. We invited quite a few people, we got married, we had our reception at Hindmarsh. Behind the church there's a hall there, we had a bit of a dance for a while, because we couldn't take any liquor there, so after the dance, about 11 o'clock at night, we asked everybody, whoever wanted to go, to come down to the packing sheds of the Santin's where they packed tomatoes and all the vegetables, and there would be beer, and go on from there. I can't remember how many was there [pause] [laughs].

As a matter of fact when Virginia walked up the aisle and I was there waiting, naturally, the usual marriage situation, and when she come up I said to her *We lost*, because I was playing for Juventus those days in soccer, and that day I didn't play and we lost 1-nil you see [laughs], and for years and years and years and years [laughs], she reminded me about that [laughs].

**OH:** **That you thought it was so important to mention?**

OM: Well I mean you know my best mate and friend, Gervasio De Bellis, who was my Best Man, we were both soccer men and we were both a little bit disappointed [laughs] that our team had lost, etc.

**OH:** **Was that the way that weddings usually happened, you know, that people would come back to the family home and have the second kind of party with alcohol?**

OM: Yes, yes, yes, unless they could get a permit or they were in a hall where they could get a permit to have the alcohol in the hall. I remember going to both, like the church on South Road.

**OH: Thebarton?**

OM: Thebarton. They had a hall behind there and for some reason you could drink there, so I'd been to weddings like that, and been to weddings where you go to their home to finish the night. Had quite an interesting time. I don't know how many people were there, no idea.

**OH: And what did your father think of your choice in Virginia?**

OM: Oh, he was very happy. Dad was one of those very happy with anything really. He never interfered much in life. He used to say to me when he used to chastise me a little, *You give them enough rope and they'll hang themselves*. That's how he used to put it, he wasn't ... I don't remember, he's never ever hit me in his life. He gave me a good kick in the bum once, but that's all.

**OH: And would you have contacted relatives in Italy when you were getting married?**

OM: Yes, yes, oh yes, we used to write, yeah. As soon as the War finished we started writing to each other.

**OH: On both sides of your family?**

OM: No, only on my mother's side. My father's side, they were never so easy, but my mother's side was very good. In my trips to Italy, and I've had 12 of them since 1966, I will always have a room there, I always had a motor vehicle, and just stayed there as long as I liked in the Buffon family, and still today they ask me to go there, because they were fairly well-off, and they still are, but they never, that didn't change them, they're still down to earth type of people, very good people, whereas with my uncle on my father's side, they were, they're good people except they were more, how can I put it, I think it's too much bother to do anything else.

They minded their own business, they run their own show but oh yeah, when we met going to church when I was over there, or met somewhere, *Oh, you must come and eat at our place*, but I never ever got an invitation when or a day, you know, type of thing, so I realised that ... it didn't worry me but that's how it was. It was good in a way because it showed the difference between one family and another, and in one, even today, I could ring up now and say *Look, I'm coming over tomorrow*, I'm sure there's a car and there's a room there.

**OH: Strong connections?**

OM: Pardon?

**OH: Strong connections?**

OM: Oh yes, very much, very much.

**OH: Before just leave Frogmore Road, I want to ask you just about the roads around that area. Were they bituminised in the time that you were doing your deliveries?**

OM: No, there was mostly white, you know, what do you call it, not bituminised, Frogmore Road certainly wasn't until later years. I was married for quite some time before they bituminised Frogmore Road. I think Findon Road would have been bituminised, but a lot of those roads were just roads, dirt roads, mm, and a bit awkward to get through when it was raining, but yeah, but you see it was a developing area and this is why now we've got different, we've got different names for different places, but in those days Lockleys was it, and mm.

**OH: And where did you live when you first got married?**

OM: We lived on Torrens Road, opposite the shop that I went into.

**OH: Oh right, and maybe we should go back to the beginning of that story, because you were telling me about how you came to even get into that business.**

OM: What, how I was able to get into the business? It came about that a traveller, which were quite a few those days, travelling people coming into the shop and looking for orders for their warehouses, for their bosses, their warehouses, different to today, but in those days that's how it was, and one of these travellers who was travelling for Angliss & Company, they were meat people, tin meat and all that type of thing, and he said *Oh, there's a shop available on Torrens Road, Croydon, and it's run by two ex mechanics. They used to work at Holden's but they're not really doing the right, you know, they don't know what they're doing really, they've never been in the game, and they don't know whether they're coming or going*, and he said *So this is shop is for sale*, and he mentioned the figure, I can't remember the figure that was mentioned, so I took notice of what he said, but as usual I was broke, I didn't have any money.

So this is a story where I went to, when I was delivering groceries on Tuesday to Payneham and Paradise and those areas, there was a chap called Piro, Carmine Piro. Now he was a very good worker, a very ... and he seemed to have had money, I'm not sure about that, but I always used to stop and have a yarn with him.

**OH: Was he a market gardener?**

OM: Market Gardener, sorry, yeah, market gardener, and I always, every time I delivered groceries there, I used to take time off, and when I say *time off*, I used to stop and go and find him wherever he was working in the garden, whether it be in the glasshouse or outside, working outside the glasshouse, and have a bit of a yarn with him, talking general mainly, nothing really serious about anything, and see I think he appreciated it at that point because I did it for quite some time, and that day that I had in mind about the money, about the shop, I said to him *Can you lend me 2,000 pounds?* And he said to me *Oscar*,

he said after a few other words that were said, *Oscar, how long would 2,000 pounds last you, one week, two weeks, three weeks at the most, maybe*, because I was playing cards all the time you see, and horses.

**OH:** **And he knew that you ...?**

OM: Oh yes, he knew, he knew, he knew. I mean everybody knew what I was doing. It didn't worry me.

**OH:** **And just about the 2,000 pounds, what would it have been worth, like would that have been, you know, someone's salary for a particular time, like I'm trying to understand?**

OM: Well, 2,000 pounds you'd buy a house in those days.

**OH:** **Oh, OK.**

OM: So that's how you can sort of qualify the value. And so we left it at that, we laughed and talked about something else. Then I come back the following Tuesday again, and he said to his wife *When Oscar comes, send him up to where he was working* – normally he doesn't say that because I used to go up and see him all the time anyway – *because I want to see him*. So I go up and he said, you know, we'd started talking about things. Then he come out and he said *You know the other day, last Tuesday, you asked me for 2,000 pounds, and I said yes. Do you still need it?* I said *Yes. What are you going to do?* he said. *I'm going to get married, I'm going to buy a shop, I'm going to do this*, and all that type of thing, and so he said *Mm, OK, I'll give you 2,000 pounds*, so I said *Thank you, you're not mucking around*, I said, because that night I went down to Virginia's family and said that I'm going to get married and that, and the next day I rang up the salesman that told me about the shop, and find out more about it, and anyway eventually we got together and he gave me 2,000 pounds.

**OH:** **Did he want you to pay interest?**

OM: He didn't want interest. He said *As long as you get married, buy the shop, and don't go gambling until you've paid my money, that's it, that's all I want*, he said. So when I eventually paid him off, I wanted to pay him interest, he wouldn't take, he wouldn't take any interest, and I didn't go gambling, I didn't go anywhere for all that period, until that money was paid.

**OH:** **And how long did it take you?**

OM: Two years, two years. It was a hard two years in a sense that having been spoilt going to dances and places like that, and all my mates from Hindley Street, they were saying *Oh, under the thumb, you can't go here now you're married, you can't do this, you can't do that*, because, you know, and it wasn't that, it was because I had this payment to make.

**OH:** **What an amazing belief that man had in you.**

- OM: Oh yes, I even today, I keep on saying that if it wasn't for him I wouldn't [laughs] I had no hope of buying the shop [laughs], nor getting married [laughs]. I would have been dead years ago [laughs].
- OH: Because 2,000 pounds, like to understand that it was the price of a house ...**
- OM: Yes, the price of a house those days.
- OH: So you got the money, you got married, and you were married on a Saturday?**
- OM: Married on a Saturday and went to the shop, took over the shop, on Monday.
- OH: And that was the beginning of married life as well?**
- OM: And beginning of married life, and shop life, and working life, and worry, not too much worry because, as I say, you can worry too much except, you know, I had to pay this money back.
- OH: And what was the condition of the business when you and Virginia, you know, went into it?**
- OM: There was no condition.
- OH: No, no, what was it like, like was it in good shape?**
- OM: No, it was a bit run down the shop. These people did not have a very good idea how to run a shop, and fortunately I picked up quite a few hints whilst working for my auntie.
- OH: And you'd been there a few years by then?**
- OM: I had been there about four years, and I knew all the salesmen from different suppliers. This was short and that was short, and I was able to battle hard to get say biscuits or chocolate, or cigarettes. In those days it was a battle of wits to get the short lines, and you had to be onside with the suppliers to be able to get these because ... so, you know, times, you work these things out, and I remember going to different tobacconists in Adelaide, especially Solomon's [tobacconist], and there even if I paid, whatever I paid I sold, I paid the full price and sold it for the same price, didn't make any money on it, but I was able to satisfy a customer with tobacco and cigarettes, whatever they wanted, so you had to work hard to go ... and biscuits were short, chocolate, and cigarettes and tobacco, and many other items.
- OH: Were they short because of being post-war?**
- OM: Yeah, post-war.
- OH: And was it still coupons at that stage?**



OM: Yes, yes, we still had coupons for tea and sugar and butter, and what else was it, butter, sugar, tea.

Assunta Giovannini (AG): Flour I think.

OM: I can't remember all of them.

AG: I remember the butter and the sugar and the tea, but I think flour too.

OM: Butter and sugar, bah, I can't remember. Anyway. In fact I've still got some, I found some old, what's name, coupons in the shed there, of tea and sugar, and also you had the people who were getting relief from the government and they had, they had to get a grocery account or vegetables, for different lines, and they didn't give you money, they just gave you these coupons, yeah, that was on for quite a while after the War.

**OH: And did you sell fresh fruit and vegetables as well?**

OM: Yes, yes.

**OH: And where did you get those?**

OM: I started that myself, because when we bought the shop it was only a delicatessen and the grocery, and after a little while I started the fruit and vegetables. I used to go to the market every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

**OH: Is this the East End?**

OM: East End Market, and just the vegetables there, and bring it home and put it on display, that's it, yeah, and even that, you know, lots of things like there was a time that potatoes were extremely short, and we were buying potatoes, trying to get potatoes on the black market, as much as we can because of the, you know. This is why in those days you made quite a good business because you were working very hard to get the things that were hard to get, and supplying it to your customers, and so that's the way that it worked out, but it wasn't easy, and I can see how those two boys that had the shop before me could not get on, because they had no clue of doing any of these things, and therefore were no, no supplier of those short lines, they couldn't get customers, couldn't have customers.

**OH: And who were your customers?**

OM: Just people around the area there.

**OH: And was that area being built up at that time?**

OM: It was being built up, yes, yes, houses going up everywhere.

**OH: So whereabouts on Torrens Road, was it between South Road and, what's the next one?**

OM: It was on the, practically on the corner of Rosetta Street and Torrens Road, opposite the Catholic Church, or Catholic School there, yes. Yeah, but a lot of new homes being built, and you had to, you know, make sure that you introduced yourself and tried to get customers, and you don't get all of them, you get some of them anyway.

**OH: So you weren't just serving Italians in the community, it was wider?**

OM: Oh no, no, no, it was a lot. I had a round at Lockleys as well, because some people came to buy groceries from us, and that's where Assunta came in with Nilo Piovesan, and they both lived at Lockleys, and they worked for me for many years, and they were a big help all the way through, whether with the round at Lockleys or in the shop itself. Nilo was great on the round because he did all the round all the time, but Assunta was mainly working in the shop with Virginia and other girls there.

**OH: So your business must have expanded quite quickly?**

OM: Yeah, it came on pretty quick. It was very lucky in a way because you see you're in an area where they're building new homes all the time, and you got new customers all the time available to you, so yeah, it was ... there's a saying that *It's better to be born lucky than rich*, which is true, so because we're lucky you can make rich, but if you're rich and you don't handle it properly you go broke, but the thing is that ... but also having good people working for you as well, because you can rely on them because we, like we used to have our hours, our times when the shop is full and it's time for most of the people to go home, to knock off, go home, but they stayed on and, you know, sort of helped out all the way. It was quite a big effort on all parts there, yeah.

**OH: And you lived behind the shop?**

OM: No, we lived across the shop for the first two years. We had two rooms behind the house there, and then we bought a house about, oh, seven doors down from that position, on the same side of the road, which is opposite the shops, and we lived there. At that time I paid 3,000 pounds, but we had to pay 1,000 pounds under the table, because nobody used to sell their houses for, the prices were pegged, so if that house is worth 3,000 pounds, OK, that's as much as you could ask anybody, but if you wanted to buy the house, you had to give another 1,000 pounds under the lap so you can get them to sell it to you. So I remember paying 3,000 pounds for the house, and 1,000 pounds under the lap.

**OH: And was this to a land agent or to a, just ...?**

OM: Through land agents. Oh yeah, that was, that was a known thing. You couldn't, you couldn't do any business without it. So this is about two years, perhaps two years after we started the shop, yeah.

**OH: So you'd paid back your 2,000 pound loan.**

OM: Yeah, it was about two or three years after I bought the house, yeah.

- OH:** **Wow!**
- OM: And yeah.
- OH:** **What do you think your skills were in being able to make that business successful with Virginia?**
- OM: I think that I was very fortunate, again I was fortunate to have worked for my auntie for those years, because I'd come to learn a lot about the trade, about the suppliers. D & J Fowler, W Grasby, lots of people, Mottram Biscuits, and all those people I'd come to know, and they're the ones that says *OK, we'll give Oscar another, another few pounds of whatever, he's short*, and so I kept on plugging away at it. You had to go looking for the things that were short, so that you could satisfy your customers, biscuits especially, very important, chocolates, cigarettes, tobacco, and sugar was always in demand because, you know, with the coupons, but sometimes you were able to sneak a few bags of sugar without coupons from the suppliers, tea, all those things were very, very short, and so you had to work very hard too, and if you didn't work hard you wouldn't get anywhere.
- OH:** **So that was about good relationships with the sales people?**
- OM: Mainly, yes, yes, oh yes, yes, you had to. I don't know, I suppose they took a liking to me, I don't know, so I was happy that way [laughs].
- OH:** **And what about your dad, what was happening with him at this time?**
- OM: My dad came to work for me and lived with me. We built two rooms at the back of our house as well so he could live with his wife then, and yeah, so he was being paid by me, but he was getting the pension as well. So that's not for the pension office to listen to this [laughs].
- OH:** **I think it's a long time ago [laughs].**
- OM: Well you know, he was OK, like his ...
- OH:** **And what did Virginia's parents think of their son-in-law?**
- OM: I got on pretty well with them. I know that my mother-in-law was always on my side whenever Virginia and I had a little tiff of some sort. But she, I think she was a very good woman, yeah, to do what she did [laughs], to be on my side [laughs].
- OH:** **But they approved of the fact that you were working hard and supporting?**
- OM: Oh yes, yes, they realised that I was doing it hard, but if you didn't do it hard at that time you would not get anywhere, you'd get left behind from others which, you know, competition is always there.
- OH:** **And were you in competition with your auntie?**

OM: Not really because in different areas, maybe a few customers down at Lockleys, maybe, but really no. She had a good business. Actually there were three Italian big shops in Adelaide. There was a Crotti, who eventually branched out to make pasta, San Remo, which is still going today. There was Star Grocery, which is the Greek people, and they were more involved in manufacturing of *conserve* [preserves], olives, typical Greek, oh well, not so much Greek as much as us as well, and so ... and my auntie, they went more for, they had wine licenses so they were more involved in the wine delivery, as well as their groceries, so the three of them actually branched out in different ways, and never got in each other's pocket or trouble, you know.

Unfortunately with my auntie, she depended probably too much on her son-in-law, which wasn't quite pulling his weight to a degree, and maybe things might have been different for her at the end, but at the end they failed.

**OH: And in your, you know, life, your first years of marriage, did you have much time for social life?**

OM: [laughs] No, no, no, no. No, we, as I said, you know, my life was quite different to Virginia. Virginia came from a market garden family, hard workers, good hard workers, honest as the day, but, you know, she was expected to go out on a Saturday night, and that's about it, where me, when I was living in town, I was out every night of the week and hardly sleeping in many ways, for different reasons, and so I'm talking about the changes that we both had to make.

She had to make one change from being a market gardener to serve in the shop, which she had never done before, but she picked it up pretty quickly, and I had to give away [laughs] my life because I'd promised her that I wouldn't do anything against with Carmine Piro, when I promised him I would pay the money back before I did anything, you know, before I'd run out.

As a matter of fact, as soon as I paid him off I even bought a racehorse there, that's how crook I was [laughs], but I'm saying, you asked me the question, and so Virginia had to change from one point to this point, and maybe whether it was better or for worse, I don't know. But for me it was certainly a lot worse than what I was used to, because I wasn't used to this being tied down, looking at every penny because I didn't have any penny and I had a big debt, and also no going to dances, not going to play billiards, not going to the races, not going to this and not going to that [laughs]. I gave up a lot, I mean, and rightly so, I'm not saying that it's not right, but I'm saying that I had to give up a heck of a lot in my case.

**OH: Mm ... it was a big change.**

OM: A big change, a big change from, you know, being in heaven all the time and going down to the [laughs], you know [laughs]. I don't know, not that bad, but it's just that it took, it takes time, and I was so busy because market gardening, you had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go the market, then you work all day until about 11 o'clock at night, then the next day the same thing again,

and the next, you know, three or four days a week it was like that, and we worked very hard.

**OH: Mm, and I think that might be a good point at which to bring this part to a close, so thank you very much, Oscar, for the interview.**

**OM:** That's OK.

**End of recording**

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**Fourth interview with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded on 25 May 2011**

**Recorded by Madeleine Regan at West Lakes Shore, South Australia**

**Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, is also present and contributes occasionally.**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Oscar, you were going to start talking about the group of boys that you mixed with in Hindley Street at the time of the War?**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Yes, yes. Prior to the War with Italy, prior to the War when Italy entered to the War, well we were free to do what we wanted to do, so I was an apprentice and I had my nice job, I was happy, but then when the War broke out with Italy, they had to, I had to be relieved from there because of the security reasons, and therefore I had to find other work, and knowing that I already had been, they had come along to pick me up and take me internment camp, but I wasn't old enough to go there, so they had to leave me in Adelaide, but we had a gang, we'd call it The Gang ourselves, we were about a dozen boys, and we always met on the corner of Register Place and Hindley Street. On the corner of that was a shop, Bailetti & Sons, which was Mr Bailetti, his wife, and they had four sons, Mario, Giulio, Fernando, and Angelo – that was a nucleus of one family – then there was the Gava boys, two brothers there, Gino and Johnny Gava. Then there was Basso, and then there was Oreste and Attilio. Did they call themselves Panazzolo then?

Assunta Giovannini (AG): Yes.

**OM:** Yeah. And we had, and strangely enough in the gang, there was an Australian boy who wanted to be Italian [laughs], he didn't want to be Australian, and he was a, he kept on with us. Anyway, the War broke out, of course everything went haywire a bit, and the point that I'd like to make is this. We were fantastic kids together, we had no money, or most of us didn't have money, but

the other fellow that was in there was Pierino Brazzale, and he was, what's name, quite well off, but it didn't worry him to be with us, not so well off, and we had a lot of good times there.

**OH: What sort of ages would you have been, roughly, at that time?**

OM: Oh, around the 17s.

**OH: And were you all working?**

OM: Well yes, yes, most of us. The young one, Angelo Bailetti, was still too young, I think he was still going to school, but the others were all, had a job, but some of us ... the point that I wanted to make is that we were all together, we got the same, we all did the same things, we all went to dances, we all went to pictures, we went to play billiards and etc like that, but we also, we all used to go to church as well, and just put that in for good measure, but the thing that really struck me is that because one family, the parents were naturalised, and some were not naturalised.

Take myself, my father was not naturalised, therefore, you know, they come to pick me up to do this, and I eventually went into the Allied Works Council, but the others, and we were all together with the same ideas, with the same thing, we never, I don't remember ever talking about politics, it didn't interest us, we were too busy thinking about our own little way of life, dancing and whatever, and the thing that struck me most is that *Right, take your brother, Oreste*. He went into the army, right. My mate, my best man at the wedding, he went into the army, several others went into the army there, and yet here's me, I get picked up and put into the Allied Works Council, right, under security strictures, and others go into the army, and we're all the same, we're all one unit.

You get the feeling what I'm trying to say that War is such a stupid thing in many ways because we never talked War, it didn't worry us, it's nothing to do with us, we were too busy with things of the day, but when it came along it split us that way. It didn't split us physically or morally, or internally, but one had to go that way and another one had to go the other way.

**OH: Oscar, the ones who joined the army, was that voluntary that they joined?**

OM: Who?

**OH: The boys who joined the army, they were called up?**

OM: No, no, they were called up, they were called up.

**OH: But did you say they were not naturalised?**

OM: No, they were naturalised, their parents were naturalised. You see what I'm trying to say, here we are, we are all one unit with the same ideas, same everything, everything what's name, with the same type of blood, and yet one has to go to War and one is locked up, we'll say, for a better word and, you

know, the difference between the two things hits you when you think *Oh gee, look, poor old ... he's gone to the War, I'm here, I'm OK, I'm not at the War, but you know, I can't go there, I can't go here, I'm always restricted. OK, it's not a bad ... but it's ...* You know, it really hits you very hard to find that you're splitting up a whole group of boys for a war, which doesn't make sense. That's what I wanted to say.

**OH: What about the restrictions? Can you say a little bit more about those?**

OM: Yes, well eventually we went to live to Beaumont, which is a suburb out of Adelaide, and that's where I had to stay. I had special permission to go to work each day, but I could not go out of the area without permission from the police, to go anywhere else.

**OH: And that was written down?**

OM: No, that was, well we were told that way, and so if I wanted to go to town for a purpose, I had to go to the police and asked for a permit to go to town to do so, but I used to go there all the time. In fact, the two policemen, Mr Thornton and Mr ... two policemen there that controlled the Adelaide area, they knew me very well, and when they used to see me play billiards on the corner of Hindley Street and Morphett Street, they used to go to my auntie and Modesto [Rossetto], my cousin, *Tell Oscar to go home* [laughs]. They were very good, they were very good. They never ever, ever pinched me, or never stopped me, or never ... but they'd always send messages for me to, tell me what's name.

**OH: Like to go home to Beaumont?**

OM: To Beaumont, yes.

**OH: So what years were you talking about with this?**

OM: Sorry?

**OH: What years, because Italy entered the War in, was it 1940?**

OM: 1940 I think it is, yeah, when they first came into the War, there was a bit of an upheaval there, lots of Italian senior, I'm talking about senior people, were picked up and taken down to Keswick, and then they were there for, some were there for two weeks, some three weeks, some were released, some were sent up to Loveday [Internment Camp] for the rest of the War. It was a bit of a mix-up all over the place, and not only people who were not naturalised, but also people who were naturalised Italians, were picked up by the Security Officers, and taken to Keswick. Like my uncle, Modesto Rossetto, not Modesto, Domenico Rossetto, he was taken to Keswick, he was there for three weeks, and after he was released and he stopped home for the rest of the War, well until he died, it was when they came down.

Like there were other people like, let me see, I'm trying to think of the names now, and they were there for the rest of the War, for the whole duration of the War. I don't know what reason, yeah, it was, people were in upheaval of all

sorts, but that applied to both Italians who were naturalised or not naturalised, they were picking them out like that.

**OH: Do you think people were bitter?**

OM: I beg your pardon?

**OH: Do you think people were bitter about what happened?**

OM: I don't know that I understood that very well. I know that I ... oh well, it's the point of when I was asked to leave my apprenticeship, fitter and turner, and then, so I had my little, would not say worries, but I mean, you know, I got kicked out and I didn't ... I suppose people, some of them were bitter. Some couldn't understand why, say for instance my uncle was released, he only stopped there two or three weeks at Keswick, was released, and he was home for the rest of the War, and another one like, how can I mention names, a few names there I know, but they stopped in all the time, the whole duration of the War – when the War finished they were released – but that's a long time, so there's a lot of negative things going around saying that some people were able to pay a little bit, you know, under the table to, I don't know, but you hear, when you're in situations like that you hear a lot of stories, that some were true and some would be fabricated type of thing.

**OH: And what about your father, Oscar?**

OM: My father was never, was never asked anything because he was working, at that time ... in the East End Market, and the company that he was working for were packing fruit and vegetables for the army, and so that became an essential job, so anybody on an essential job, as long as they got their plate clean, I mean as long as ... if he was a Fascist he probably wouldn't, they wouldn't consider that, but because his plate was clean he was allowed to work there because it's an essential job, just as much as I had to leave my job because they were making munitions there and therefore it became a security risk for me to be there, you know. I mean I know there was no security risk as far as I'm concerned [laughs] but that's how it was seen at the time. So it became a ...

But the emphasis that I wanted to make is the fact that, you know, there we are, a group of boys, we play cards, we play, Mrs Bailetti and Mr Bailetti were both wonderful to all of us, because we were in their home most of the time, and playing cards there, and they loved it, they didn't care. We played for a bottle of lemonade, we played all night for a bottle of lemonade but, you know, to pass the time.

**OH: You were telling us that you changed your name for cycling?**

OM: Oh yes, well because during that period I was cycling, and of course I couldn't get a permit to travel out of Beaumont, or from Adelaide to go to Goodwood where the cycling track was, or from Adelaide to go to Kilkenny where another cycling track was. See I would have had to have permits, and they wouldn't supply permits for that, so I used to go just the same and race under a different



name, things like that. Peter Peters, I remember one name a lot; another name was something Matt, you know, things like that, just to ...

**OH:** **And were others boys in your group doing the same sort of thing?**

OM: No, because Minuzzo, the other fellow that was racing was Sebastian Minuzzo, but he was naturalised and therefore he was allowed to travel wherever he wanted to go. In fact he finished up in the army anyway, but I mean he was free to go anywhere, so yeah.

**OH:** **Did you ever worry that you might get caught?**

OM: Oh yes, yes.

**OH:** **And what would have been the consequences if you had been caught?**

OM: Well a little incident, when I was, like when I say locked up, picked up in the Allied Works Council, the first six months we were in an enclosure at Dry Creek, and I used to sneak out again at night time training, like bike training or whatever I wanted to do, and I remember one incident that going down the hill from North Adelaide by the Children's Hospital there, there's a hill there, I'm coming down fast with my bike, on my bike, and in my training gear, and there's a chappie that crossed the road and I nearly knocked him over, and that fellow turned out to be Mr Marshall, who was in charge of the Allied Works Council in Adelaide, and he knew me because of other times that we had talked. Anyway, I went my way, I went back to the camp straightaway after that [laughs].

In the morning I went down on the job at Dry Creek, they called me up, they take me to the office, and there's Mr Marshall and a few other chaps there, and he asked me, he said *What did you do...? Oh yes, it was me*, I couldn't say no, and he said, you know, he said *You're lucky you're in a country like us because what would they do if you did that in Italy?*, he said to me, and I said *Mr Marshall, you know in Italy we're all Catholic* [laughs]. I remember saying that [laughs]. That's it, I'd spoken to him [laughs]. I said *We're all Catholic over there*, I said [laughs], because he was trying to insinuate that I was going to be put in jail or hung, or whatever the case might be, you know, make a story of the thing. I said *We're all Catholic over there*. I remember that as plain as anything [laughs]. I didn't have much time for the guy because I think he was, I think he was a chappie that might, with a few dollars under the table, he might release you [laughs].

**OH:** **Didn't trust him?**

OM: I don't know, there were a lot of rumours about the chappie there, but anyway it's gone now but [laughs] I remember saying *We're all Catholic in Italy*, so he could take it whichever way he wanted to.

**OH:** **He didn't have any answer to that?**

- OM: No, he was stumped. They didn't do anything more, they didn't say anything else.
- OH: And you were saying something also about the differences between the young Greek boys and the Italian boys?**
- OM: I think we had a lot of battles there in the beginning at the West End there, because before the War nobody wanted to be a Greek. For all the bad names that we had, we had a better name than the Greeks, put it that way.
- OH: Why?**
- OM: I don't know. The Greeks wanted to be Italians in those days, but of course when the War broke out, you know, they're on the side of England, and Italy of course is an enemy, so then they became Greeks then, you see [laughs] so we used to rubbish them a little bit [laughs].
- OH: And were there any hostilities between you?**
- OM: Oh no, just a few little skirmishes of things, but nothing really, no, no, a few words and go home, and all that type of thing, because our, Hindley Street was our little, our little spot there, it didn't belong to anybody else [laughs].
- OH: And would there have been more Italian people in the population in South Australia than Greek?**
- OM: More Italian people? Well I don't know. That would be a hard question. There's a lot of Greeks in Adelaide.
- OH: But at that time?**
- OM: Yeah, even that time, yeah, yes.
- OH: And they were, what were their jobs, what was the kind of common area of their work?**
- OM: I've never taken much notice, ever taken ...
- OH: They weren't in the gardens?**
- OM: No, no, they weren't gardeners. I know they ran most of the gambling places in Hindley Street. They were, yeah, but that's only a sideline of course because they must have been working for somebody, or somewhere. But yeah, I'm not sure what their what's name was.
- OH: And Oscar, the group of, the young men that you talked about, the ones who went to War, how did they fare, did they come back?**
- OM: Oh yes, everybody was safe, and got back alright, yeah. Oh, some of them got good jobs, interpreters, and maybe, I don't know what Oreste, I think Oreste was an interpreter.

- AG: Yes, yes he was.
- OM: Yes, and I know Gervasio was, that's my best mate, and others, they served whatever, I'm not sure what.
- OH: And what did they think of your experience?**
- OM: Sorry?
- OH: What did your friends who became soldiers think of your experience during the War?**
- OM: I don't think we ever talked about it, we didn't, we didn't, you know, we knew that something was happening to each one of us, and we all had our own little, little, call it troubles, not troubles but to work it out, there was no ... between us we always kept the same level of friendship and there's no change whatsoever, none of us, none of us.
- OH: So when the War finished?**
- OM: We got back together all over again, yeah.
- OH: Doing the same things together?**
- OM: Doing the same things together, yeah, getting broke together. Or at least I was anyway [laughs].
- OH: That's a very interesting slice of history that you've just given about the differences of the treatment of people.**
- OM: Yeah, because even, not only just our group of boys, but we're talking about here, even the elderly ... some, great friends, right through, and then some of them finished up, the whole lot, the whole period in the camp, in the concentration camp, the others were out. You know there was a lot of, a lot of this like Crotti was taken away and then released. My uncle was taken away and then released. Then there was Carollo, he was taken away, he didn't come home until the end of the War. There were quite a few, a lot of people that I knew there that ... because we don't know exactly what they did, you know, if they got involved in anything, I don't know anyway, but I hadn't been there. But there was never anything really serious about anybody really, if they did anything it would never be nothing to worry about.
- I think there was a bit of a ... I can understand that the authorities panicked a little bit on situations, you know, they'd get caught up in a situation where they don't know themselves what they're going to do. Yeah, well for the best, and they've got to, they've got to show they're doing something as well at the same time, you know, they have to, you have to give in to that way, not ... It's a difficult situation. I mean war is such a dreadful thing, and that's only my opinion, because nobody wins that war. That's all, that's all I have to say about that [laughs].

**OH:** And Oscar, just the last couple of questions about this area. Did you know much about Loveday at the time?

OM: Loveday, I went, I went up there to Barmera, which is, Barmera is a nice little town on the river there, and Loveday was a few miles out. And I went up there with the Bailetti brothers because they were going to see their father, and so I went with them to Barmera, went to Loveday, saw the concentration camp, and I came back to Barmera, well we all come back to Barmera. And yeah, we were there for about four or five days, to see the situation.

**OH:** What do you remember about Loveday? What did it look like?

OM: A lot of barbed wire [laughs] all over the place, and a room and then we were then to see Mr Bailetti, and I didn't say very much. I mean I spoke to him but not much, because the sons were there, that's the reason why, and yeah, that's [pause] It didn't, I mean it's a vast compound of barbed wire, that's all I could see, and all the huts inside of course.

**OH:** And did you see many of the other inmates?

OM: No, we were in a room only to see, we weren't allowed to what's name. We could see them from a distance but not to talk to.

**OH:** Did you see people who were, you know, prisoners of war?

OM: Well the only contact I had with prisoners of war is when they were released from camp and came to Port Augusta to work on the railway lines. There was prisoners of war, prisoners, also what's name, from concentration camp, mainly, mainly from Queensland they were, those people from Queensland. I don't remember seeing any from Adelaide up in Port Augusta anyway. They probably were somewhere but I'm not sure about that, but I did see a lot of prisoners of war, and also these from the concentration camp, Italian concentration camp, but mainly, mainly they came from Queensland. There was a lot of them from Queensland.

**OH:** And when you were staying at Barmera, how did you get there when you went to see Mr Bailetti?

OM: I got a permit.

**OH:** You got a permit?

OM: I got a permit, yep. These two policemen that I was saying that knew me well, and through them I was able to get a permit, because I was going up, and they, they knew the Bailetti boys very well indeed, and yeah, that's how I got a permit to get up there.

**OH:** And how did you travel up there?

OM: You know I can't remember, I can't remember how we got there.

**OH:** You didn't cycle?

OM: No, no, too far [laughs].

**OH:** And were did you stay when you were there?

OM: In a boarding house, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**OH:** So you had some very, very strong experiences in the War, didn't you, you know, because of the fact that you ended up in the Allied Works Council basically for the ...?

OM: Oh yes. Then of course that was a long time, you know, a long period of time there, and you met quite a lot of people, practically, not every week but many, many people that came out not because, because they had to pass through Port Augusta to go to the different positions in the line, different camps.

**OH:** Yes.

OM: And some you didn't see at all because they went straight through. It's all part of ...

**OH:** We might bring this part of the interview to a close, but thank you very much, Oscar, for that reflection about the time during the War, and that group of friends.

OM: They were good, good friends, all through our lives. Many of them have passed on now, but all through our lives we kept the friendship together, and it goes back to those times when they weren't hard but they weren't easy either, you know, there was sort of none of us really knew what to expect next really. It was a strange, strange time, strange time.

**OH:** Yes. Well thank you very much for that reflection, that's great.

OM: That's OK.

**End of recording**

**Fifth interview with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded on 25 May 2011****Recorded by Madeleine Regan at West Lakes Shore, South Australia****Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, is also present and contributes occasionally.**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Thank you, Oscar, for agreeing to this fifth interview. We're going to pick up where we left off last time, which was to talk about the idea of naturalisation, and I'd like to ask you when did you become naturalised?**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Yes, well as soon as the War finished, dad and I made an application for naturalisation. We always had that in mind. I mean we had it in mind before to get naturalised, before the War, but those days you had to pay ten pounds to get naturalised, and ten pounds those days was three weeks' work, and nobody could afford three weeks' work to pay for naturalisation, so dad never ever got naturalised, which meant if he was naturalised I would be naturalised, because I was young in those days, but in the later years ... when the War finished, ... 1945, you know, I was about 23.

**OH: You were born in 1923, so you were 23?**

OM: Yeah! So I was actually, I could apply by myself because I was an adult then, so both dad and I applied for naturalisation and we got it straightaway. We got letters of recommendation from different people that employed us, like the Commonwealth Railways, and a couple of other people there, and we got it straightaway.

**OH: And did it make a difference to you that you were naturalised?**

OM: Not really. In this respect, as a youngster, I always wanted to be a fitter and turner, and you start an apprenticeship, around about 16 you start apprenticeship for any trade those days, it doesn't matter as a fitter and turner, or a carpenter, or a plumber, electrician, you started off at 16 and you did about 4 or 5 years apprenticeship, and then you become a fully-fledged tradesman, but at my age, at 22, 23, it was too old, there was no room. Like these days you can at any age, but those days you had to start off really at the early age and that, so my ambition of becoming a tradesman as a fitter and turner, was completely gone.

The people at Commonwealth Railways, the Heads there, they knew me pretty well for many reasons, and they offered me a job to become an electrical helper, which probably eventually it would have, eventually in time I might have got in to get a ticket, I don't know how, but somehow I could have got perhaps to be an electrician, and I said I would take that, that's at Port Augusta, but in the meantime my Uncle Domenico Rossetto, he and his wife and two children had a shop in Hindley Street, he passed away, and my auntie needed someone to help her out because the children were still young, I thought they was about 14 or 15, maybe a bit older, and Modesto was about 10 or 12 or

something, something of that age, so she needed a man to help with the business. So I came down from Port Augusta to help my auntie, and at the same time dad and I applied to be naturalised, and eventually we were accepted, yeah.

**OH:** **And Oscar, what about your dad, you know, after your mother died, can you talk a little about what your dad did?**

OM: Well my mother died in 1942, and dad naturally was devastated to a degree, but he carried on pretty well. When I came down to work for my auntie, I worked hard for her, but I couldn't settle down as far as, how could you put it, to be a good son. I was gambling, I was going out all the time, so just to give you an example. Dad and I, we had a room to sleep in at my auntie's house. We slept in the same room but he had his meals with another relation of ours in Currie Street, so in three months we only saw each other once, and that shows you what type of life I was leading, because when he came home from having his meals at my other uncle in Currie Street, I was gone out. I'd come home, 3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning, he would get up, he wouldn't wake me up, and at that happened day after day after day in the three months I was home.

**OH:** **How do you think your dad thought about your life at that time?**

OM: This is what I'm coming to now. Because I was such a hopeless case, you might say, he decided to write to Auntie Maria, which is the widow of one of his brothers in Italy, and he thought that, because he was only, oh, I don't know, about 40-something my dad, and he decided that there was no future. He was hoping that I would settle down and have a future with a family, with myself and my family, etc, but it didn't look that way, so he decided to write to Auntie Maria, and eventually they agreed to get married. She came out from Italy with her daughter, she had a daughter, and that's how dad got married, but he always said that if I had been a good boy [laughs] he would never ever have gotten married, because he was hoping that we would be living together, which we would have done. As it turned out, we did that anyway afterwards, but at the same time, at that particular time, you know, there was nothing much out here, and no money, always broke, etc, etc.

**OH:** **That's interesting. So Auntie Maria was your?**

OM: Auntie.

**OH:** **Mother's ...?**

OM: No, it was on my father's side. One of his brothers, she was married to one of his other brothers, and he died, and was left with this young girl, and that's how dad wrote to auntie, got together, and eventually got married, yes, a proxy marriage.

**OH:** **And how old was the girl, your cousin?**

OM: My cousin? I can't remember.

**OH:** Like young?

OM: She would have been about five years younger than I, perhaps more, yeah.

**OH:** And what was her name?

OM: Beniamina, because her father was named Beniamino, so she was named after the father and all this, Beniamina, and yeah, but he always says that he would never ever have got married if I had been a fair, you know, a fairly good kid, but I wasn't. But I wasn't bad either, you know [laughs].

**OH:** Yeah, I'm sure you weren't. And where did they live when your auntie came?

OM: Well by the time they came out, I must think this, it was the time when, it was the time when I went and bought the shop on Torrens Road [Croydon], and whilst dad and auntie lived in the house of my auntie for a number of months there, when she came out from Italy ...

**OH:** In Hindley Street?

OM: In Hindley Street. I bought the shop, and a few months afterwards I bought a house across the road from the shop, or just a little bit further down, and they all came down to live, we lived together there. We built a room at the back for them and a kitchen and room like that. So, as I said before, eventually we got together, but if I had the right mind, he would never have got married you see [laughs]. Never mind, he was happy. She was good to him and they got on pretty well, and as it turned out, later on we'll talk about when my children came along and she was like a mother to them more or less, because Virginia and I were so busy in the shop that someone had to look after the children, and my auntie was the one that did it, and three, well the two children for sure were raised by auntie more or less, because our working hours were very long, and that was all.

**OH:** Let's talk about those first years in the grocer shop. What was that like, when you say the hours were very long?

OM: Well, you know, I think I mentioned that I borrowed all that money, and naturally it's a big debt to pay, so we worked very long hours. I would say on the Thursday night and Friday night we would sleep on the floor at the shop, we wouldn't even go to the house to sleep, which is only a few hundred yards across the road. We slept on the floor of the shop for a couple of hours, and then started working again, and then I would go off to the market and Virginia would be there, and then, yeah, it was hard work, but we needed to do it because we had money to pay, to pay, to pay, and fortunately I had good brother-in-laws as well. They helped us in many ways, and a good team of workers as well. I'm not sure when Assunta came to work for us, what year it was.

Assunta Giovannini (AG): About '55.



**OH:** 1955?

AG: I think.

OM: 1955 was it?

**OH:** And you already had Nilo Piovesan working?

OM: Nilo was already working for us, yes, and Jimmy, was Jimmy there?

AG: No.

**OH:** And how did you build up the business in that first few years?

OM: Well we were very lucky in many ways, and this is the reason why I bought the shop there, because Lockleys, they were all market gardens, very few homes, mostly market gardeners.

**OH:** This is in the area of Croydon?

OM: Croydon, but the same thing happened, what happened at Lockleys happened at Croydon. There wasn't very many homes but they were building all the time, they were developing, developing, developing, and with development you get people, and people, you pick up new customers, new customers all the time. Our biggest struggle was to supply to our customers, to supply tobacco and cigarettes which were very, very much in demand, and under hard ration, and so you had to work very hard to scrounge and to do all sorts of things to get some tobacco and cigarettes so you can make these people happy. Not only tobacco and cigarettes but there were so many items in the grocery lines were very short.

**OH:** Was it still rationing at that time?

OM: Yes, tea, sugar, and what else was it, butter I think, butter, sugar.

**OH:** And how did that rationing work for you as a shopkeeper?

OM: It was hard work because you couldn't, if somebody come in to buy half a pound of tea, they had to have a little ration ticket, so we'd cut off a little piece of the little ration ticket, and put it in the box, and then in the night time when things were closed, we had to paste them all on a piece of paper, all these little pieces of paper, and when we got delivery of tea or whatever ration articles came from the warehouse, we had to have these sheets of paper with these ration tickets on them to give them. Sugar, the same thing, everything was very hard.

**OH:** And was that controlled by a government agency?

OM: Oh yes, yes, everything was controlled. In fact, it's not like today. In those days we had a, in the grocery store, we had a book, a price book. Now every item that we sold in the store was in that book, in every store, it was the same book in my store like it was in 200,000 other stores, all the same price, it was

price controlled. Now you could not sell anything above that price, and you could have sold some for less, but there wasn't much margin to muck around, you needed to make a bit of a profit. So whatever shop you went to buy a pound of sugar – forget about the sugar because you had the tickets – but you go and buy a tin of jam, the same brand, the same quality, and you paid the same price in my shop as well as in all the other shops.

So the idea is to satisfy people, to get customers, was your service that you gave. It's no trouble if somebody rings up and says *I forgot to get something on the order. If it hasn't already gone, would you be able to bring it to me?* So even for a pound of butter we would make a delivery, so as to keep, not because you knew there wasn't any profit in it, but you kept the customers happy, and that was the main thing in there. So between tobacco and cigarettes and other items ...

For instance in the vegetable line, potatoes became very scarce, they were rationed, well they weren't rationed, you just couldn't get them, so we would go up in the hills in the night time, with a truck, and buy on the black market, potatoes, and bring them at home, and when you sold them you didn't make any profit on it, it was just to make the people, the customers, happy, and that's how you build up your business is trying to keep the customer happy.

**OH:** **And how did you know where to buy the potatoes from in the hills?**

OM: Because, you know, we had this vegetable shop as well, and I was going to the market.

**OH:** **And was that the East End Market?**

OM: Yes, the East End, yes. So I got know everybody and everybody knows everybody, and so there was a ... and the same thing for another example, is the cool drinks, lemonade or whatever cool drink it was, that you were rationed, not rationed to the degree that you needed a ticket for it, but the firm could only give you say six dozen for that particular period, of either a dozen lemonade, a dozen orange, a dozen raspberry, a dozen something else, and that was it, but that wasn't enough to keep things going because people keep on asking, so we used to go up to Oakbank at Pikes there, in a truck, and buy their drinks. That wasn't on the black market, that was ordinary trading, but you went to the extent. There wasn't much profit in it but you had to give service, and we became known for that particular ... and that's the reason why we got on so well. And apart from that we had good workers see [laughs]. We did, we were very ... I always said that because all the workers, they all pulled their weight all the time, they never looked at the clock about knocking off at a certain time, and all that type of thing. No, I was very lucky.

**OH:** **And you and Virginia obviously worked really hard?**

OM: Yes, and this is what brings the point of Virginia and I working so hard, and having a family, and the children growing up.

**OH: Can we talk about the children because I don't think we've touched on that before?**

OM: No, that's true. I think in, we got married in 1949, and in 1953 we had the first child, which is Christine, and then two years after ... three years later [laughs] we had Helen in 1956, and then in 1965 we had Vicki, but by that time we were out of the shop, but the first two, like with Helen and Christine, we grew up together, yes, but we didn't see each other very much [laughs].

**OH: And that's where you said that Auntie Marie ...**

OM: That's where Auntie Maria and dad, you know, they used to get them dressed up, take them to church and, you know, take them to school.

**OH: And where did the girls go to school?**

OM: They went to St Margaret Mary at Croydon, which is across the shop, so that was very handy there, and then in later years when they had to go to high school, they went to St Aloysius in Adelaide.

**OH: And what about Beniamina, what did she do when she came to Australia, or to Adelaide?**

OM: Well Beniamina, by the time they come out, she must have, I don't know, I can't remember the age, but she had a boyfriend in Italy, and it wasn't long afterwards that he also came out, and then they got married, and I think they lived with us for a while, do you remember?

Christine Rebellato (CR): I can't remember Zia Beniamina and Zio Berto [Robert] living with us.

OM: No, maybe not because by that time, what happened there, some money that my father got from his, he inherited some land, some land from Italy, and it was sold. I can't remember because I was too busy working the shop, and those other little things didn't come into my mind at all, but I think a lot of that money was used to build a house for them in Croydon, for Beniamina and Roberto, and so they lived not far from the shop again, in Croydon, and that's what happened, she got married too.

**OH: And Oscar, did you and Virginia have time for social activities?**

OM: Very little [laughs]. I guess for her it was, she came from a family of gardeners, and they worked very hard.

**OH: And they were on Frogmore Road at this time?**

OM: Frogmore Road, yeah, and I suppose in many ways for her to go from one working hard situation to another working hard situation, it didn't ... she was very good, she was fantastic but, you know, it didn't, there wasn't much transition, it's hard work both ways. The hard work was for me because I was used to going out a lot and I had to stop going to dances, I had to stop going to

the races, I had stop going to play cards, I had to stop do this and stop do that. I gave up a lot [laughs]. Sorry to sound so martyries.

*Laughter*

OM: But I'm trying to picture a situation where she had more or less changed from a hard job to another hard job, and she was very good.

**OH: So it was you who had to be disciplined?**

OM: But I, I was the one that had to be disciplined because, you know, every ball, you know, we'd be going, and tickets for the ball, yes, of course, you know, it was a known thing that I would be going, but at the end I couldn't go, so yeah, we had a bit of a struggle, at least I had a bit of a struggle there.

**OH: But you had a goal for those first years.**

OM: Pardon?

**OH: You had a goal for those first years to pay back that loan?**

OM: Oh yes, of course I had a goal, but the playing instinct was still in the back of the mind type thing.

**OH: But you must have had some time because one of your employees, Lawrie Horne, was an Anglo-Australian, reported to me that you invited him to social occasions, and some Italian weddings.**

OM: Well, because naturally at weddings we would be invited and we had to go, and also we catered for a lot of weddings as well.

**OH: Oh! Can you tell me about that?**

OM: Oh, just the catering, it wasn't as bad as much as it is now, it's more, well I don't know what exactly, we just supplied all the material, all the goods and stuff, so we catered quite a bit on the what's name, and naturally I'd be going to the wedding with Virginia, and then Lawrie, I would ask Lawrie to come along and have a good time too.

**OH: And obviously for Lawrie it was an important experience?**

OM: Yeah, well I think, we must remember this, that we went to a part of a suburb of Adelaide where there was very, very few foreigners, Italians anyway, and it was mainly Anglo-Saxon, and you had to break in, they had to accept you, either yah, they accepted you or they didn't, and if you did you might as well walk out the shop because you wouldn't get any business ... So, you know, you had to try very hard, not only on the business but also to be, do the right thing, say the right thing, and try to be friendly with everybody, and I think we managed that pretty well, because, and as I say we had Nilo and Assunta and Jimmy and Lawrie, and other girls there, some Italian girls and some English, Australian girls, and there was a fair few working there at that time, and they

all pulled their weight, and it was very good.

We mixed pretty well and we become accepted in the community there because not like if you're down at Lockleys in those days, it's a very highly Italian community. It's easy to work in there because you're Italian, but of course here you're in complete, you're in Australia but in a strange situation as far as your nationality is concerned, and of course, you know, during the way there's always that little kink there because Italy was, you know, an enemy, and so yeah, you had to get over it. Although that's never ever bothered me really much at all because I just played the game as I saw it, and I thought I played it fair anyway.

CR: And you formed very close relationships with some of your customers too, because they used to take us out. They took us to the zoo, to the pageant, to shopping, Mrs Silver, Mrs Davies. They felt sorry for us so they helped mum and dad out by taking us out.

OM: That's right.

**OH: It's interesting to think of that close kind of bond that customers would have with a family.**

OM: That's right. Yeah, it's true, it's through the customers that the girls were able to go out to these places. As a matter of fact, Christine was, what were you in the John Martin's Pageant?

CR: In the pageant, twice.

OM: She was twice, two years running in the, what do they call that?

CR: Little fairy.

*Laughter*

OM: She was a fairly in the, what's name, with a queen, was it?

CR: Oh, the Pageant Queen, dad, Fairy of the Pageant, and Cinderella.

OM: And she's got a fairy dress. So two years running she got that.

CR: But I think Lawrie Horne said that he was the one that took me to the pageant.

OM: Yeah, probably, oh yes.

CR: He told you that last time.

OM: Yeah, because I never ever had taken you, how could I, I was never able to do that, but yeah, that was ...

**OH: And Oscar, how long were you and Virginia and the family at the Torrens Road grocery, you know, roughly. How many years?**

OM: About ten years I think. ... I always, always, sometimes I think about it and I say about ten years, and then we sold out.

**OH: And why did you sell at that time?**

OM: Well the supermarkets started to become a force, and so it meant that I had to change my whole system, because what we did we went out to our customers, picked up the orders, delivered the orders.

**OH: So they didn't even drop off the orders, you had to go and pick them up?**

OM: No, we picked them up.

**OH: Wow!**

OM: We gave them number 1 service all the time. The supermarkets became, they were putting out these specials, but people had to go in and buy, there was no delivery, there was nothing, they had to go and buy in the supermarket, and take it home, but we had our customers used to having everything delivered. We could not give the same service, not for the same price. And so to me it took the wind out of my sail, and I said *Well this is no good...* either I change completely and go supermarket, or forget about it, and so I decided to sell.

**OH: And what did you and Virginia do when you sold?**

OM: Well Virginia worked for quite a while in the shop, still working in the shop there, and then she went working down at the airport I think, so at the airport.

**OH: And where were you living once you sold?**

OM: Oh, we had a house all the time on Torrens Road, across from the shop, we lived there all the time, but yeah, she worked, first of all kept working at the shop until things got fixed up with everybody there, and then she went to work, and she loved working because ... but as I said to her one day, I said *You might as well stop home*, because she was working and she gave all her money to the Sisters across the road again from the shop, there was a Convent there, next to the school, and she gave all her money to the Sisters all the time. I said *The only thing that I get out of this situation is that I've got to pay your tax* [laughs]. The money she was getting I had to pay tax on in my tax, you know, that came into ... and so, yeah, she gave everything away.

**OH: And what about you, what work did you get involved with after leaving the shop?**

OM: I took some time off to think that out [laughs] like four years [laughs].

**OH: You probably needed to have a rest after working so hard.**

OM: Well I couldn't decide what to do, I went ... Anyway I thought I'd have a holiday, and this is when I went to England. That started my travels around the world then. And that got, it's a bit of a bug travelling because it's really good.

Then I had to decide what to do really with my life, because if I wanted to travel I could not tie myself into a job where I had to be there all the time, because I needed my time to travel, so I decided to invest my money in different ways, so that whilst I'm travelling that money is making money, OK, so that gave me the scope to travel here and there and everywhere, and I did give it a fling to, I went into partnership with a friend of mine, into a building company, building homes etc, buying land, building homes, developing land. Where Lawrie Horne lives today, that piece of land up at Happy Valley, it was our company who developed that. That was, I don't know, it was about 200 blocks or something that we bought, a piece of land and we made about 200 blocks out of it, and strangely enough he lives in one of those [laughs].

**OH: And what was the company called?**

OM: Well first of all it was called Olsen Constructions. There was Mr Olsen, myself, and Dino. [Agostinetto] There were three of us.

**OH: How did you come to have a partnership?**

OM: Well I was a silent partner, because the reason being a silent partner because I wasn't prepared to do the work that the others were doing. Naturally my share wasn't as great at the end of the year, but at the same time I was satisfied with that.

**OH: And how did you know Mr Olsen?**

OM: I didn't, Dino Agostinetto knew Mr Olsen, and eventually we went into a, I don't know what happened there. We were the first people in South Australia to build home units as they're called today, and there was a write-up, and I've got the paper somewhere in the back there, where there's a big write-up on a Sunday that we had these units for sale, and whoever wrote the article said that perhaps South Australia wasn't ready for that type of thing yet, but they were because it developed pretty well, but we were the first to build units, and they were down on the Esplanade at Brighton, fronting the sea, and it was on a corner block.

On the other corner block opposite us, opposite the units, was Mr Mawson, the Antarctic explorer, that was his house there. He wasn't there of course because he's been dead a long time, but that's it's still, I think it's still there now the Mawson's house, and so are the units for that matter, but we were the first to build home units there.

**OH: So we're talking about some time in the early '60s, would that be right?**

OM: Yes, I reckon, yeah, '60, '66, yeah.

**OH: And Oscar, you'd also developed a large house on Magill Road?**

OM: Oh yeah, that was part of, that was ... first of all we went into, we were going pretty well in the building game, but unbeknown Dino and myself, Mr Olsen was touching the till, so at the end of, after a few months, a couple of

Clarkson's and Wool Bay Lime, they said *Your accounts have not been paid*, and we were staggered because our accounts are always paid. We found out that Mr Olsen had bought himself a property down at Meningie and was developing the property with the money from our account [laughs]. Anyway, to cut a long story short, we got a lawyer, we got it all fixed up, so he was out of the company, which left the two of us, and we called it DNO Constructions.

**OH:** **And how had you come to know Dino?**

OM: Dino was a friend of the family, and also his brother, and they lived, in Italy they lived just about three kilometres from Bigolino, and three kilometres from Valdobbiadene, it's called San Stefano, a little to the right of, when you go to Valdobbiadene it would be over to the right, the first little hamlet there is San Stefano, and that's where his family came from.

**OH:** **And was Dino born in Italy or in Australia?**

OM: No, born in Italy, yeah.

**OH:** **So he was like your contemporary?**

OM: Oh, we weren't mixed up in business before, but it sort of happened like that, that when he and Mr Olsen were together in the beginning, they needed money, I was ready to put money but not work, so I became what they call a silent partner, and that's how I got into that situation, and then of course I had to get, when the trouble started with Mr Olsen, we had to, I had to take a more active part in there. I did for a little while, but being in the game of building and developing, we would buy blocks of land, we'd put up three or four units, or we cut, you know, it depended, anything that came along we developed that way, and it was going well.

So where we were making profits, it wasn't good to pay tax, so we decided to buy 15 acres of land down the South East, between Robe and Kingston, virgin country, because those days, you can't do it now, but in those days you could develop that virgin country to a farm situation, and it all comes out of the profit of any other business that you have. We had the building going, so the profit went in there, and when you sold it you didn't have to pay tax you see, it was free of tax when you sold the developed land like that, so we put the money in there, clearing the land and, you know, it's a lot of work there. We put a bore down 360ft, an artesian bore, we went down to artesian water, which it gave us a 60ft head of 6inch, because it's artesian you don't have to put a pump there, it just comes up by itself like that water coming down from Queensland and the North. You know, we sort of got it all working pretty well.

And then we developed Tranmere House.

**OH:** **Going back to the land down in the South East, what were you doing with the land?**

OM: We were putting cattle in there, fattening cattle. So we had, we built a shed, a big shed, and it became also a very, a holiday place for all the family. They had



a lot of fun down there, a lot of fun, because we'd go down with the whole family, not only my family but Romildo and his wife, and oh, lots of people came down there. Some of them liked shooting, I've never been a shooting man, but they liked going out shooting, so it's an escape.

**OH:** **And how far to the coast was it?**

OM: It was about, I don't know, about 30 miles I reckon, maybe, yeah. It's between Robe and Kingston, but Mt Benson it was called the area there. So that was part of that.

Then of course again you lead on from, you go from farming, then again you've got profit that comes in, again you've got to look for something to use up that profit instead of paying tax, so you go, that's when we started the Coober Pedy. We got bright ideas how to do the mining much easier instead of working hard to make all those shafts by hand. We got Proline Industry people to make us a digger so it's done mechanically rather than by hand, and after a few mistakes we got the right thing and yeah, so we delved into that, so that became ... I was involved there until about 1977. I never worked up there, I've been up there many times, but I always had a man to work for my place.

**OH:** **And what was Coober Pedy like in those days?**

OM: The very beginning that we were there, there was no telephone, there was no, well how can I put it, very ordinary, you had no phone connection, so that gives you an idea that you're quite alone out in the bush there like that. The water was rationed. They had a big water tank there and it was rationed to a 44 gallon drum for two weeks for each person, and you had to do your cooking, your washing, your everything in the one. Yeah, it was very, very frontier type of thing, you know, very, very.

**OH:** **And who were you working with at that point? Was it Dino?**

OM: Yeah, in the beginning. There's a company, the four of us, and then two had to pull out because they weren't well, and then we found other chaps that had been up there for six months, but they were completely broke. They needed some finance and help to keep going, they had nothing, so they said *Well, come in with us and we'll put the money in*, and they did with the work you see. They were doing it pretty well for quite a few years.

**OH:** **And Oscar, who was living in the community at Coober Pedy at that time? What sorts of people?**

OM: I suppose the nationalities would have been 20 or 30 different nationalities there and very, very primitive in many ways. We all lived underground but ... how can I say this? The bulk in those days were Greek and Italians, the bulk, but there was a lot of other nationalities there, a very cowboy style thing. Aborigines, I found the Aborigines very good in the beginning. They got spoilt at the end when they started a hotel and then of course that meant they could get grog and that sort of spoiled them, but in those years you could trust and leave anything outside your dugout or whatever, you know, car, never close

your car, always like that because nobody would touch anything.

It's only when progress came along, and with progress you get the good and the bad and therefore, and then you have to look after, lock up things, etc, and the Aborigines, although they never are, they never are what's name, only when they drunk or something like that, but if you leave them alone they don't bother you, but it's a pity because the early part the Aborigines were ... I remember my first trip to Coober Pedy, I went up there with, I had a Chevrolet car, and it was full of beer, that's all I took up there to the boys because I know they were ... As I said, I never worked there but I went there quite often, and it was full of beer, and it was great because you couldn't get anything there. Then, as I say, the hotel started, and when things get modern it comes good in many ways, but it goes back in other ways too.

**OH: I'm trying to imagine you driving up in the Chevrolet, you know, full of beer. It must have looked pretty amazing. A long trip?**

OM: Oh well, it was all dirt road except from Port Augusta. And those days a dirt road was a dirt road because there was no ... now it's all bituminised of course, but then for many years it was a dirt road but graded, but those days it was like a track going, you know, there's a tree there so you go around it. When they made the new road they knocked those trees down to make it nice and straight, but those days you had to snick-snake towards ...

CR: You had all the box and the bulldust as well.

OM: Oh yes, and then with all the bulldust that you found in the different areas there near Woomera. I remember taking one of my friends up there, Peter Perin, to Coober Pedy, he wanted to go up there, and I knew we were coming to this stretch of ground which is full of bulldust. Because it was night-time we had the windows down in the car, and I knew what was going to happen. What's going to happen when you drive into that, all the dust comes in like that you see. So I slowly wound my window up, I didn't tell him you see, and he's talking away and all of a sudden [laughs] he can't talk anymore because he got a mouthful of bulldust and had to close him down.

*Laughter*

**OH: What is bulldust?**

OM: Bulldust is very, very fine, it's like, it's like powdered sand.

CR: White.

OM: Power, a real powder, real powdered sand [sound effects] like a big cloud [laughs].

**OH: So your friend wouldn't have been impressed?**

OM: He wasn't impressed, no, no. We had a caravan up there, one night he wanted to write to his wife, and I said he had to write that night because the plane

would go once a week to take the letters out. I said *You've got to write it tonight and put it in the letterbox in the morning before going out to the mines, so that it will catch the plane*, but it wasn't so, it wasn't right. So he was living in the caravan and he had a camera, I remember him writing away in the caravan [laughs], bent over with the heat, because it's hot and what's name, and he's there writing away to his wife, the candle, and nothing, and we're outside watching him through the louvre windows of the caravan [laughs], and then he said, and he come in and he said *I've got the letter all fixed up*. He said *That's alright, put it there*, and the next couple of days the letter was still there [laughs] because we never posted it [laughs], because he didn't have to post it, it wouldn't have gone anywhere anyway. So it's all part of, you know, fun, those days.

**OH:** **And as you said, frontier kind of country?**

OM: Yeah.

**OH:** **And behaviour [laughs].**

OM: And behaviour, yes, yes. They were alright, I found Coober Pedy pretty good in the early years, very good.

CR: The clubs were strong.

OM: Pardon?

CR: The clubs were strong.

OM: Yes, and we had an Italian Club there, that was strong, and they had *bocce* [Italian bowls], you know, play *bocce*, and that was it, the club.

**OH:** **And were there Italians from all parts of Italy?**

OM: Yeah, yeah, different parts of Italy, yes.

**OH:** **An interesting experience. And one other thing that we passed over was Tranmere House.**

OM: Oh yes. Yeah, well Tranmere House, we bought that for thirty-two thousand pounds, the house and the land around it.

**OH:** **And what was, what had Tranmere House been?**

OM: Oh, huge. It's got a fantastic history, but I can't remember.

**OH:** **But a big house?**

OM: Oh yes, oh yeah. There's a very good history to it and we ruined it in a way, because being developers, you know, the period that we had the building company, and we made it into ten flats – just imagine a house we made into ten flats – but the rooms were 40ft ceilings, you know, those beautiful ornate corners, and there's three turrets in Tranmere House, a big middle one and two

on the side, and on the side turrets they were all rooms in there, bedrooms, because they're so big, and we had some good, you know really good clients in there, like Mr Lean, Sir Lean it was, the Commissioner of Police, and he died, and his wife, Lady Lean, was in Number 1 flat, so we had some good, you know, nice tenants there, like because it's a nice area, and she had fantastic furniture, it all came out from England years, many years ago. Oh! But we were, in our mind, developers, you know.

Many years afterwards, many years after I was interviewed on Radio 5CL I think with Philip Satchell, and Tranmere House came up on the program, and I spoke about Tranmere House and I said *I'm sorry that what we did to Tranmere House, it wasn't quite the right thing to do, but we were too involved in business, rather than thinking about this, or the nicety about everything*, and in that interview this lady was listening to it, and what had happened in the meantime, Tranmere House was bought by these people, and they worked so hard and spent so much money to bring it back to its original glory, so Tranmere House today, I imagine, would be back to the glory that it was years ago, a big staircase, those winding staircase, beautiful, you can only see it in pictures or something like that, and they ...

A couple of days after I get a phone call, and she introduced herself and said *I'm Mrs So and So* – I can't remember her name, unfortunately – but she said *Look, I heard you talking about Tranmere House, the interview with Philip Satchell, and I would like you to come up and have a look at what we did to Tranmere House.*

**OH:**            **Oh, that's lovely, Oscar, and I think we're going to have to leave this interview here, and we can pick that up at the next interview. Thank you very much for your interview today.**

**OM:**            OK [laughs] thank you.

**End of recording**

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**Interview 6 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan  
at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,  
on 8 March 2012**

**Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, are also present and contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Thank you, Oscar, for agreeing again to be interviewed. At the end of the last interview we were talking about Tranmere House, and an interview on the ABC radio that you had with Philip Satchell, and I think you were telling us that you felt a bit sad about what you and your developer partner had done to that house. I think it might be a good place to start this interview.**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Oh, I see, right, mm. Yes, I had this interview with Philip Satchell because he asked me what we did and all that, and then Tranmere House came into the conversation, and because we were developers we never thought that we, I mean for us money and developing was the key project. We didn't think of what we ruined, what we did wrong, we didn't think of anything about history or whatever.

So I was telling Philip Satchell that we sort of ruined Tranmere House because it's a big, beautiful building, there's fantastic staircases and all that type of thing, really something out of the box, and we made ten flats out of it, so you can imagine being a house with all these rooms, and making ten self-contained flats. We had to put bathrooms in, we had to do many, many alterations, and now I feel that we ruined it in a way, the way to what it was, but strangely the next day or a couple of days after, after having spoken about Tranmere House on radio with Philip Satchell, I get a phone call from a lady who was then living in Tranmere House, and her husband, she and her husband, and I think they had eight children or something like that, he was a doctor, I think he was a doctor, and she rang me up and she said that she heard my interview and she became very interested when I started talking about Tranmere House, and she said to me *Would you like to come down and have a look at it now because we tried to bring it back to the original, to what it was? So we needed, you know, eight children, we needed plenty of room and the house just suits us, and it's a* ...

But unfortunately, I don't know, for many reasons, for some reason, I didn't get around to do that, to see the house, and I'm sorry that I haven't gone down to have a look because I would have loved to see the difference to what it was, what we did to it [laughs] and what it is now I suppose, but I imagine that Tranmere House itself would be, the biggest worry about Tranmere House would be the upkeep of it because it's such a huge, huge house, three turrets, lots of corrugated iron on it, iron roofs and that, and that of course deteriorates, and the walls deteriorate, and the weather gets to them, so maintenance is a big

factor there, so I don't know what it is today but I imagine that it would be a bit of a headache to try and keep it up to scratch.

**OH: And Oscar, what was Tranmere House like when you got the idea to do this sort of renovation?**

OM: Oh, well apparently years before we bought it they had already sold some land to the Tranmere Bowling Club, and there is a club in front of Tranmere House. There's Magill Road, there's the bowling club and then Tranmere House is behind it, so we bought it when the bowling club was already established there, but they kept on harping to us that they wanted more land to put not only just the bowling club, but also to put some tennis courts, which eventually we finished up selling some land on the left, on the east side of Tranmere House, and I presume they put tennis courts there, I can't remember now, but we still had plenty of land around the house itself, and yeah, but it must have been a huge, the history of it, I read a little bit about the history but I can't quite recall everything.

**OH: Was it in good condition when you bought it?**

OM: Oh no, fair condition, it wasn't too bad, some parts needed replacing, like the iron, corrugated iron, and painting, but we were lucky because in our, in our company we had two, we employed two carpenters for our jobs, and when they had, didn't have enough work somewhere, they used to come there to do all maintenance work around the house, in and out, quite handy, and we kept it pretty, pretty well up to the scratch situation, but I don't know what it is like now.

**OH: And I'm trying to understand would that have been an unusual act to take with a house like that in Adelaide? Were there other people doing that kind of separations in houses?**

OM: Not that I, no, not really, it's probably a once-off because, after all, there's only one Tranmere House in Adelaide, and there's not very many houses of that nature there in Adelaide. I guess no, I never, I never came across any other building that's been, that was ruined like that [laughs]. I was quite pleased to hear when the lady rang me up and told me that they'd spent a lot of money to bring it back to the original house, and I was quite pleased about that, but as I say I missed out going out to see it.

**OH: And I understand you had very good tenants in that building?**

OM: Oh yes, pretty good tenants. We had an agent who was a letting agent, but because of, I suppose, it gave an impression of being a nice place and nice place to live in, you got good tenants that way, and we did have good tenants in there.

I can remember vividly, and she lived, her bedroom was in one of the turrets in the western turret, a main bedroom, and it was Lady Lean. She was the wife of

Sir Lean, who was Commissioner of Police for many years, and her son. Her son was a pianist, not married, and he was teaching, giving lessons on the piano, and she lived there with her son, and quite a bit, what I remember about her is the furniture really, that fantastic furniture that came from England, and something I had never seen, such beautiful furniture.

**OH: And were you responsible for collecting rents?**

OM: Yes, I collected rents there, yes, until the end, yes.

**OH: And I don't think we've identified what sort of period this was in. Was this like 1960s or 1950s?**

OM: Oh, it would be, it would be in the '60s.

**OH: Oh, OK.**

OM: The '60s, '60s-'70s, I can't, I can't remember that point there. Another, I was involved in the building company then. First of all when I went into the building company I was a silent partner, just put money into the company, but not actually working with it, but when we had a bit of a split-up and Dino [Agostinetti] and I became the two owners of the company, and then I took more interest as far as working with it and collecting rent, or seeing clients for building, and all that type of thing, and I used to go out every week and pay the men, whoever had to be paid, and all that type of ... Yeah, I took a lot more interest in that, but I can't remember the years.

**OH: Oh, that's alright, that's fine. I'm curious and I guess we could establish it by finding out when Sir Lean, you know, was retired.**

OM: When she passed away.

**OH: Yeah, or when she passed away, yeah. One other thing that I'm going to follow up is about your role as a Justice of the Peace.**

OM: Oh! [laughs]

**OH: Can you tell me why you became a Justice of the Peace, and I understand it was in 1964.**

OM: Yeah. Well I had a great friend that I met during my market days, the vegetable market in Adelaide, and he also had a shop in Norwood, and he was collecting vegetables from the market in the morning, like I was, and many others, and we became fairly good friends, and he was a JP [Justice of the Peace], Mr Polling his name was, and he said to me one day, he said *Oscar*, he said, *you do a lot of work for the Italian boys*, you know as I probably mentioned before that I did a lot of tax work for the migrants that came out those years, and other things, maybe going to the doctor, maybe going, I don't know, many, many things that are required in life, and so I helped a lot of people, and I had contact

with a lot of people, and he said *It would be good if you became a JP, you would help them out a lot and better, a lot more, because you know that when they come to you, they have to sign papers and you go looking for a JP for them to witness, etc.* So I thought *Yeah, that was a good idea.*

So I got interested in it, and you have to have five referees to become a JP. One was a local priest, one was a Member of Parliament, one was an investigation at the Police Department if you had any convictions of any kind. What was the other one, Police, Taxation Department, you had to be cleared. I can't remember the fifth, anyhow there was five, five, and I was able to get all cleared. In fact as a matter, when I went up for the, I think the final interview at headquarters in Adelaide, I was told that I'd forgotten, I'd forgotten a little thing about something that happened when I was bike riding, and something about something, we jumped the fence and pinched some oranges, and we were taken to court for it [laughs] by Mrs Frost.

Anyway [laughs] I forgot about that point there, but the judge that was sitting there, he said *Such and such*, I can't remember the name, the year, he gave out the year, he said *You got fined three pound ten* [laughs] *for this.* I said *Yes, that's true, I forgot about that.* He said *Can you enlighten me about it?* He said *Tell me your story.* I said *Well, we were all bike riders and we went driving, riding, up Hectorville, up the places up there, and one of the boys, his father had a farm up there, five acres or ten acres of land and a big shed, and a cellar underneath there, and unfortunately we went down the cellar and drank some wine out of the barrel, with a hose, and that's the worst thing you can do is drinking wine with a hose because all the fumes, it hit our heads, we were all pretty bright. Then we get onto our bike, we look at this orchard and I didn't jump the fence, I was the nit-keeper, you know, I was keeping nit, with my friend Gervasio, and the others jumped in, got a few oranges. It shows how stupid we were.*

We got to a crossroad and we stopped there and stopped eating these oranges. We could have run away a year, you know, a long [laughs] we stopped because we were half, a little tankered, but ... and the police caught us there you see, because the lady of the house rang up the police and the police came up, the Payneham Police, or Paradise or something, and they got us there, so yeah. So the police were very good, they said *If you go up to her and say sorry to the lady, you know, we'll take your name but we'll forget about it. If she forgives you,* *OK.*

So Gervasio and I went up to the big house, through the orchard, because that's where we got the oranges from, up to the house, and she wouldn't even see us, she refused to see us, and so the police had to go on with the case you see. As a matter of fact we found out afterwards that she also, because her delivery, the baker delivery boy or the baker, he picked up an orange from the orchard, going to the house, and he got put in my her for pinching an orange, so she was a pretty hard woman, and that's why a couple of weeks afterwards, after the court case, we rang her up and told her to stick the receiver wherever she wanted to [laughs].



**OH: Retribution [laughs].**

OM: Well we were only, you know, young boys [laughs].

**OH: But it didn't prevent you from becoming a JP?**

OM: No, no, they accepted the story, they had a good laugh, and no trouble at all, yeah, yeah I got clear, all clear.

**OH: And what happened once you got the all clear? Did you make it known to people that you were a JP, or how did you get your business?**

OM: Oh, you got your official things, and then, oh, it doesn't take long for people to find out that you're a JP because, especially in the Italian community where, you know, a lot of signatures are required for different reasons, and *Oh, Oscar's, Oscar's that*, so they'd come, and then I was very friendly with all the police [laughs] in the area, and they required all their summons that they took out to the houses, they had to be signed by a JP before they take them out, so I had a heap of summons to sign, and the police would come around at all hours for me to do this and, you know, I was quite busy.

**OH: And did people ask you during your working hours at the shop?**

OM: Oh yes, oh yes, yeah, part of it is, it's like another little something that you do in life. I was ready to, to help out.

**OH: And did you have to renew every year?**

OM: No, no, you became a member of this association, which is the Magistrates, and as a matter of fact I sat, in Coober Pedy, I was up there one year, I sat in court there, and a man had broken into a dugout as a matter of fact, and he was caught, and the police had him in jail there, and he had to be tried, so I had to sit as a Magistrate there, and I remanded the case to, because at that time I needed to go to Adelaide, and I had no transport up there because I went up by train to Finke and across other – that's another story – but anyway, I was in Coober Pedy and I needed to get back to Adelaide, and another policeman up there needed to get back to Adelaide because he was getting married, so what we did, we remanded this chappie for the Woomera Police Station, or prison there, so we could get a ride down with the police van or, you know, that little cage business there in the back of the truck, back of a utility, and we, so we get a ride down to Woomera, but of course when we got to Woomera we also had to get to Port Augusta, so the court case come again at Woomera and I had remanded him to go to Port Augusta [laughs], so we got another ride. [Laughs]

I don't know what happened to the chap but we eventually finished up at Edinburgh because the army, the British Army, were in a convey, came down from Port Augusta to Adelaide for some reason, I don't know, and so we got on to that convoy and we finished up at Edinburgh [airfield], and we couldn't get out of Edinburgh because we went in with the convoy, but we had no reason to be there [laughs]. Eventually we got out and he went down to the south of Adelaide and got married and I what's name. It's all part of life.

**OH:** **It sounds like it would have been a bit of an adventure being a JP at that time?**

OM: Oh yes, it was, it was good, I really enjoyed it, yeah.

**OH:** **And Oscar, I understand that you were a JP for a very long time?**

OM: Yeah, 40-odd years, 47 I think, 47 years. I had to give it up last year because of the loss of eyesight, and naturally when you sign papers you have to see that you're looking at the right person who is signing, and etc, and so the eyes are very important [laughs], and with the loss of that, so I had to resign, and got a nice letter back from Mr Rowe, the Attorney General thanking me for all those years, and a Certificate of Appreciation, etc. That's OK, that's part of life.

**OH:** **It reminds me of the kind of role that you had in Port Augusta as a young man helping out, you know, a lot of the Italians there.**

OM: Yeah, that's right, that's right, because I was an interpreter there and yeah, a similar role. They said this was more official in a way but yeah.

**OH:** **And one other thing I'd like to follow up is about the opal mining in Coober Pedy, and I don't think I asked you this most basic question, which is how did you become interested in opal mining?**

OM: Oh, only because of the money that we were making in the building game, in the building, and then we put it on to farm and then the farm was making money so we had to find another loophole for putting money into. That's why we, well we talked it over and said like if we could get the machine to do certain work that was done by hand, instead of by hand by your machine – we went to Proline Industries and spoke to Mr Proline himself and also his son, and we come up with ideas of different, a different machine to make a, from a posthole digger to make an opal mine digger, so we could make a shaft by mechanically rather than by hand, and from then on with lots of errors and mistakes, we eventually finished up with a machine that could do the job properly.

**OH:** **So you weren't interested in the beauty of opals?**

OM: Not really, I probably had never seen an opal before [laughs] before those days [laughs], and you get the advantage up there because when we started off quite early, there was no telephone in Coober Pedy, there was no, it was just a mining town, a good place to go because of the free, everybody was free to do what they liked, and quite a good place actually in the early years.

**OH:** **Are you talking about the 1960s?**

OM: Yep, yep, 1960 you could ... we lived in dugouts and yeah, we, yep.

**OH:** **So what you were doing was quite different in terms of the methods that you were using?**

OM: Well we did, as I say, with this machine, instead of doing a shaft by hand we got this machine eventually working properly and do it mechanically, which took a lot of time out and a lot of effort as well.

**OH: And danger, was it as dangerous?**

OM: Oh no, not really, no more than normal danger. You get dangers up there, people have been killed with the, with the, in different ways, but then eventually after the machine with Proline, because when, as an opal is found at Coober Pedy at least it's found in three different levels, and it goes from a level could be at 10ft, 20ft, 30ft, 60ft, so if it goes up to about 30ft-odd you would use, eventually we'd use the bulldozer to mine, but if it's lower than that, the level is lower than that, we would have to use the shaft and we used the Proline machine to do the shaft. So after a couple of years we bought a Komatsu bulldozer and did open-cut as well, which was good.

**OH: And once you ... did you get many opals?**

OM: Oh yes. Any taxation man around here [laughs]?

**OH: No, we won't go down ... But what did you do with them like, you know, once you had got some of the beautiful gems?**

OM: Yeah, we had, it was, when you bring it out of the ground it's fairly clean in form but it had to be also re-cleaned better, so the boys used to stop home from going to the mines at home and clean up the stones, and then it had to be classed. What I mean by classed is that a man who knows opals would say *Oh, this is worth \$1,000 ounce; this is worth \$500; this is worth \$200; that's worth \$1,100*, and etc, and then you got down to the chips and opal ... and etc, and so a parcel, you make a parcel. You usually made a parcel around about \$40,000-\$50,000.

**OH: And were you doing that up there or was the opal moved?**

OM: No, up there, no, yeah, up there, and the ... Yeah, so that ... Then opal buyers would come along and say *Well have you got an opal?* and you would say *Yes*. They'd have a look. This man who classed it also put a price on it. He would say *Alright, that parcel is worth* – we called it a parcel, number 1, number 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, up to about, with the chips it was about 8 little different qualities – and he would say *Right, that's worth about*, say for argument, *\$50,000*, and so an opal buyer comes along, he has a look at it, he says *I'll give you ...* You don't tell him what you want, you let him have a look first, *What will you pay?* and he might come near the price, he might be very low, so we say *No, we don't sell it less than \$50,000*, and so we'd haggle, sometimes it would be below ours, sometimes he comes up with his, and sometimes there's no business, but we eventually sold them.

We made it a point in our company that if a man classed an opal at \$40,000 or \$50,000 a parcel, we would not sell it for less, that's it. We had to get that money otherwise wait for another buyer to have a look at it, and it paid off for us because we sent some to ... and I also took some to Hong Kong and places

like that to sell, because the Chinese were the main, or big buyers for opal, Americans and Germany, but China, Hong Kong was a spot there, there were a lot of opal cutters and things like that very interested.

**OH:** **And going back to the Komatsu bulldozer, there's a story about that, isn't there?**

OM: Well, when we bought the Komatsu bulldozer, Mr Marshall, who is the representative of Komatsu here in Adelaide, he said that, he invited me to go to Expo 70 at Osaka in Japan, so I was the only one from Adelaide, but there was other, other boys from Melbourne and Sydney and other states, there was about 15 of us went over there.

**OH:** **And why were you asked?**

OM: Because we had bought this Komatsu from, a tractor from Komatsu, and the general thing would be to keep us happy and give us a reward for doing what we did, and also keep going because knowing that today you buy one machine, the next day you buy another machine, etc. Instead of buying a caterpillar, which is the other big company there, we kept to the Komatsu ones, and so it was a bit of a public relation situation. So we went to this Expo, which was very, very good, and we were away for two weeks and all expenses paid, and very nice.

**OH:** **And was that the first time you had been to Japan?**

OM: Yep, yeah. Yeah, that was 1970, 1970 I think it was, yeah.

**OH:** **And prior to that you had made a trip overseas?**

OM: Oh yeah, well actually in 1966, I had never been outside of Australia, but in 1966 I went to, with a number of boys interested in soccer, I think there was about 26 of us in the group from different states, we met in Sydney and we started from Sydney and went to London, because the World Soccer that year was in England, and so went off, but that was my first trip away, so I had a month in London, well not just London but around England, took an extra trip into Ireland, which was very nice, and then I had ten, on the way back I had ten days in Italy, and two days in Singapore, so that was our trip, an arranged trip like that which was very, very good, and that was the beginning of my taste for World Soccer, and also Olympic Games, and so I, I'll go back a little bit here.

When I sold out, when we sold out, and that's why I became a silent partner in the business rather than active partner, because I didn't want to be tied up to anything because I wanted time to travel, and I thought that if I invest my money in a way that money makes money by itself, I don't have to be there, it will make money just the same, whether I'm in England or in Buenos Aires or Montreal or whatever, my money was coming just the same and I was having a good time going to these places, so that's my reason for that, and it worked out pretty well.

**OH:** **And your first trip back to Italy after how many years?**

OM: Oh well, I came out in 1933, so that was the first trip there in 1966, those ten days that I had there. Unfortunately those ten days were spent mainly in Rome because there was a friend of the family from Australia here, Croydon, whose daughter got herself into difficulties over there, and I had to go to Rome and visit the – how can I call it, I suppose it's an asylum. She was classed as gone off her head a little. What happened, she had fallen in love with a man over there but his parents objected to it. Anyway one thing led to another, it looked as if she lost her marbles I might say.

**OH: Was she an Italo-Australian?**

OM: No, she was Australian and one of our cousins actually, of the father or mother, cousins of ours, so I had to go to Rome, and what I remember of Rome I did go to see the Vatican just briefly, but the only thing I would see of Rome was going to this asylum and back again, asylum and back, and the Australian Embassy, you know, working with the Australian Embassy to get her out of that situation. Eventually we got her out.

**OH: How difficult.**

OM: It was difficult but yeah, yeah, she came.

**OH: And did you have to accompany her home?**

OM: No, she had a friend, a girlfriend in London, that I had met whilst I was in London, through her, through knowing her, and what happened this was on account of me doing this job for, you know doing this work, and she was ready to come from London to pick her up, so when she was, this girl was allowed to leave Rome, this other girl came from London and picked her up and took her to London, so that's how she got back to London, and eventually got back to Adelaide. She was an opera singer, and she had been in Italy to learn to sing, and mm.

That was part of my days, those first few days in Italy were all, as I say [laughs], all tied up like that, but I met all my relations there that first few days, the first time I'd seen them, and my Uncle Oscar was still alive then and he had been out to Australia in 1956, he had come out with his eldest daughter, and I knew him but not any of the others.

**OH: Just talking about your Uncle Oscar, why had he come out in 1956?**

OM: Well he came out to visit, he had, my mother was his sister, Mrs Rossetto was another one, Carmela [Rossetto] was another sister, and then there was an uncle called Beniamino, Uncle Beniamino, so he came out to see his three, brother and sisters here, and he stopped her for about a couple of months I think, or something. He was a character. So we enjoyed his company for quite a while.

**OH: So am I right in thinking that your father also had a brother, Beniamino?**

OM: Yep.

**OH:** And he was the, he had been married to zia Maria?

OM: Correct.

**OH:** Right, OK.

OM: Yes, and that's why the daughter was called Beniamina you see, yeah, that's right, Beniamina.

**OH:** And when you returned to Bigolino for that first time in 1966, did you have any memories of it as a child?

OM: Oh yes, I remembered where we lived, mum and I, just down at the bottom of the, opposite the house of my Uncle Oscar, where at that time they had the sawmill there, and they were working there quite heavily there. Now it's completely different, they went down to Treviso now, they shifted all their working things down there, but yeah, I remember, I remember most of the little streets you might call it or [laughs], yeah, I remember quite well, yes.

**OH:** And what was it like meeting your relatives again?

OM: Oh, it wasn't again, I never met them before except for my uncle. All his children I had never seen them before because they were born after I left.

**OH:** Oh! So cousins?

OM: Yeah, my cousins.

**OH:** So what was it like then meeting family that you hadn't met?

OM: Oh, I guess we just took it in our stride I guess. They came to Milano to pick me up, and as usual I'm always the last one on the plane and always the last one to get off, and always ... and here's me strolling along there and they said *Oh, it must be him coming, no one else coming behind him* [laughs] because we'd never seen each other before and yeah, it was quite ... so yeah, they came from ... because I went from London to Milano to what's name, after the soccer matches there.

**OH:** And what sort of lives were they living, like we're talking about the mid-1960s, what was life like in the Veneto then?

OM: Oh, they were alright because they had this business, they were pretty busy, yeah, they've always been busy there with their ... I mean they'd been busy all the time, even I remember before coming away to Australia they were always busy, because it's a sawmill and timber is used everywhere, one top or the other, they made all different types of wood for carpenters or boat building, like the wood was sent down to Venice for boats and, you know, gondolas or whatever they made down there, yeah, they were pretty busy all the time, mm, and of course they imported a lot of wood from Yugoslavia or from the Eastern countries, so you'd get these big trucks coming in from different parts of Europe, yeah, it was quite exciting really.

**OH:** So after your first trip in 1966, you went to Japan in 1970, and what about other trips? Did Virginia join you on some of your trips?

OM: In the later ... When did we go to Montreal, '197...?

Christine Rebellato (CR): '76.

OM: In 1976 I went back to Italy, not Italy, to my first Olympic Games, it was in Munich. That was a time, the period, when they had this problem with the terrorists from, with the Israeli people, and I was at the Games, we used to go every morning around about 10 o'clock to the Games, and that particular morning I remember going in there, I mean everything had happened, all the world knew what was going on except us people who were at the Olympic Games, in the village itself, and it wasn't until 5 o'clock in the afternoon it came over the announcement that the Games were suspended because of such and such a thing, for the day, and we were there all day and we did not know that anything like that was happening.

We saw a lot of aeroplanes, we saw a lot of helicopters, and we saw a lot of people with guns and things like that, but we took that as part of security situations, and none of us knew that this was happening there, and yet the whole world outside, outside of that village, knew exactly what was going on, but us in there we didn't know until 5 o'clock that day [laughs].

**OH:** And do you think that that was on purpose?

OM: Oh, I think it was quite a good idea because it didn't make us panic or anything like that. I think they ... yeah, I think so, personally I think it was, I hadn't felt, I mean by the time we knew about it, it was all over really, so everything was, whatever happened, it was all controlled, whereas when we were there we just didn't know, so that was the strange part about it.

**OH:** Did you go to Italy again that year?

OM: Oh yes, yes, oh yes. I went from Italy to the Games, and back again to Italy, yes, yeah, yeah.

**OH:** And then Montreal in '76?

OM: '76, well that's when, that's the first time that Virginia came away, isn't it?

CR: I think so.

OM: Mum come away, that's the first time that Virginia came away with me in a trip overseas, and then she got to like it. Before she always said *Oh no, I'm better off home, I feel better at home, I don't want to go*, you know, but ...

CR: That was a family trip.

OM: Yeah, that was a ...

**OH:** **Oh, everyone went?**

OM: That was with Vicki and Helen, and Christine was already in America.

CR: Oh, England I met you, I met you in London.

OM: Oh, that's right.

CR: And then we went to Italy together.

OM: That's right. Christine was already in England and so at the Games, at the Montreal Games it was Virginia and I and Vicki and Helen, and oh, we visited Niagara Falls and all those places, Toronto Towers and, you know, all the little things that tourists do, and then we went, from there we went to London and met up with Christine, and then from London then we went to Italy and stopped there for a while.

**OH:** **And did Virginia have any relatives living in Italy?**

OM: Yes, they live in Caselle d'Altivole, and she has, I don't know, uncles and aunties, and quite a few people there. Yeah, we met them all.

**OH:** **But for Virginia it would have been different because she was born in Australia, wasn't she?**

OM: No.

**OH:** **Oh!**

CR: She was born in Italy.

**OH:** **Oh, OK, oh! So had she memories of her childhood?**

OM: No, not very much, because she was only young when she ...

CR: She was eight.

OM: Eight, when she came out from Italy. They came out the year after I did. I came out in 1933, they came out in ...

CR: '34 when you came out to ...

OM: I'm sorry, '34, not '35, yeah.

**OH:** **Oh, OK.**

CR: On the same ship.

OM: On the same boat, yeah, mm, and yeah, they came out a year after us, after me anyway, or mum and I, and that was a strange thing, you know, things happen. I mean life goes on and then you meet. I mean even that was a strange meeting because I already was engaged to a girl and then I finished up marrying



Virginia [laughs], and that was at Port Augusta more or less, but she ...

I think I probably told the story that I've always been a bit of a gambler, a bit of a no-hoper in many ways, and that's why she, this girl that I was engaged to, gave me away because of the fact that it looked as if I had no intentions of getting married, and no intention of saving money, no intentions of this, no intentions of that, so ... it was good though, and if you went on the day that I got married she went a Nun, she took her vows to go to the church. So I got married to Virginia and she got married to Our Lord, that's what happened.

*Laughter*

**OH:** **So you and Virginia were in Italy as children, not that far from each other really?**

OM: No, no, only about 16ks from each other, not knowing of course. I mean I didn't even know her here until I started working for my auntie and I was delivering, come back to delivering groceries down at Lockleys, and that's where they had their market garden, and that's how I met the family, and eventually Virginia, and went from there.

**OH:** **Mm, mm. So there were more trips overseas after the 1976 one?**

OM: We went in 1984, it was the golden anniversary of uncle, wasn't it?

CR: Yes, his 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. I can't remember the year.

OM: Yeah, something like that.

CR: I thought it was '85 when Julian was born.

OM: I can't remember the years. Yeah, we went over there for about two or three months or something, and yeah, and then on the way back uncle passed away, we were in Hong Kong. Actually from Hong Kong we took a trip into China, we were in China, and when we come back we got a telegram saying that uncle had passed away.

**OH:** **And was this Uncle Oscar?**

CR: Yes.

OM: Uncle Oscar, because, and he had come down to the airport to see us off and everything, he was quite, you know, we thought everything was right. It just happened suddenly like that, in a couple of days, and we, yeah.

**OH:** **And Oscar, you've also had other relatives who have come here to Australia to visit you and Virginia?**

OM: Yes.

CR: In '76 Olga, you brought Olga back didn't you?

OM: Yes, yeah, in '76, yeah, that was the trip after the Olympic Games wasn't it? We brought Olga back here.

**OH: And Olga is your cousin?**

OM: Our cousin, and she had a visa for three months, but then we extended the visa, went to see Mr Cameron who was a Member of Parliament then, and extended the visa, and she was here for about six months, and we done quite a few trips around Australia with her, and then she came out another time, didn't she?

CR: Yes.

OM: I can't remember what time. Oh, after her father died or something, something. I can't remember all these things but ...

**OH: I think you're doing really well with the memory part. What was it like for cousins like Olga to come and visit Australia?**

OM: Oh, it's an eye opener. In fact I think that in my opinion, I think every Italian in Italy should come to Australia for a while, and then when they go back they'll be different people, they'll be more, they'll be more people, more [laughs] more honest and more [laughs] ... I honestly believe that because in Italy, you know, it's been going on for many years now, 40 years, of this evading paying tax, and they do a lot on the black market, and so many things go on there that they, it's part of their hobby to cheat, to, to be smarter than the other, and unfortunately it's come to the stage where now they're banging out the door because they can't go on like that.

**OH: So you've had plenty of opportunities to observe life in Italy?**

OM: Oh yes. Well some of the friends that came out, not only just relatives but other friends came out here, one in particular, Alessio and his girlfriend came out. He'd had other girlfriends in the first ... anyway, a big story, but I remember sitting here and he was down on the phone there speaking to Italy, and *Oh*, he said, *another so many millions put in the bank*, coming from something that they do quite wrong, so he said *I can stay here for another six months, it wouldn't make any difference*. In fact he wanted to buy the house over the corner here. It sold the other day for about, they're asking \$1.3m for that house, and he wanted to buy a house, so what I'm referring to is that he was ringing up his agent in Italy, or his offsider over there, or whatever he was, or accountant or something, *Oh, I've got another so much money come in for this or that*, and it was all money that they were not paying tax, you know, and that's only one, and there's thousands, thousands of them doing it over there, which led to the fact that, at the moment, they find themselves in great difficulties.

**OH: Mm, mm. Well Oscar, I think that might be a good point at which to complete the interview today, your reflections on Italy and the economic situation, and I thank you again for your very good memories, and I look forward to the next interview.**

OM: Oh [laughs] thank you.

**End of recording**

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**Interview 7 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan**

**at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,**

**on 11 April 2012**

**Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend, are also present and contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Thank you, Oscar, for agreeing to this seventh interview.**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Uh huh.

**OH:** In the previous interview we talked quite a bit about various aspects of your life, like being a Justice of the Peace [JP], and travel, and opportunities for work, and I thought today we could focus on some other areas of your life – racing, horses and dogs, family and retirement, although there's a question mark about what we call *retirement*.

OM: Correct.

**OH:** So could we talk about your interest in racing horses and dogs? Which came first?

OM: The horses came first, yes, because when ... I think in a previous interview I said where I borrowed money to buy the business at that time and get married, and once I paid that back, and the promise that I had made to the lender that I would not gamble or play cards or any gamble whatsoever until I paid the money back, but as soon as I paid the money back an opportunity came along to go into a share with a racehorse, which I did straightaway.

**OH:** Oscar, what do you mean an opportunity came? Tell me about that.

OM: Well a friend of mine in the East End Market, because remember that I used to go to the market regularly every, oh, every second day really I must say, at the East End.

**OH:** To buy for the shop?

OM: For the shop, mm, and I got friendly with one of the boys there, and we started talking, and we decided to buy a racehorse. Of course Virginia didn't know about this point here, and we had him racing for a couple of times and the only way that she found out is that it was Adelaide Cup Day and he was in one of the races at very long odds, and I backed him to win, I backed him enough to win the Royal, that with the winnings I would have bought the Royal Oak Hotel in Hindley Street, but remember there was long, long odds on this race. Anyway, he ran second. I still collected over \$1,000, £1,000 those days, for running second, not prize money but betting money I'm talking about, and when I got home, because the races were run on a Wednesday I believe in those days, and I got home from the races and someone had gone into the shop and said *Oh, I see your horse ran second today*, told Virginia, but Virginia didn't know anything about racehorse, or didn't know about this particular horse anyway, and when I came home she naturally went mad at me, when I went into the shop actually, so I pulled out quite a big bundle of money that I had won that day, and I said *Look at this*, so she chucked them away on the floor [laughs], chucked them all on the floor [laughs] because she hated gambling. So that's how she found out that I had a racehorse, and that was the beginning of my racing career [laughs] you might say.

Christine Rebellato (CR): Which horse was that?

OM: 'Dunmanway'.

**OH: What was that?**

OM: 'Dunmanway'.

**OH: And what year would that have been?**

OM: Oh, I can't ...

**OH: About the 50s?**

OM: No, it would be later than that, or no, maybe not.

CR: You bought the shop in '49.

OM: Yeah, it could be '56 or '50-something or other.

**OH: And I'm interested when you talk about buying a horse with the partner, how well did you know this man, and how well did you know horses?**

OM: I didn't know anything about horses [laughs] but actually we didn't buy the horse, I made a mistake there, we leased the horse.

**OH: Oh!**

OM: And when you lease a horse every time it wins, or any money that he wins, a certain percentage is paid to the owner of the horse, so we leased it and every

time there was any money coming, whether they're running first, second or third, a part of it goes to the owner of the horse.

**OH: What's the advantage of leasing a horse rather than owning it?**

OM: Well, depending. Well the advantage is that you haven't got a big outlay in the first place, but if the horse is any good, on the contract you have the right to purchase the horse at a certain price, and it's up to you to use your right to do it, if you felt like it, but we got to know the owner as well and he was quite a nice chappie, elderly chap at that time, and we were happy for him to get a part of it. He was getting a thrill out of it, and we were getting our thrill. I wasn't, I mean I was a punter to a degree, but my partner he was an exceptional punter, very bad.

**OH: So he knew about the horses?**

OM: Well I don't know about knowing any more, but he put a lot of money on horses, in betting.

**OH: Was he a gardener?**

OM: No, he was a stall keeper up at the market – what do they call it?

CR: Merchant.

OM: Merchant, you know, fruit merchant, a fruit and vegetable merchant.

**OH: And was he an Italo-Australian?**

OM: No, he was a Chinese actually, so a good mixture.

**OH: And how long would you have kept that horse as a lessor?**

OM: Oh, about five years at least. Then afterwards I had other horses, you know. I bought one horse called 'All Dust' and I kept that for myself.

**OH: 'All Dust'?**

OM: 'All Dust'.

**OH: And why did you keep it for yourself?**

OM: Because with the partner I had a bit of a fallout. He rang up Friday night to the trainer to say to give the horse a run, meaning that you would give it a run but not to win. The horse, 'Dunmanway' was running at Gawler but he forgot to tell me about it. I go to the races and I take out doubles with my horse, it's going to run in the handicap, and three or four of those, first leg in the double came and they won, so I had 'Dunmanway' running for quite a few thousand dollars, pounds those days – I think pounds, I'm not sure – for practically a small outlay, and when I saw the trainer, went down to see the trainer before the race I said *Oh*, his name as Graham Heagney, and I told him to, you know, I showed him the ticket, I said *Look, Graham, the horse has got to win today*

*because it's ... Oh, he said, we're not racing to win today, he said, we're just giving him a run. I said Who said that? He said George, George Dowd, my partner, George rang last night, and give the horse a run, and I said No, I'll be damned, I said, I've got all these tickets now alive, with the second leg being 'Dunmanway', and he said You'd better go and talk to the jockey. The jockey was Pat Lennon, another famous name in the racing game, and he said Go in to ask the steward to see the jockey, then you can talk to him.*

So I did that, I went to the steward, I asked permission to talk to the jockey, because they were in the ring, and I told Pat, I said *Pat, you've got to win today, I've got all these tickets going for good.* He said *But we're supposed to have a run.* I said *No, no, we changed our mind, we can try to win.* Long story short, the horse won, he paid good money, I collected good money, but in the meantime my partner didn't even go to the races which were at Gawler, he was at the Producer's Club Hotel in Grenfell Street with his friend, and listening on the mantelpiece radio in the lounge of this hotel, and the race comes up and the horse wins. He was so cranked up, he picked up this mantelpiece radio and chucked it on the floor and broke it in pieces [laughs], because being a big punter and the horse came in, he paid 33/1 which is a lot of money, and he missed out on a huge payout, but it was his fault anyway. So from that I said *Well, if I ever get more interested in more horses I'll do it on myself rather than to have another partner.*

**OH:** **Oscar, why would your partner have said that he only wanted the horse to run rather than to win?**

OM: I don't know. Perhaps it was up at Gawler, he didn't feel like going up there, or something or other, I don't know what made him say that because, you know, I told him afterwards when we had a few words together, I said *Look, when you've got a partner you've got to be, both of us have to know exactly what goes on otherwise it doesn't work out,* so that's how we finished up our partnership, but yeah, that was it.

**OH:** **So when the horses were racing, did you always go to the actual race?**

OM: Yes, I did.

**OH:** **And where would they race?**

OM: Cheltenham or Morphettville, or Victoria Park, yes, that's the places.

**OH:** **And did you go and visit the horses in between, like did you see them at the stables?**

OM: Oh yes.

**OH:** **And where were they?**

OM: They were down at Morphettville, Graham Heagney's training stables were at Morphettville, so I used to go there practically every week and have a bit of a

yarn with him and his wife, and the stable boys and that, got to know them very well.

CR: And you had ‘Sharon First’ and ‘Challa Lad’ as well.

OM: Yeah, but they’re trotters.

CR: Oh, was it? OK.

OM: See these are racehorses.

CR: ‘Gwen Dillon’.

OM: Yeah. Then from racehorses in Croydon there was a butcher shop there, two brothers there, twins I think they were, Tom and Bill, and Tom was, he was involved with Messenger [Stan], Messenger was a trainer and driver at the trots, and he asked me one day *Would you like to be in with one of the horses that they had available?* and that was ‘Gwen Dillon’, the first one.

CR: Right.

OM: And I said yes, and that’s how I got into the trotting game. I must say that Messenger was a very smart cookie and not always straight, so ...

**OH: This was the butcher?**

OM: No, the trainer.

**OH: The trainer.**

OM: And a trainer/driver, which makes a great difference. So I didn’t sort of trust him completely what he told me or told us, because he was doing his own things rather than, doing things for himself rather than [laughs] than pleasing us so much. Well we had to take it because we’re not trainers and we’re not drivers, and so I remember one incident, I went down there and again ‘Gwen Dillon’ had drawn the outside of the barrier, and she was 33/1, and it was a charity meeting, the prize money was only £100 in those days for a charity meeting, and the horse won at 33/1, I won good money because I backed it anyway, but poor old Tom didn’t have a penny on it because Messenger that he can’t win from that barrier, etc, etc.

Anyway, it finished up winning and the prize money was £100, so on Sunday morning this Messenger goes to see Tom with the £100, he said *I was fined £10 during the race*, for something that he did, and also, sorry, no, £7/10/0 he had the fine, and he kept £90 for himself for driving a winner out of £100 which was, you know, ridiculous really, and so we had nothing to split between us two as far as prize money goes [laughs]. I mean I was alright, I won good money.

So the following night, the following Saturday night, ‘Gwen Dillon’ was racing again and drew barrier 1, which is the best barrier you can draw, and

Messenger said *We'll win tonight*, but I couldn't trust him. I remember I took Virginia and the girls down to the trots, and we were standing in the grandstand, or sitting in the grandstand, and I even refused to go to the betting ring to have a bet on it, never had a penny on the horse. It drew number 1, jumped out, never got headed, won the race quite easy, but I didn't have a penny on it because I couldn't trust him. I might be putting my money on and he's going to pull the horse up, I don't know [laughs]. So that's the racing game in a bit of a nutshell, but it's got its ups and downs, you get ... So we had, from there we got other horses, went in and it wasn't the first one but then there was 'Sharon's First', and I can't remember all of them.

CR: 'Challa Lad'.

OM: 'Challa Lad'.

CR: That was the early-70s.

OM: And that one I bought straight out, 'Challa Lad'.

**OH: And what gave you the intelligence to know that 'Challa Lad' would have been a good buy?**

OM: Oh, no intelligence at all [laughs], just a fluke [laughs]. And then I got into, it was 'Sharon First', and 'Challa Lad' was my own, but with 'Sharon First' I was with Mr Mitchell, he was the, Mr Mitchell, George Mitchell, was the Manager of the Challa Gardens Hotel on Torrens Road.

**OH: Oh, OK.**

OM: And he and I raced 'Sharon First' together, and a couple of other horses, I can't remember their names, 'Native' was one of them.

CR: Yes.

OM: A horse called 'Native', and 'Challa Lad' was my own. I remember the first race it raced at Globe Derby Park, and I backed it to win a trip to go to Italy, so I put enough money on it, it won, and I paid for my trip to go to Italy, that's all [laughs].

**OH: How do you mean that you backed it for that?**

OM: Well he cost, I can't remember the figure that it cost me for a ticket to go to Italy in those days, and a bit of spare money, and so I backed it to win say, say for argument £2,000, and I backed it to win £2,000, and it won, and I was happy, that was it [laughs].

**OH: So Oscar, did you have horses that were racing as well as the trotting horses at the same time?**

OM: Yes.

**OH: How did you kind of keep up with all of the things?**



OM: Oh, that's easy, it's no trouble. I mean [laughs] the only thing I was getting, I was getting a monthly account to pay [laughs], that was my biggest concern to pay the training fees and all the rest of the fees that go to keep a racehorse.

**OH: So talking about say 'Challa Lad', because you said that that was, you know, your own horse, did you make a decision about getting a trainer for that horse, or was it already in a training situation?**

OM: That was in training, that was with Webster, K Webster, one of the, a great trotting family. There were three brothers I think, and then also we had Holberton as a trainer, Alby. Yeah, I didn't have, personally I didn't have Messenger anymore as far as I'm concerned, because he wasn't quite up to the mark I mean about, about that, and then the other part, we started to, a friend of mine said *I've got a dog here that looks good, would you like to ...* I said *How much?* and anyway I can't remember how much I paid for the dog, and we called it 'Paglia', which of course in Italian, Paglia means straw, and that's about all it [laughs] ...

**OH: Is this a greyhound?**

OM: Greyhound, yes, and he won two races at Globe Derby, and then after winning the first race the price of the, you know, dogs go up when they win good, and I got offered good money for it but I ... Vicki was the one that really wanted the dog, and when this fellow offered that money and I was thinking about it, and she said *Oh no*, and she started to cry [laughs], so I didn't, I didn't sell it. He won another race and then after that he broke down. They break down easily dogs, legs, they go on them.

**OH: And what happens to them then?**

OM: Oh then they, you give them away to some people who likes dogs, or I don't know where they should be sending them. The same with horses, when they've had their racing career finished you give them to people who likes horses, and they like to keep them as hacks or, you know, little, yeah, on a farm or somewhere, people who like horses for value, mm, mainly for their children.

**OH: So you had obviously quite a few years where you were in the racing industry?**

OM: Yeah, I don't remember how long but then, you know, I was member of every club, like the Cheltenham, the Victoria Park, and the Morphetville. Morphetville of course has always been the leading club here, and in fact if you're a member of Morphetville, the SAJC [South Australian Jockey Club], you also become an Associate Member of Ascot in England at the same time, so if you happen to go to England you were welcomed there as a member of that particular time. I did it a couple of times when I went over there.

**OH: And what was that experience like?**

OM: Oh the experience was good because you go to an outfit, it dresses you up like a doll, you know, with a top hat and grey suit, tails, etc [laughs].

**OH:**           **Do you pay for all of that or do you hire it?**

OM:           Oh yes, you have to pay, it's a hire, it's only for the day. It's just a matter of going to Ascot and going to the Members' Enclosure. I remember the Queen was present at one time I went there, just one of those things that you do on the spur of the moment, and afterwards you think *What the hell did I spend all that money?*

*Laughter*

OM:           But it was an experience, yeah. I went to the races in England, and I also went to the dogs over there as well, yeah, so the ... It's a matter of the time you're youngish and you haven't got much brain, and that's how it is [laughs].

**OH:**           **But you must have enjoyed it?**

OM:           I did, otherwise I wouldn't have done it of course.

**OH:**           **So what was enjoyable about like all three of them?**

OM:           Well I think the excitement of seeing your horse coming down the straight and trying hard, you know, all that type of thing, yeah, it's quite good, quite, yeah. Well it gives you a kick, well you know, with some people they say you are mad, but you are mad when you're a punter anyway.

*Laughter*

**OH:**           **And was that what Virginia was worried about when she first knew?**

OM:           Oh, Virginia was worried. She never ever appreciated my gambling [laughs] because I wasn't very good either because I remember one day I had 'Dunmanway' running at Victoria Park, and across from Victoria Park there's the, what was the name of that hospital?

CR:           Queen Victoria Hospital.

OM:           The Queen Victoria Hospital, right, where Helen was born.

CR:           Yes.

OM:           Well Virginia was coming on Saturday, but of course it clashed with my going to the races on Saturday you see, so smart me, I get my brother-in-law, Romildo ['Nugget'] to go and pick up Virginia from the hospital, and I go to the races. Not very proud about it thinking, I didn't think very much in those days, but now and later years I thought it was the wrong thing to do, and of course I would never have been allowed to forget it either. Every now and again I get reminded how I preferred to go and pick up, to go the races than go and pick up my wife [laughs] with a child, but there you are, that was me. I didn't mean any harm, I didn't do it intentionally to hurt anybody in particular, but it's just that I didn't think there was anything wrong at that time. Now I do, but ...

**OH:** **At the time it was the excitement and the focus on the races?**

OM: Yeah.

**OH:** **But Virginia went to the races with you sometimes?**

OM: No, never to the races, I only took her there the once at Wayville when this horse won, and I didn't have a bet that I've spoken previously, and I took her that day, that night, with both Christine and Helen then, and yeah.

**OH:** **Mm, mm. There seems to me to be such a big difference between watching a beautiful horse, and maybe even a trotter, in comparison to a dog.**

OM: Well that's true because a dog in what, in 20, 30 seconds the race is over, a short race, and the longer race takes a bit longer but not much, probably a minute, and trotters of course, it's exciting in many ways because you go around the track three or four times, three or four laps, whereas a galloper you've only got say about a 5-furlong race, it's not, it's only a quarter of the local tracks there. It might be a long race, a mile and a half of it, then you get a full, a full round of it, but that's it, whereas the trotters you see three or four times coming around, a race horse you see only the once. You see the start over there and they finish here, so you only just see that little, and the same with dogs, dogs are very quick, the same. I think the most exciting is probably trotters as far as looking at them, because you can see them, although once they get themselves set they're always staying in the same position. It's only the last half a lap that there's movement and trying to get to the front.

**OH:** **Oh. So what made you finish up with horses, the trotters, and the dogs?**

OM: Oh nothing, I just got tired. It's one of those fads in life for me anyway, as I say I was a member of every club, and then all of a sudden I said *No, I'm tired of horses*, so I just gave everything away, didn't even go to the races anymore.

**OH:** **And did anything replace that kind of focus?**

OM: Not really. I was a more homely, homely man [laughs], perhaps that replaced that [laughs]. Maybe that made Virginia happier that way, I don't know.

CR: Well it was the mid-70s.

OM: Hey?

CR: You still had 'Challa Lad' in the mid-70s.

OM: Oh yes.

CR: So it was a long time, it would have been 20 years.

OM: Yeah, it was a 20-year span of all these things, and yeah, you know, you get, well I did anyway, yeah, you just get tired, not tired of it but your interest has gone, you've done this, you've done that, and everything is OK. If you happen to be lucky enough to get a really top class racehorse then perhaps you could,

but you know, they are so rare, like these days you get 'Black Caviar' and that's, you know, that's a rarity. How far he'll go I don't know but he's doing well so far.

**OH:** **Mm. And just an interesting question for me, in the, I suppose the social group who were racing horses or trots or dogs, is it a very Anglo-Australian kind of group of people, or is it diverse?**

OM: Yeah.

**OH:** **From your experience.**

OM: In my years, yes, there wasn't very many foreigners that owned horses or raced horses, in later years it changed, and the funny part about it, the people that went to the trotting meetings were different people to those who went to the race meetings. Very rarely you'd see top punters from the racing, from the horse racing, go to the trots, it was such a select sort of group for one, and a select group for the other. The dogs were a bit lower again, just anybody type of thing, but yeah, it was a ...

It's strange for me as a member of the clubs, because I used to go into the Members' Room, naturally with everybody, you've got your friends, but I found that some of the members say down there, the SAJC, whilst they want to know what you know about the horse, about the stable, because you not only bet on your horses but you bet on the stable of horses, when they're going and they're not, they want to know all the information about ... because I used to ring up Mr Heagney every Friday night and get all the information, not only about my horse but also the other horses, and so there was a lot of members that, when you go to the races, they like, they don't, maybe don't particularly like you, you might not be their same class or whatever, but they do like to know about what you know, so they'd be asking one another *Would you ask Oscar*, and so on, and say *Will you do this?* you know, [laughs], you know, things like that [laughs]. I used to love that [laughs].

**OH:** **And did you tell them what they wanted to hear?**

OM: Oh yes, I didn't pull any punches, but I felt, I felt that these people, whilst they were fairly, call them, you know, well known and respected in many ways, and all that type of thing, but they didn't want to lower themselves too much to talk to a commoner, let's say, but in a way they had their little group, *Oh, you ask him*. It doesn't come direct to me, they don't talk to me directly, but they go around the corner [laughs] and find out.

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

OM: That is, it is. That's in the racing game. In the trotting game it's a bit different, a bit. It's a social, social group upper echelon, middleclass; dogs further down, you know, three, three different branches of society there.

**OH:** When you first went to the South Australian Jockey Club, or to Morphettville, were you by yourself, like would you have gone in alone or were you with someone?

OM: Oh yeah, yes, yes I was alone, and then you meet up with some friends, or you eventually become friends with some of them, but they're not the upper part of the situation. Yeah, oh yeah, I didn't care about those things, you know, it didn't worry me at all. I done what I did and done it my way, and I didn't care a damn what they thought about it [laughs]. I've never been one of those to worry about, you know, Sir or Lady, or whatever, to me they're all the same.

**OH:** Yeah, it's interesting, kind of a social sort of grouping, as you've said.

OM: Well because not only was I friendly with a lot of people, but also those of the underworld type of thing, more or less, you know, those who are classed as pretty shifty, but I always talked to all of them.

**OH:** And were they at the races too?

OM: Oh yes, yes, and they, and they're the ones that gets a lot of information, because that's their game, their real game, and so the top boys want to know what did Jack say, or what did so and so say. Yeah, that's ... but they weren't game to be seen together with these boys, but they wanted their information, sure.

**OH:** You mean the Jockey Club members wouldn't have wanted to have been seen with the underworld?

OM: Yeah.

**OH:** And that's interesting, so we're talking about the '50s, '60s, '70s. Was there an underworld in Adelaide?

OM: Oh yes. When I say *underworld*, you know, not as perhaps big as Melbourne or Sydney or whatever, but they had their characters, yeah. I remember an incident at Cheltenham races and this particular figure after the last race he came up to me and gave me a ticket. He said *Oscar, would you collect this for me?* and I said *What is it?* He says *If I collect it*, because he owes money to different bookmakers around there, if he went and collected, the others would see and then they will be after the money – it was £4,000, the ticket was worth – and I said *Jack, what's happened, what's wrong?* Oh, he says, *if I go*, he said, *everybody is on my back to get money and I can't, I don't want to pay them out yet.* I said OK.

So he gave his ticket. I went and collected it, and I held that money at home for over a month until I rang him up and I said *Jack, come and get your money, you know, there's £4,000 here floating around*, and he said *Yeah, I'll probably need it next week anyway*, he said. So, you know, I'm trying to show there's a certain amount of trust between people, if you do the right thing, regardless of who they are. I mean I wouldn't trust him with £4,000, and yet he trusted me with £4,000 [laughs].

**OH:** How could you, I don't understand how he could have got away with not paying up.

OM: Well he would, he would have paid at the end.

**OH:** Would he?

OM: Eventually, oh yes, he would have paid it up, but he wasn't ready to pay up yet because he didn't have money or enough money to, to pay these people, yeah, but those people knew, they know what they do, they give them credit, and they know that they're not going to get their money straightaway. If he loses they've got their own little way of doing things, but if they see him collecting £4,000 from one bookmaker, you know, they'd be on his back [laughs].

**OH:** And would it have been strange for somebody like you to be picking up £4,000?

OM: For me, it was strange for me, but it didn't matter.

**OH:** Because I'm sure that people would be watched, wouldn't they?

OM: Oh yeah, up to a point, but I didn't feel any worry about it, it didn't worry me.

**OH:** Were police around in the racing kind of world, you know, if they were aware of the underworld being there?

OM: Oh yes, yes, there were policemen there. Well they were betting themselves, I think they wanted the information from these people, just as much as the other people wanted it [laughs], so it's a wishy-washy situation. You wash my hands and I'll wash yours type of thing [laughs].

**OH:** Yeah.

OM: It's not, oh yeah, there's a few stories about these things, but I've always been able to keep on the right side of these people as well in many ways, and they helped me out a couple of times in other things.

**OH:** Sorry, you were going to say something?

OM: No, well I mean one particular one, a very famous one here, he would – how can I put it – if I said *Jack, that man did this to me, fix him up*, he would do it, that's how he was.

**OH:** And what would *fixing him up* mean?

OM: Oh, I mean, you know, find a little 6ft chamber [laughs], but I mean I've never, of course I've never taken advantage of that situation, but that's how he was, and there was no hishy-hashy. He'd been involved in quite a bit at the West End there. If you look into the life of the West End, the Fimeri's and the Broadstock's, etc, you would find a lot of that going on.

**OH:** **How does it happen that a family, like say the Fimeri's or the Broadstock's, would get a name or a reputation in the underworld of Adelaide?**

OM: Well because of what they do.

**OH:** **But how does it start?**

OM: Oh, I don't know. It started before my time with the Fimeri's. Broadstock was a little bit older than I, but not much, but he was, yeah, he was good, he was good, very good to me, but it's just like those people are very good to you if they are your friends and, you know, you sort of don't do anything wrong to them – if anything you can help them sometimes – but they're a bad enemy if you're on the wrong side. That's all there is to it.

**OH:** **And would you have known both those families when you were growing up in Hindley Street?**

OM: Not when I was very young but after I came back from the War I did, yes, and during the War as well, yeah.

**OH:** **I'm just curious to know why would families like that then become associated with the world of racing and horses, and things like that?**

OM: Well, those people are associated with anything that's gamble, to playing Two Up and cards, Two Up and racing of course, it's part of the thing. And the Fimeri's, they had a betting shop in Hindley Street as well, legally but of course they done a lot of things illegally as well, and that betting shop was a bit of a front for them, but there you are. Oh, it's good, you know, good people, really good, you know, I can't say a thing wrong with them. I mean if you do something wrong, you can expect something wrong to come back to you from them, but if you mind your own business they will leave you alone. That's how it is.

**OH:** **Oh, interesting. And at this time, Oscar, you still had some interest in Coober Pedy, up until I think the early-80s?**

OM: Yes, well in 1977, that's when our gang finished off Coober Pedy, but the chappie that was working for me, Joe, up there, he still wanted to stay up there, so I bought a Proline Digger so he could go out prospecting, and if he found any traces, good traces, we would get another gang, as well call them up there, that has bulldozers and things like that, that would work that claim, and we would go a percentage, say 50/50 or 60/40 or whatever the case, work it out. Well he worked there for, I don't know, I can't remember now how many years, about three or four years after we finished.

**OH:** **Why had you decided to finish in 1977?**

OM: Well because I never worked up there, but I always had, you know, gangs there ready, and it was a decision because these boys were married, I mean their wives had a lot to say. When I say a lot to say, they had a say *Well how long*

*are you going to be away from home?* all this, so they made a pact to say *We'll go for another two years, and that's it, whether we strike it or not strike it, we finish*, and that's how it came about, but fortunately we did get something good out of it in those two years, and everybody had money, some went to Italy, some retired, some, all sorts of things happened, except for me with this particular chappie that was working for me.

I bought equipment for him to work, so he worked for, I can't remember, three or four years up there, and then after he retired down here, but I've still got a dugout up there that I had bought, and unfortunately because of my condition now I can't travel up there, but it's always been a soft spot for me up there, to go up there. In fact in my early years in Coober Pedy, when I was driving up, I was always happy, and when I was coming down I was always sad [laughs].

**OH: What do you think made it a soft spot for you?**

OM: Oh, it's such a beautiful life, it's a free ... In those early years you could trust everybody, there was no hanky-panky the way that it is now, and good friends, and a free life for everybody, yeah. It was very unique those days to find, let's say 2,000 people, 2,500 people, getting on well together, and all laughing, and yeah, very good, instead of down here it was like a rat race compared to up there, and I think the freedom and even whether you're working or not, you had a certain freedom up there that you couldn't get down here.

**OH: And what was the dugout, or what is the dugout like?**

OM: A dugout is, it's a hole, not underground, you get a hill and you face it, what they call face it, they take away the, to make at least a 10-12ft, take away the front part and leave a face of about 10-12ft high. Then you go into it and there you make your rooms. There's some beautiful dugouts up there that are homes, and you get, from the Mines Department, you register your, they give you so much land and you've got to build your house in that particular, house or rooms that you want, in that particular area, and then you've got the next one which goes to the next chap and the next chap, the next chap, like that, and the temperature is always the same, summer or winter. You've got ventilation because you've got your, you make it so that you've got ventilation, and it's very good living in, in a dugout, it doesn't matter what weather. Weather, I mean you know you get extreme hot up there, but you also get extreme colds, especially in the night, but the temperature in the dugout is the same.

**OH: What about plumbing?**

OM: Plumbing, oh well, you put your plumbing in there, yeah, especially in the later years where you've got the water from the Water Department there, and you connect up the plumbing like it is here. In the early years you didn't, you had to, you were rationed with a 44-gallon drum of water a fortnight, and you had to drink, bath, and whatever else, with that, that ration.

**OH: Gee! That's quite strict. Did you ever take any of your relatives from Italy up to Coober Pedy?**



OM: Oh yes, yes.

**OH: And what did they think?**

OM: Oh, very [laughs], they were all thrilled to bits about Coober Pedy. I think Coober Pedy grows into you really. You go there, you don't see very much because a lot of it is underground, but the longer you stay there the more it grows into you, and you get to appreciate the whole thing then, mm. There's, yeah, a few characters of all sorts of things around the place, and it has its, oh, you know, it's got this, they have the Coober Pedy races up there, they have meetings, and they've got a golf club even though you play on dirt, you know, they've got their little sports and all that, but mm, it's a unique town in the world, it's very hard to find another one like that.

**OH: Mm, mm. And Oscar, I understand that you'd been living at Croydon Park with the family for quite a few years?**

CR: Until 1980.

**OH: Until 1980, and you made a decision to move. Can you tell me about that decision?**

OM: Yes. Well actually because I wasn't too well in my lungs and etc, the doctor said it would be better if I shifted from that particular area or spot, by the sea or up in the hills, so Virginia and I looked around quite a bit and we nearly settled for the hills, we picked out a couple of blocks up there, nice place, can't think of the name of the, give a name to it, but it's a nice position, but because Virginia didn't drive, it was a bit awkward to push a bike to go to the shop, inconvenient, put it that way, to what we were used to, and so because she could not, she wasn't driving – if she was driving we would have built up there – whereas then we got to know about this block here, and so we built down here, and it was 1980 was it?

CR: Mm.

**OH: And were all the girls at home at that point?**

CR: Helen was married.

OM: Helen was married, yeah, and Vicki could have been home or could have been in Japan, I'm not sure if she was in Japan or she was in Warrnambool for a year, or something there through her work, and this house was finished for quite some time because I said, at the end, I didn't want to shift anymore, I wanted ... I put this house for sale actually.

**OH: Before you moved into it?**

OM: Before we moved into it. And then it was Christine who pushed the issue, she said, when was it, was it St Patrick's Day or something?

CR: I can't remember. I had been overseas and I came back in 1980, and you weren't going to move, but the house was ready.

OM: Yeah, it had been a ready a year here, and so she said *Well I'm going to move down there whether you want to move down there or not, I'm going to move down there*, she said [laughs], and so that pushed us into it, so that weekend or weekend after, I'm not sure what happened there, we quickly made the move.

CR: That was March.

**OH: And why, why had you not moved into the new house?**

OM: Oh, because I liked Croydon. I mean I was happy there. It's only my health really that was playing up a bit, so the doctor said *You should get down to the sea or up in the hills*.

CR: It was a main road and there were lots of fumes from the cars.

OM: The fumes on the main road was probably the biggest bugbear there, but I liked the area, I didn't mind, I didn't mind. I was never, you know, fussed about houses or even motor cars. I always had a nice car but they didn't, just like that, it didn't worry me, it didn't worry me at all.

**OH: And what was West Lakes Shore like at the time that you moved here?**

OM: Well here in this particular circuit here, I think there was about three or four blocks, empty blocks, all the rest were built, built up. It was fairly well advanced by the time we got down here really, the shopping centre, not as big as it is now, it was a smaller shopping centre, but then they built a lot more shops, another, I don't know, 70 or 80 shops.

CR: Well the original sales place was actually in the circuit.

**OH: Oh, for all of West ...?**

CR: Yes, and some of the display homes were in the circuit too, so this would have been one of the first areas, I think, from my recollection, to be developed.

OM: Yeah, something, yeah, well ...

CR: But across the road there was still sand hills, they hadn't built on those yet.

OM: Yeah, across the road there were sand hills between the sea ...

CR: Well had been sold.

OM: Between the beach and Military Road there was just sand hills. In fact I had an offer for me to buy two acres there at \$40,000 an acre at that time, and I should have, I could kick myself for that, but anyway that's, you know, it just gives you an idea as to what was going on. It was all just sand hills there, and yeah, this area here, but the other side wasn't developed much at all, it was all pretty ... but as time goes on everything builds up, builds up, builds up, and now you

can see how, you can see how big these blocks are where we're living, where it's quite common for the house to be knocked over and the block divided into two, to make two blocks, and it's been done next door. There's an empty block over there, just across the road from us there now, but only done last week, and they keep on doing that because the blocks in those days were so big. I mean we've got a huge block in this house here, but also we've got a big house.

**OH: So a lot of change?**

OM: A lot of changes, yeah.

**OH: Well Oscar, we're going to leave this interview at this point and we'll pick it up with the next one, so thank you very much for today's interview.**

OM: Oh, OK, thank you.

**End of interview**

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**Interview 8 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan**

**at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,**

**on 2 May 2012**

**Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend  
contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Thank you, Oscar, for agreeing to another interview. At the end of the last interview we started talking about your move to West Lakes, and I thought that we might pick that up again, and I'd like to ask you a few questions about your house. I understand that you and Virginia designed the house?**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): That's right. We designed the house with help of other people, and we built it as well.

**OH: How do you mean you built it?**

OM: Oh, we got the different tradesmen, like brickies put the foundation down, brickies and plasterers, and all that type of thing, so it wasn't done through an

agent or a builder, because remember that I was a builder, involved in the building company, I was never a builder but involved in making plans for homes and building homes, building home units. I think I might have referred to it in earlier discussion, where our company was the first company to build home units in South Australia, and in fact the *Sunday Mail* put a big page about it, and said that perhaps we were too early to start building home units in South Australia, but it turned out that that was wrong. They took off pretty well and everything went well, but I was involved in the building company, and I knew enough to build this house and make the plans, not that I drew the plans, I took them to friends of ours who done plans for us all the time. In fact later he became the Mayor of Woodville for many years.

**OH: What was his name?**

OM: I'm trying to think of his name. I'll think of it in a second, Dyer was his name, Dyer, he was the Mayor of Woodville for many years, and a friend of mine at all times, so they had their office in Woodville Road, Woodville. Anyway, he drew the plans.

**OH: So he was an architect or a draftsman?**

OM: That's right, he was a draftsman – he might have been an architect too, I'm not quite sure – but we never employed architects in our buildings, it's straightforward from plan to a builder, ordinary builder not an architect.

CR: Was that John Dyer?

OM: John Dyer, that's it, that's his name, and he come to see me often here afterwards. He was still Mayor but he was very, a very nice man.

**OH: And what did you want this house to be at that time?**

OM: Oh, just our home, but it was ready to come in and I just didn't feel like moving from West Croydon, or Croydon, and it wasn't until my eldest daughter, Christine, she came home I think from a trip overseas or something and she said *I'm going to move down to the house*. The house was here empty for about, oh, eight, nine months or more, perhaps a year and, you know, [laughs] I couldn't make up my mind to come down.

**OH: Did you come down and have a look at it in that time?**

OM: Oh yeah, yeah, oh yes, of course. It was all locked up and we came down, probably came down every week, but anyway [laughs] eventually my hand was forced by Christine deciding to – I remember the words she said – *If you don't go there, if we don't go there, I'll go there myself*, and that's about the way, I think that's how it was, that's how I remember it.

**OH: And can you tell me how different this house at West Lakes Shore is from the house that you were in as a family in Croydon?**

- OM: Well I don't know if I took much interest in it, or worried about that type of thing because to me a house was a house, and it wasn't ... I had to shift from Croydon because of my health, and either go to the hills or come by the sea, and we chose to come down here because Virginia could not drive a car, and up the hills you needed a car to drive wherever – here it was more convenient for her – and so we decided to build here, and that's about it as far as the house goes. I mean there was nothing about, nothing wrong with Croydon, or here was nothing better than Croydon, I just liked Croydon, but then, as I say, we eventually made the, took the step and came down here. That was 1980.
- CR: 1980.
- OM: 1980.
- CR: I was away in '79.
- OH: And West Lakes was already fairly established by that time?**
- OM: Oh, fairly well established, yes. It had the shopping centre over there, not as big as it is now. Now it's about three times as much as those days.
- CR: It has expanded, mm.
- OM: Yeah, they've made so many shops and so much of everything that were there, but everything was here, you know, all the conveniences were available there, and no, once we done the, once we took the step to come down here, we were quite happy to be down here, there was no trouble at all, but we kept that house empty up there for at least a year after. Eventually we sold it to the church because they wanted it for some reason there.
- CR: A Bailly House, it's called a Bailly House.
- OM: Bailly House, yep.
- CR: That often gets through ... the St Vincent de Paul Society runs it.
- OM: Yeah, it was for, you know, people that they are without a home and they put them in there, and it's still used today like that, is it?
- CR: I'm not sure.
- OH: And when you moved here, Oscar, how did it change the sorts of activities that you were involved with?**
- OM: Oh, it didn't change at all. I was still the same person, the same whatever I was doing then, I'm not sure what I was doing but I would have carried on the same way. I'm trying to say that it made no difference whether I was in Croydon or whether I was down at West Lakes, it made no difference to me as far as my life or ... no, it just carried on as if I was there. It's just though I probably got used to living in Croydon and had many friends there, and had many years in the shop, and knew a lot of people. In fact when I was going

shopping at the shopping centre over here, I used to meet quite a few of those people again, because a lot of them, not a lot of them but quite a few, shifted down this way as well, people and old customers, and have a bit of a yarn, and that's it.

**OH:** **And I was thinking that you had been at Croydon for really 30, more than 30 years?**

OM: Well I went there in 1949 until 1980, so '49, that's what, 30-odd years you know, 31 years.

**OH:** **Yeah! I can understand that you would have felt very identified with that area.**

OM: Yes, yes, yep.

**OH:** **Tell me about how you and Virginia made your home a place of hospitality for relatives and people from Italy, and from other places.**

OM: Well because I love to travel, that was one of the reasons why I did what I did in my life, is because my first preference was to travel, especially going to Italy because I was born there, and seeing all my relations there and all that, and over there especially with a family, Buffon family, that was home from home there. There was a motor car, there was sleep and, you know, everything, it was home from home. And I made my house here the same for them when they come over here to visit us. Olga came out twice I think.

CR: She came out in '76 the first time.

OM: The first time in '76, and then she came ...

CR: She went to Croydon then.

OM: That's right, and then came here in whatever year, I can't remember.

CR: I can't remember the year.

OM: But she was here and then I remember going to Mr Cameron, who was a Member of Parliament, and lived in West Lakes here, just down the road, I remember taking Olga there for him to help me to keep Olga here for another six months, to give her an extension of the visa, which we got, and she was very happy about that.

**OH:** **And Olga is your first cousin?**

OM: That's right, in Italy, yes. So she came out twice and then her brother, Giovanni, came out. Her other brother, Arrigo, came out, and then friends, and then also her sister, Emma, with her husband, came out a couple of times I think. So we travelled extensively here in Australia with them, but headquarters was always at home here, so everybody was welcome to stay, and not only relatives but friends of the relatives that we come to know, and we're

still in contact with them now. So I'm sure that if any of them come over, that's where they're going to go, they're going to come here.

So they would say *Oh, we wish we could make it*, you know, because they're not getting any younger themselves I guess, but yeah, so not only the relatives I had but then this house became very popular from my daughters', like Helen living in Whyalla, and she has three children, and when they come down naturally it's always here, and Geoff and Helen, that's the husband, and the children, will be here. Now they're grown up they're all over the place, at the moment they're at Darwin, two girls, and when they come down this is the place they come to, so it's a home from home for everybody, not only for them but also for Vicki, which is up at, Vicki is up in Darwin, so it's headquarters for the whole family.

**OH:** **And you had two of your granddaughters living here while they were studying at university?**

OM: That's correct.

**OH:** **And what was that like having the younger generation living here?**

OM: Oh, it didn't make any difference to me. I suppose it's been my attitude in life, *che sera sera* [what will be, will be], and that's stayed. When you have that attitude, not because I did it, but because it really works. It works because *che sera sera*, because you know young kids, they can stay out late at night, or come home, you know, at different hours to what you're used to, but that didn't worry me because I said *che sera sera*, so that didn't worry me at all, and I'm saying that attitude sort of stands for a lot of things in life, so you have a better, you have an understanding, and also finish up you're much happier by being quite casual about it.

**OH:** **I think that's a really interesting idea to explore a bit. I was going to do it later but let's talk about it now. I remember it was in one of the first interviews, and you talked about your experience in the Allied Works Council in Port Augusta, and I think that was the first time in the interview that you spoke about that *che sera sera*.**

OM: That's right, I was in Port Augusta, sent up there through the Allied Works Council, working in the Commonwealth Railways, and I remember making an application to go to Adelaide from Port Augusta, for three or four days, and a telegram came back from headquarters of the Allied Works Council that *We can make you work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, permission not granted*, and so that moment gave me an understanding, and also the other part is that although I was sent to Port Augusta, you wasn't sure to stay there because Port Augusta was OK, you had the run of the town, you lived in, you know, in a built-up area, etc, there was shops and dance or pictures, etc, but the worse part about from Port Augusta there, they used to send our boys, the Allied Works Council boys, on the line, working on the railway line as fettlers, and that meant in most places, living in a tent, and maybe 300 miles from Port Augusta, maybe 200, but every 20 miles there was a camp, so they looked after those.

There was about 8 or 10 people in a little group of tents there, and they looked after the railway line, and that went from Port Augusta to Alice Springs, and Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie, and that's a long, long stretch there, both ways, and lots of people were working there, and of course the other part there, at the whim of someone in the office at the Commonwealth Railways, you could be here today in Port Augusta quite, when I say happy, generally sort of happy, but then you can get an order for you to pack your bag, in two or three hours you've got to be on the particular train to go up there to camp 720 miles up, or 650, or whatever the case may be, and so it means that you were there always with a thought that you're not permanent in anything, and so I made up me mind *che sera sera*, whatever happens will be, and I'm not going to worry about it, and so between the telegram coming back from headquarters of Adelaide from the Allied Works Council, and the attitude that was at that time, at all time, that you could be sent up, up the line at any time, made me realise that it's not much good worrying about it, and just so my attitude changed completely.

Nothing ever changed, nothing ever worried me after. If they did send me to the line it wouldn't be a surprise, I'll accept it, and that was it, and so by having that attitude for the years that I was there, that became my attitude right through life when things, you know. When I came down to Adelaide to help auntie out, that was another point that I never expected to do, but then the chance of buying a shop in Croydon, and then getting two different – call it the work or call it business – in the building or selling houses, then the farming down the South East, in Coober Pedy on the opal – what other facets that I've done that I can't even remember some [laughs].

**OH:**           **The horseracing.**

OM:            Oh well [laughs].

**OH:**           **Or is that a different category?**

OM:            No, well *che sera sera* again, you know, *OK, let's try it out*. So I was always going to try something that I could see that might be OK for me, but one thing about it, I was in the shop for ten years, after ten years we sold the shop, and I had to decide then whether I'm going to work in an office for the rest of my life, or invest and fiddle around with different things, so that I'd be free to travel, because my thoughts, I always wanted to travel, and so in 1966, my first trip away, was to England to the World Soccer game over there, for a month in London, and that was my first trip away, and I've had quite a few trips, both for the soccer, World Soccer, or the Olympic Games, so by investing money the way I did, or investing in, like in the building company.

I was what you might call a silent partner, although I took, you know, a fair bit of action in it, and the same with Coober Pedy, I was never a miner but I always used to go up there to do the right thing about picking up the opal, bring it down, sell it to Hong Kong, or go to Hong Kong and sell it, or the development of a farm on the block of land down the South East, different



ways of doing things to make money, etc, but it always left me time to travel whenever I wanted to, and that was my main purpose of it, which turned out to be correct.

**OH: Mm, mm.**

OM: In my opinion anyway, it might not be to everybody but [laughs] it was.

**OH: You certainly had lots of opportunities for adventure [laughs].**

OM: Well there is, there is a lot of opportunity, it's only a matter of, you know, grabbing it when it's there.

**OH: You were talking about the attitude about *che sera sera*. Do you think there's also something else about confidence?**

OM: Confidence? I guess I never thought of it that way. I don't think it came into my mind about ... I was always, I was never afraid of anything, whether that's turns you to confidence I'm not sure. I don't think I was over confident of everything or anything, but I know, I know what I wanted to do and I went ahead.

**OH: Yeah. I think that's what I was meaning by confidence.**

OM: Yeah, because I mean not everything turned out OK. I was involved in a, in making material, like curtain material or ...

**OH: That's right, you spoke about that in another interview.**

OM: That's right, and so, and lost a lot of money there, but at the same time, you know, it didn't deter me from trying something else later. It's *che sera sera*, just sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, and that's the game, and that's, I guess I got to that stage where it got to this stage of thinking the same way all the time, and if it goes, it goes, if it doesn't go, it doesn't [laughs] go.

**OH: And the confidence that there will be something else?**

OM: Well yeah, well I don't think that I ever lost confidence to do anything, or try anything. As I said before, you don't always succeed, but it didn't deter me from going to try anything else that come along.

**OH: Yeah. And the descriptions that you have given about the different activities and initiatives you've taken in your life, certainly exemplify the fact that you were ready to do the next thing.**

OM: That's right, I didn't find anything that I, you know, I didn't find anything I reckon I would, that I didn't think I could do, but I wasn't sure of course. I mean, as I said before, you don't win everything, and I suppose it's the same in horseracing. You're going to the races, you don't know whether you're going to win or lose anyway [laughs].

**OH: But if you don't have a go, you don't know.**

- OM: That's right.
- OH: We were talking about your home being that centre, and as you called it *headquarters*, of, you know, families both here in Australia and overseas, and I understand that Vicki was an exchange student in Japan, and that led to another kind of hospitality here?**
- OM: Oh yes, we had these – because Vicki was involved in Rotary and she was a year I think ...
- CR: A Rotary Exchange Student.
- OM: Rotary Exchange Student, yep, and so she went to Japan for a year, but then again, you know, when they take your daughter, Rotary takes your daughter, looks after your daughter, you also help back by opening your house to Rotary students from Japan or wherever they come from, and so we've had several Japanese students here staying with us for whatever period, three months, six months, whatever it is, and then of course Vicki met a lot of families over in Japan, and they also came over here and stayed with us, and especially one of her teachers, Mr Kaneko, and he still writes Christmas cards.
- OH: Oh!**
- OM: So it's quite an open house really that way, mm.
- OH: And could the Japanese visitors speak English?**
- OM: Not some of them, no, but broken, few words, oh it was quite, we got on alright. I guess you, I guess you understand a foreigner, you help and try, and yeah, you can, yeah.
- OH: To talk a little bit more about your family, I was going to ask you about coming here in 1980, and I understand that Virginia died in 1991.**
- OM: Correct.
- OH: And she was ill for some years before she died?**
- OM: About three years, yeah. She had a strange, it's still a mystery now to what she died of because [pause]
- CR: Well the autopsy showed Multiple Sclerosis.
- OM: That's it.
- CR: That was undiagnosed for about three years.
- OM: But it, yeah, but then again the very first operation that she had, we were called in to see Doctor, I can't remember the name of the chap up in North Adelaide, he told us that she had cancer.
- CR: But it wasn't.

- OM: Yeah, but we all went in there, but it wasn't so, it was just this other type of illness. In fact there was only two in the whole world, was it, with the same, with the same type of thing.
- CR: There were a couple of things. Mum had Sclerosing Cholangitis.
- OM: X.
- CR: X. No, that's Histiocytosis X. I'm not sure exactly what all the things are now because part of that is blocked out of my mind, but there were multiple things going wrong at the same time as having this Multiple Sclerosis, which was all undiagnosed, so that's what threw the doctors off because there were different symptoms.
- OM: Well she was, yeah, she was quite a long time, different times in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. They were great, they were very, very, very, very good, but we elected to keep her home and not put her in a home, and we had palliative care. The doctor used to come here, nurses, and oh, it's incredible what they done, yeah, it was still a mystery until the very end what was going on.
- OH: It must have been very difficult?**
- OM: Because whatever was happening to her body, whatever part of her body this particular illness attacked, she would lose all her movement and her strength, and she couldn't pick up anything, she couldn't, she had to be, you know, shifted with, we had set up in the room there with different help to put her into bed, out of bed. If she wanted to shift an arm, you'd have to shift her arm for her, she couldn't shift it, everything went. Whatever part of her body this thing attacked became numb.
- CR: That was the MS.
- OH: Mm.**
- CR: So we moved mum's bedroom into the, converted the dining room into the bedroom so everything was downstairs. We had ramps for the wheelchair, to take mum down to the bathroom area, and mum was mentally very well, it's just she started to lose control of different parts of her body, bit by bit.
- OH: Mm.**
- OM: Yeah, like her arm, she couldn't, towards the end she couldn't eat properly because she had to ...
- CR: It could be swelling.
- OM: We had to make little food for her, everything, everything went, and so it was, yeah, and that's the period that I never washed the plates or never cooked, or never done anything in my life, but in that ...
- CR: Up to then.

- OM: ... but in that period of time with her being, the time that she was home here, not being in hospital, she would teach me how to wash, even use the washing machine and, you know, little things that I suppose we should learn when we first married or something, I'm not sure [laughs].
- OH: But in your generation the men wouldn't have done this very much.**
- OM: No, no. And cook, I wouldn't know what to cook, I wouldn't know how to boil an egg.
- OH: So you became a cook?**
- OM: No, I became a ... I even made *baccala* [stock fish] which is ...
- CR: Mum died in the January and the previous Christmas she decided that she wanted to have everything, so we had a lot of traditional dishes, and one of them was *baccala*, so I had dad's, mum gave the instructions and I have a little cookbook where dad took all the notes, how to make broth, how to make *baccala*, how to make *minestrone*, and a lot of other traditional food.
- OH: Oh! Do you remember how to make *baccala*?**
- OM: Yes, I still remember now.
- OH: Can you tell the steps?**
- OM: Oh, I don't know. It's pretty easy really [laughs] but my daughter, Christine, she makes *baccala* once a year, every year.
- CR: Following your recipe, mum's recipe.
- OM: Following my recipe, because there are different recipes around of course.
- OH: It's a fish, isn't it?**
- OM: It's a stock fish, yeah. *Baccala*, well what we mean by *baccala* is the dry one which is stock fish, because *baccala*, especially in Southern Italy they call *baccala* the lean fish which is salted fish, salted slabs of fish.
- OH: Is it very large?**
- OM: No, this is what we call *baccala* or stock fish, it's a dry fish, it's just a fish without a head, been gutted and dried. They hang it out in Norway, I think it's spread there, it's made, and they hang it out on like clothes lines, you know, type of thing, to dry, and that's how you get it, that's how she would buy it. So you have to put it into water for three or four days to get it nice and soft to a degree, and all the rest of it, and it was very interesting.
- OH: And do you bake it, do you bake it in the oven after this process?**
- OM: No, no.

**OH: How do you cook it after the soaking?**

OM: What do you call it in stew?

CR: It's like a stew.

OM: It's like a stew, yeah.

CR: It's cooked on the stove.

OM: Yeah, cooked on the stove in a big pot, and you use milk, a lot of milk and ...

CR: Our recipe has the onions, celery, the *baccala*, a little bit of tomato, and then cooked for a long time in milk, and right at the end we put some cream in it, and it has spices as well.

**OH: And what spices?**

CR: Well mum's recipe has pepper and cinnamon, and the herbs, we put parsley in it. Recipes are different but that's mum's recipe.

OM: No, it's quite, quite good, yeah.

**OH: And with the milk, it's interesting that it's got milk. Has it got tomato as well?**

CR: Only a little bit of tomato paste.

OM: Very, tomato paste, just a little bit of tomato paste and a few anchovies as well.

CR: And there's anchovies.

OM: And yeah, the main, the trick, not the trick, but it's got to be cooked in milk, you can't cook it in water and then add the gear, milk is the main thing for it to come out to a nice ...

CR: It's very rich.

OM: It's very rich and then very tasty.

CR: It makes a sauce so that you can have it with the polenta.

**OH: Oh, I was going to ask what you had it with.**

OM: Yeah.

**OH: And is it with wet polenta, wet polenta or polenta that you cook in the oven?**

OM: No, no, polenta, wet polenta, or you know the one that you mix up.

**OH: Oh, on the stove?**

OM: On the stove. Well I suppose even the one in the oven has got to be made by that method first, before you put it into the stove, but I know you can buy now pieces of polenta already made, and then you toast it or you whatever, but that's not the one that we're talking about, we're talking about the one that's homemade. It takes a bit of time mixing and etc.

**OH: And the consistency is quite runny?**

OM: Well not, yes, yes and no, half and half I think. When you pour it out it sort of runs a bit out but not too much, not running to run off a plate or anything like that, it's just, it's very soft like a porridge or something like that.

**OH: Do you know if for your family, like your parents or say for Virginia's family, was *baccala* a special dish in those families?**

OM: Yes, yep, yep, a special dish on a special occasion because it's pretty, well it's not, it's fairly expensive *baccala*, but I don't think that, some families will think twice before having it because it costs a fair bit of money, not sure.

**OH: And the occasion, would it be for a particular season?**

OM: Yeah, well it's *Pasqua* [Easter].

CR: Usually Easter.

OM: Easter.

CR: But mum wanted it for Christmas.

OM: [laughs] Yeah, that was a bit different but Easter is the time for *baccala*.

**OH: And you became a proficient cook then?**

OM: I don't know about proficient, but you had to do [laughs].

**OH: And did you enjoy it?**

OM: Yes, yeah.

CR: It was a, it was a hard time but it was a good time, wasn't it?

OM: I think I learned a lot in those three years. I always say that I grew up in those three years. I was only a kid before [laughs] but in three years of looking after Virginia and doing things that I'd never ever done before, and learning how to do all, you know, washing, washing floors, washing clothes, washing this, and doing ... I think the only thing I didn't do was sewing I think [laughs].

CR: Dad was chief carer/coordinator, because there were lots of people coming in, and we all had our set times during the week. We had domiciliary care, we had the nurses, we had the palliative care doctor.

OM: Yeah, because she had to be looked after day and night, 24 hours a day.

- CR: So we all took it in turns.
- OM: So we all took it in turn, and yeah, it was ...
- CR: Washing had to be done on a certain day, the ironing had to be on a certain day, you couldn't, it was a set routine, you just couldn't, it wouldn't work if we didn't keep to it. It was a hard time, but it was a good time.
- OM: Mm.
- OH: Mm. It sounds like it was very much a team effort with you at the head of ...**
- OM: It was, yeah, the girls, everybody helped a lot, yeah, the girls helped a lot and everybody pulled their weight and we helped one another, because as I say it was a 24-hour, 24-hour time, and we even had a nurse coming in so many hours a night.
- CR: That was towards the end, just to give everyone a bit of respite.
- OM: Yeah, yeah, so.
- OH: Wow! And to continue the focus on your family, can you tell me about the three girls and what they're doing, and their families, at the moment?**
- OM: Mm, well we'll start off with Christine, she's the eldest, she's near retiring as far as work is concerned. I'm not sure whether she's, she's taking this year off anyway and see what happens at the end of the year. She's been a school teacher all her life, and got some degrees in the front of her name, or back of her name, I'm not sure where they go [laughs]. She's been a very good and efficient teacher right through, and she married Peter, and they have three children, Julian, is the eldest at 27, and he is a teacher also in Millicent at the moment, teaching in Millicent, who will be getting married in September this year to another teacher called Tina, which lives down there, down in Millicent, and also teaches in the same school.
- Then there's Alice, she's 25, and she's an Occupational Therapist, so her job now is occupational therapist, and she's a nice kid. I don't know, has she got a boyfriend?
- CR: Oh, she has but it's ...
- OM: Anyway, she's got a, I think she's got a boyfriend or something like that. Then we've got the young one called Louisa, and she's 17, and she's doing her last year at St Dominic's, North Adelaide, and that's where she'll be going to university next year. She's a bright kid and she's a lovely kid, not because she's a granddaughter, but it's difficult to find a girl like her focused on work all the time. She works, she has one eye on TV sometimes, but not very often, but mainly she does art, she does all her clothes, she does painting, she does, you say, whatever she takes on she really loves it, and yeah, and they live in the same street as I do here now, so Christine is very, well she's organised all

of my life now because that's how it is, how I got to this stage, so I'm very grateful there.

Then we have Helen, and Helen is married to Geoff Mills, who is a farmer – still is a farmer in a way but he's a great worker – but he works also with the steel company up at Whyalla, and he's the Head of the Environmental Department there, but he looks after his farm as well. It's more like a hobby farm now than before because since he's taken this job on, he can't do both very well. He does both very well indeed but he wouldn't be able to do it as full farming if he had the full, the farm going at full go, and Helen is ...

CR: He's also Chairman of the Pastoral Board.

OM: Oh yes, he's also Chairman of the Pastoral Board, and his boss is the Agriculture Minister here in Adelaide, and yeah, he's, well he gets on very well and he does a lot of work, and he's very good, and Helen is a Dental Therapist, she's been like that ever since she left school, you might say, yeah, and also researcher for something or other in the university [UniSA] up at Whyalla, so she's pretty busy, and she comes down as often as she ...

CR: Working in the area of Aboriginal health.

OM: Yeah, that's the main area that she works in, and she comes down as often as she can, down to stay two or three, two or three days with me here, and give Christine a bit of a break, and so does Geoff come down, the same as Peter, Peter's Christine's husband, they both help me in the garden here and look after a couple of things on tidying things up and looking after generally like that.

And then there's Vicki, she's the youngest, and she's, she's up in Darwin, and she started her career, she started off as a Speech Pathologist, and she was in there for about ten years.

CR: Yeah, a long time.

OM: And perhaps more. Anyway, she finished up, up in Darwin. First of all she was in Gove, which is Nhulunbuy in the, what's that land, Aboriginal land?

CR: Arnhem Land.

OM: Arnhem Land. She was there for about eight years I think, and working mainly with Aborigines and that.

CR: Well she was also in Sydney, and then in London, and then she went to Arnhem Land.

OM: Oh yes. Well she's been away, like she had studied in London in that big ...

CR: I can't remember the name it was.



OM: What's the name of that place there? It's to do with speech pathologists, and I remember I went to visit her in London one year and she was working in this place, and there was a girl there, 25-year-old girl, she was a famous violinist in the London Symphony Orchestra, whatever, and she was involved in an accident, and she wasn't able to play or talk or anything, but it came over that when Vicki went to this place in London, I don't know, somehow this girl got attracted to Vicki in a way, in a way that she responded to Vicki trying to help her, make her talk or, you know, because they had to pronounce the words again, or teach them how to pronounce words, etc, and there was a what's name in the ABC where this girl responded to Vicki.

She didn't respond to anyone else, but to Vicki she did, and there was a bit of a story about her over there, and she was in this place for about a year, and then she went also to Italy, but this is all to do with speech pathology, but they kept writing to her when she left this place in London, they kept on writing to her that they wanted her back all the time because she had done pretty well. That's good. Anyway, she come back home here, went up to Nhulunbuy with her Aborigines mainly, and from there she studied further. She came back to Adelaide for a couple of years and ...

CR: Four years.

OM: Four years.

CR: To do the postgraduate Medicine, postgraduate Medicine at Flinders, it's a 4-year degree.

OM: At Flinders, and eventually she became a doctor, and she's a doctor now up in Darwin, and she's working at the Darwin Hospital, different areas there, and she's married to Alistair, Alistair Cross, he's a boat builder, repairer, and they have two children, twins, Lucy and Alexi, seven years of age they are, and yeah, they're going well. So between mother, between work, and between whatever it is that women do.

**OH: And sometimes you go up to Darwin?**

OM: Yeah, I have been in the past, yeah. I doubt whether I'll ever get up there again but I used to go up there two or three times a year, but unfortunately now it's a bit difficult, but at the same time they come down when they can, and everything is going fine, just a lovely life and lovely family. They all help, they all care, they all keep in touch, and that's very good.

**OH: Thank you for that summary of your family, Oscar. We're just going to move on now to some final kind of reflections in the interview. I'm wondering if you thought back about the achievements that you've had in your life, what would be the most important achievements?**

OM: Getting married to Virginia. I think that was very lucky there because you've got to remember that she was put in the situation when we got married, in the shop, and she's never been working in a shop, she's always been working in the garden with her brothers, market gardens down at Lockleys, and she had to

start from scratch, but she was good with, you know, she was very good with the clients and they all liked her all the time, so I was very lucky there.

Then I was very lucky to find good workers that came to work in the shop, and here I have to look across at Assunta [laughs] because she was a mighty worker [laughs], and there was like Neil and Lawrie and Jimmy, and there were quite a few there, but they worked very hard and very loyal, very ... I remember that none of them ever, I don't think any of them ever knocked off at their right time, they were always, they finished work when, you know, things got easy, not 5 o'clock, zoom, no, never, always there until our customers left, or whatever the case might be, yeah, so a very good crew there, they're very lucky these years, yeah, and, well, Assunta can bear that out on that point there, they were all, none of them that I can remember did anything, they were all very, very good.

So I was very lucky there, getting married to Virginia and having great workers in the shop all the time, and then again, you know, once my daughters grew up they're an asset to me. Well they can't do enough for me at the moment, and I can't wish for anything better than that.

In business, as I said before, some things went right, some things were not right, but generally I think I came out in front, so I'm pretty lucky, and I think also the fact that I took that attitude of *che sera sera*, which also helped me I think, helped me a lot, as taking things without taking, without being too seriously about anything, the good or the bad, so you got along pretty well, and I've always had pretty good friends all around all the time, and had a lot of fun with perhaps horses, perhaps playing soccer, or bike riding, or whatever we took on as we were kids, or not so much kids as grown up too [laughs], but yeah, I had a lot of fun in the soccer and also in the bike riding., I've been a great worker myself, but yeah, I guess everybody can't be good workers can they [laughs]?

**OH:** Well it seems to me you've done a lot of work, Oscar.

OM: Oh, I done a lot of thinking but I don't know about work – work, I don't think I was, I don't think I was made out to work too hard [laughs].

**OH:** And what about people who have inspired you in your life? Who would you say have been inspirations for you?

OM: Oh! I don't know, I suppose my teachers were pretty good teachers. They said the right word at the right time to try and, you know, cub whatever a young lad that grows up.

**OH:** Are you talking about teachers in Australia?

OM: Yes. I can't remember very much of the Italian teachers because I was 11 years of age when I come away, so I wasn't, I wasn't too involved. I think at that age you don't get involved too much with, or understand as much as you should,

with teachers, in my time anyway. Perhaps now it might be different because things have changed even, you know, an 11-year-old or 10-year old boy today seems to know a lot more than a 10-year-old boy 50 years ago, and so, you know, we're talking about different times here. I remember my, you know, days in Italy and that, but yeah, I think I learnt a lot more when I went to school here, in the years I went to school here, because I went to school, I was 11, and I went to 15, 4 years I did, school here in Australia, and I think it's a good age to come out from Italy because although you've been away 70-odd years from Italy, you can still talk a fair bit of Italian. You can't understand all of it, the real Italian that comes through, but you get along alright, and so you still cling to that Italian point, language, as well as thinking. I guess if it comes to barracking in the sport field, I think in the later years I think I would barrack more for Australia than for Italy, but if Australia is not in it, then I would be barracking for Italy type of thing. That's how I see myself anyway.

**OH: That's a really strong connection to Italy.**

OM: There's still strong connection although I was only there until I was 11, although I've been back many times, and so I'm very happy to see these games, you know, soccer or cycling, and all that.

**OH: Well Oscar, I actually think we've got a little bit more to do in a further interview, but thank you very much for today's interview.**

OM: Thank you.

**End of interview**

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**Interview 9 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan****at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,****on 23 May 2012****Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend  
contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Well thanks, Oscar, for agreeing to this ninth interview. I thought that we'd begin the interview today by you telling me about some objects that were very important in your parents' life coming here to Australia, and they're here on the table, and I wonder if you could describe them for me.**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Well, I don't know, what would you call these little bottles here?

**OH: Would we call it a carafe, small carafe?**

OM: Little carafe etched with, I can't see really what's on there now, but I remember that they were etched with different flowers or something, and it's a liqueur set. There was supposed to be six glasses but I think there's only one left now with the same etching as well. My mother used to treasure that, and also another bottle with, probably it had glasses with it but, you know, over the years something must have happened to them, I don't know.

**OH: This one is interesting, Oscar, because it's got a representation of a gondola.**

OM: Right.

**OH: As well as some flowers and the gondola I guess is some kind of connection to ...**

OM: Venice.

**OH: Yeah.**

OM: Probably it would come from the Venice glass.

**OH: Murano?**

OM: Murano more than likely.

**OH: It's interesting. That top, I'll just give it to you, it's very heavy glass.**

OM: Mm, it is.

**OH: Would your parents have entertained using these objects?**

OM: No, no, we never [laughs], we never had any money to entertain, to put anything in there for entertainment for sure, because we never, no, not that one unfortunately. That's life.

**OH: Does it suggest that your mother or your father would have had a sense of using beautiful things?**

OM: My mother would have, yes. My father was a nice chap in a simple, you know, simple things for him, nothing grand, nothing, everything was OK for him, and so my father would not be concerned about anything really that way. First of all of course we never had the opportunity or the money to buy anything that's good. These things here must have been given to my mother and my father.

Christine Rebellato (CR): They may have been wedding gifts.

**OH: Wedding gifts.**

OM: And a wedding gift, or whatever, but they would never have been able to afford these to buy if they had the money, so yeah.

**OH: So you were saying that your father was more practical, and what about your mother when you said that perhaps she would have valued them?**

OM: Well because my mother came from a different type of family where these things were more of the things that would have in their family, because they were merchants and money people, etc, whereas my father was a *contadino*, which is a farmer, and I guess they would prefer, I don't know, a horse in the stable rather than [laughs] than things like this in a way, and that's how, well that's how they would look at it, at that time, and even probably now with different families, so it would be from my mother that she would have had this.

**OH: And do you remember your mother's parents' house as a child?**

OM: Yes, yes, easy, because I was there practically every day, because we only lived just down the road, or just by the gates there, and I used to go there practically every day, yes, and, oh, they were hardworking, the merchants, and of course my grandfather was very busy going to the markets in different places, but he used to bring home, I always used to wait for him to come home because he always would bring home some *mandorlato* [nougat] or some lollies like that, which little kids like me at that time were [laughs]. In fact I remember going to sleep with him many times in his bed, like his wife had passed away and he was on his own.

**OH: And his name was?**

OM: Quarto.

**OH:** **And was he your father's father or your mother's father?**

OM: My mother, my mother's father, yep, and this is why when I go to Italy or when I've been Italy, I've always, that's been my home because I mean all of them, you know, there was an uncle, my Uncle Oscar, same name as mine, they named me after him actually, and he had five children and they're all alive, they're in Italy now, and he's still carrying on the business that my grandfather had, and still very successful, and so that's been my home when I go to Italy, there's always a bed there and a motor car, and everything I want just there, but then at the same time when they come over here this is their home as well, so it's been a two-way passage like that.

Yeah, I remember my grandfather very well that way, mm, he was very generous, and in fact through his generosity he got himself into trouble because he used to sign guarantees for people around the community there, you know, and if you sign too many guarantees you will virtually finish up in trouble. It got to the stage where they were nearly going to go broke completely because of these signatures that he used to, or *per favour* type of thing, but anyway they got out of it and everything went right after.

**OH:** **And Oscar, you were telling me about another item that you remember coming on the trip to Italy with you and your mother in 1934.**

OM: Yeah [laughs] that's a funny one because I suppose at that time when I knew what was going on, I didn't realise that in later years I would be laughing about it because my mother, whether it was my father who insisted or whether it was my ... because my mother had a sister over here in Australia, zia Carmela Rossetto, and she might have written about a mattress, that the mattresses here in Australia were very hard. I think they used to use kapok or whatever, some hard things not very comfortable anyway, so what I'm getting at is that my mother brought over her woollen double mattress from Italy, made a special trunk for it, so in later years when I come to understand how much wool Australia produces, I thought *Fancy bringing wool from Italy* [laughs] *when you've got tons over here* [laughs]. Anyway that's what happened, she brought this mattress and of course they used it well, and I don't know what happened to it when mother died. I guess it sort of, I don't know what happened, but nevertheless they used it until she died anyway.

**OH:** **And you told me that it was packed up each time a house moved.**

OM: Oh yes, yes, every movement we made from one place to another, the mattress would be following us there. That's probably the only thing that we had [laughs], we had hardly anything really.

CR: And that was brought over in the *baule* [trunk] which you still have.

OM: Mm, in a trunk, yeah, and I've still got the trunk here, not for that purpose but, you know, in fact we had two trunks and I think my daughter, Christine, has got one, no Helen up on the farm has got one, and I've got one here, and I imagine that there wouldn't be mattresses like that to fill up these *baule* because we didn't have much clothes or what, so yeah. So I get, you know

when I thought about it years after, to think that to bring wool to Australia was rather like taking ice to an Eskimo type of thing.

*Laughter*

**OH:** **And did the trunks move with you too when you moved around in the country?**

OM: Yes, yeah, the trunks followed us everywhere, and we've still got them after all these years or, you know, sort of I've got one and Helen got the other one, and Christine's got a wooden, well it's a bit bigger than a suitcase but it's a, I think it was used as a suitcase, more or less, and still she's still got it over there.

**OH:** **And Oscar, going back to Helen, I was following from the last interview, we talked about Christine's family and Vicki's family, and we didn't talk about Helen's children, and I'm wondering if you could just fill in the details about Helen's children.**

OM: Well Helen has three children, Clara, she's about 30 now, she's a lawyer; there's Rebecca and she's an astronomical engineer, and she's 26, is she? Yes, and then Jacob, and he's 25 and he works for One Steele up in Whyalla, he's a plumber/electrician and he's well in the trade there, and they also have a big farm which now it's only a hobby farm for them because Geoff, that's the husband, is working for the same company as where Jacob is, and he's the Environmental Officer there. He's got ten men working under him and he's keeping, wherever there's mining there's a lot of environmental problems to look after anyway.

CR: OneSteel.

OM: Also he's very well in the farming district and he's the, is it Chairman of the Pastoral Board?

**OH:** **Mm.**

OM: He's Chairman of the Pastoral Board, and he comes often to Adelaide because he has to answer to the Agricultural Minister in South Australia, so they're going very well up there.

**OH:** **And where do Clara and Rebecca live?**

OM: They live in Darwin, they're up in Darwin, for the time being. I mean young kids of today, when I say kids, she's 30 and Helen is 26, they're old enough, and they seem to go from place to place. She was in Melbourne before, Rebecca lived with me here for five or six years while she was going to university, and then she got this big job up in Darwin with the power and the water up there, and she's very happy, but eventually she will find something else probably, I don't know, they all find different things [laughs].

**OH: And Oscar, the focus of this interview is really about reflections on different aspects of your life, and I wanted to ask you what did it mean to be an Italian when you first arrived as an 11-year-old boy in 1934?**

OM: Well I guess I was a bit young then really to realise too much, or make much of anything. I know that because I was getting an ice-cream now and again I was over the moon about that, and of course remember that life in Italy for us was very, as I said before, we were very poor so an ice-cream was like having a big treat, but when I first went to school, the first year we were in Naracoorte, and of course the Abyssinian War was on, well Italy and Abyssinia, and they used to call me Abyssinian, and I used to see red [laughs], that got me [laughs].

**OH: Did you know the significance of that?**

OM: Well yes and no. It didn't worry me, naturally at my age, 11, you don't think too much about politics or whatever, but the only thing that riled me was being called Abyssinian by the boys at school there, so we had quite a few fights, although some of them came up, finished up best friends with me. It's only just, you know, you go through these stages I think until you get to know better, so then I made good friends up in Naracoorte and had them for years.

**OH: And in the mid-1930s how many Italians would there have been in Naracoorte?**

OM: There was only our family and Zaniol I think his name was. He had a market garden, and he used to supply veggies to the local people in Naracoorte there. He's the only Italian that I can remember, and yeah, he had this market garden, and we used to live on his property. We had two rooms there and a lean-to kitchen made of mud [laughs], but the interior was, the walls were made of mud, and yeah, we lived there for a year which was ... Oh yeah, I made good friends there, good friends, had a few fights but they were good friends, yes, but it takes time to ... but really the war, the Abyssinian War, that didn't sort of click with me much at all.

I remember writing to the Consulate in Adelaide here, and I still have the letters – when I say I still have the letters, I got them for the Archives – asking for Italian newspapers, sporting papers, because I was mad for sport, in the bike races or soccer, or whatever, mainly bike races at that time, and I knew all the top riders, knew of them of course, and I needed some information about this. I wrote twice to the Consulate but [laughs] they never replied [laughs]. Strangely enough, two or three years ago my cousin took me up to the Archives here in Adelaide, and there were my letters that I'd written in 1934 [laughs] to the Consulate. I don't know why they keep them, but I suppose I was a bit of a danger man [laughs].

**OH: Maybe in those days there wasn't a lot of correspondence from, you know, people to the Consulate?**

OM: Probably not, I don't know, I'm not sure, yeah, probably not. Probably when the Consulate closed, when the war broke out the Consulate closed, and they



found those letters that might have been important for security reasons, or whatever it is, and I imagine that ... but I was surprised to see them there anyway.

**OH:** **And Oscar, I'm thinking about your family unit, your mother and father and you, and I was thinking about what were the important things that your parents passed on to you, you know, whether it was, you know, explicitly or what you picked up from them?**

**OM:** Well I think that ... my father was away quite a bit in Central Australia – in those days we used to call it Central Australia and not Northern Territory, it used to be Central Australia – and he was working in the mica mines and the wolfram [mineral] mines, etc, so he was away quite a bit, so mum and I we had always, we never ever had a house, we had a couple of rooms somewhere in Hindley Street there, Grey Street, Hindley Street, and my life was more with my mother than my father because he was away so many times, until mum got so ill, and dad was working in Adelaide then, in the flower, some people had some flowers growing at Plympton I think it was, somewhere there, so I guess there wasn't much because my mother was too ill to pass anything on to me. She was concerned about me but what could she do?

It was pretty difficult, a difficult time for her, a difficult time for dad, a difficult time for me. I didn't find the difficulty because when you're young you haven't got that type of responsibility, but looking back I could see that it must have been hard for both my parents, because most times we were on the rations, and I remember going time after time with mother to line up to get these rations to live. They'd give you coupons for groceries, coupons for kerosene for the lamp, coupons for milk, coupons for meat, and all that type of thing, all rationed, so money was never, never flowing anywhere, I can't remember [laughs] seeing money in the house. It was pretty hard.

**OH:** **So would one of the values that you would have learned from your parents have been about, you know, cautious use of money?**

**OM:** Oh yes, well money wasn't there to be a point of, I knew there was no money so there was no point of talking about it or asking things, so my whole life actually, I never ever thought about the money because it was not there, so you never asked for things which, or never, you know, stamped your feet to want something, because you knew that it wasn't possible, so I guess you learn your lessons. I mean even though you're very young you realise that you do anything about it, yeah.

**OH:** **I'm sure that your parents would have had some notion of wanting you to grow up with certain values.**

**OM:** Oh yes, well, you know, they tried their very best for me. I mean when I finished school at grade 7 at Nuriootpa, I wanted to be a fitter and turner, and so instead of continuing school to go to grade, you know, the higher grades, from Nuriootpa we come down to Adelaide so that I could go as an apprentice of fitter and turner. You see there, mum, my dad, they didn't have to come

down to Adelaide from Nuriootpa, they only came down for my sake, so that I could be an apprentice of fitter and turner, which I was until the War broke out, and that sort of spoiled everything, but they really tried hard for me, but sometimes because of being poor, and also the interference of war and the way things turned out is, yeah.

**OH: Mm. In terms of your family's relationships within the community, who would have been the most important people to your parents here in Adelaide, you know, when they first came and those next years?**

OM: Well I suppose it would have been my Auntie Rossetto, that was my mother's sister, and yeah, that's about it. There wasn't much, so when we went to Naracoorte there was, well there was only this Italian that I spoke about before there. When we went to Nuriootpa I think there was only two Italian families in Nuriootpa in those days, and all our other times were spent in the West End of Adelaide, Hindley Street or Grey Street, those other places, Newmarket Street, and I guess, yeah, that's it, there was no ... My mother was not well enough to go anywhere, she was too ill all the time, and in hospital, and out, in hospital, out, in hospital, out, in hospital and out, but yeah, she died very young.

**OH: The Italian community at that time, you know, when you think about the West End area, what can you say about the Italian community there?**

OM: Because we didn't get around too much we didn't get mixed up with the Italian community very much, not in those years, not the early years before. It was after the War that, when I came down from Port Augusta to work for my auntie, because my uncle had died, and then I got involved with the Italian community in the West End there. First of all some of them were customers of my auntie's grocery store, and I delivered groceries, and come to know a lot of people there, and yeah, so my dad was working in this flower garden. I mean he worked six days a week and he never, apart from going to our other relations, the Mattiazzo, the butcher in Currie Street, because he used to eat there and sleep, and my auntie would be in the room we had of my auntie, and so that was his church work, eat and sleep. He never had a bike, never had a motor car, never had anything to travel around or, yeah.

**OH: Mm, a very simple life.**

OM: Very simple, yep, yep. I don't think I ever seen him even play cards or things like that. He was just a simple man.

**OH: Oscar, last interview we talked about your achievements in life, and the things that you felt were achievements, and today I'm wondering about the challenges that you would have faced in your life.**

OM: Yeah, I suppose there was quite a few challenges, but I've never given them much, I never, I never thought of them as challenge, I just thought there was just the done thing, get into business or do bike riding, or play soccer, or get into the horses, or get into the what's name. It's never been like a challenge to me, it's been something that you feel like doing, or felt like doing, and just

took it on, and not as a challenge to try and beat anybody or to try and what's name, just part of life, part of life, yeah.

**OH:** Does it fit with the *che sera sera*?

OM: Definitely, yeah, because I never worried too much about anything. I guess that's the, whether that's a good thing or not, I'm not sure, but to me it's worked out OK. I guess in business or in sport, or in gambling or whatever, everything doesn't go your way and you've got to take the good with the bad, so I didn't worry too much whether it went good or whether it went bad, I just kept on going, and I think that attitude, maybe some people might say it's not right, but for me it's OK, because you could have easily lost your bundle you might say, if you lose this, or some money that I lost at one stage there, quite a big amount of money, and you could have lost faith in human nature, but I never have, not even now, so that's it [laughs].

**OH:** That's great. What about world events in the time that you have lived your life? Is there any world event in particular, or any of them, that stand out for you?

OM: Oh, I don't know. I think one particular one, I was at the Olympic Games at Munich in Germany, I think 1972 maybe, I'm not sure of the year, I can't remember exactly, but anyway I was there, and there was that, I think, I can't remember, something to do with Israel, some of the Israel athletes were shot or killed by, it might be Palestinians, I'm not sure of the exact, I can't remember the exact situation, but what I do remember is that being at the Games in Munich, and that particular day, and the Games started in the Olympic Village, they started at 11 o'clock in the morning, and I used to get there just prior to 11 o'clock and pick out the games or events that I wanted to see for that particular day, and I remember that day going there, and I did see perhaps more helicopters and policemen and guns and things like that, but I never connected it with anything, and it wasn't until 5 o'clock that afternoon that it came over the amplifier that the Games were cancelled because of certain things that had happened, and it wasn't until I got home, on TV, to the hotel, that I saw what was happening, what had happened at the village during the morning and during the day, and I suppose the thing that stands out most to me is that there we were, thousands of people in the village, in the Olympic Village, and we were the only people probably in the world that did not know what was going on, not until 5 o'clock that afternoon.

The Games resumed the next morning, but by that time of course everything was over, whatever happened there, but yeah, it was a strange thing to be right there, right you could say next door to something that's happening there and not know, but I suppose they had their reason for it, naturally to keep us from panicking, etc. I guess if I, thinking back, after seeing all those armed soldiers and policemen hurry here and hurry there, you might have panicked or something, but that really stands out to me that way.

**OH:** Do you remember feeling fearful?

OM: No, because I just thought it was part of the program like that, the whole, the whole day until 5 o'clock. At least I just went along to see what games I had selected to have a look, and everybody was doing the same thing, no panic, no nothing at all, because we didn't know of course.

**OH: But the next day?**

OM: And the next day, well it was all over by then, and so we went back to the village again at 11 o'clock as usual, and yeah, continued on with the Games. I suppose that's something that happened, it was happening, but I didn't know it was happening [laughs].

**OH: And you were right there?**

OM: And I was right there. Well we were all there, right in the middle of it, but yeah, strange things like that.

**OH: Any other events that you think have, you know, been momentous?**

OM: Well as I said, probably, the other one that, you know, you think of world events when J F Kennedy got killed, and I remember that I was driving from Torrens Road to go to the farm, Santin's farm, my brother-in-law's, because I was helping them to pick cucumbers as a matter of fact.

**OH: And where was the farm?**

OM: The farm was at, what's that place there?

CR: Frogmore Road or Lockleys?

OM: No, no, no, no, up here.

CR: Oh, Bolivar.

OM: Bolivar, and I was driving up to Bolivar and it came over the air, I had the radio in the car, that J F Kennedy got killed, and that surprisingly, it really hit me hard that one. I don't know why because you hear of a lot of other people getting killed and that and shot, but for some reason it hit me that one. I suppose probably because I thought he was a good person, and didn't deserve to get what he got so, you know. I think he was sort of speaking my language as far as politics go [laughs]. That's as far as I'll go [laughs].

But other events, I don't know about world events, but I mean the events, getting married of course, that's a very important one, [laughs] and I have to remember when I walked up, when Virginia walked up to me at the altar, I said to her *We lost* [laughs], because I was playing soccer in those days and I didn't play that Saturday, and the team lost 1:Nil and the first thing I said to her *We lost* [laughs], and for many years afterwards I've always been reminded that, *Is that all you're thinking about?* [laughs].

So I guess that probably without knowing, it was a moment in life, and of

course when the children came along that was great, that was a happy occasion all the time, even though I wasn't the best of, how can I put it? I took everything quite casually and perhaps too casually, and maybe I could have been a bit more sensible about that, but I did, you know, I did enjoy those moments.

**OH: I know that you gave an interview for a book about people who'd immigrated from the Province in Italy where you were from, and from the particular region, Valdobbiadene, and in that story you say, right at the end, in Italian, that Italy is always in your heart.**

OM: Correct.

**OH: Can you talk a little bit about what that means?**

OM: Well it means that because I was born over there, and had always had a great, I suppose a great leaning towards Italy, and I still have the same, I still have it now even though I imagine over the last few later years ... I'll put it this way. If there's a soccer match or some sort of sport that Italy and Australia were in it, I would, in the early part I would be barracking for Italy. Now in the later years I barrack for Australia, but I still like to see Italy get second but, you know, that changed a little bit that way, but if Australia's not in it, whatever it might be, sport or politics or whatever, I would be barracking for Italy, and this is why I say Italy is always in my heart of course, because you're born there and you like to see it going well, although at the moment they're not going so well I guess over there, but they'll get out of it. They brought it onto themselves and now they'll have to get out of it [laughs] that's why.

**OH: And for you and Virginia, what was it that you would have wanted your children and grandchildren to understand about your Italian heritage?**

OM: Oh, I think they all got a fairly good – I won't say we went out of our way to teach them – but by our talk in the family itself, they would have picked up the way we felt about our relations and about Italy, and about, especially relations, and they all come up pretty good. They're all, I suppose I would say that even the children born here, they might think, you know, here in Australia you must be, you know, Australian, but as they grow up they realise that Australia is not the only country in the world, you know, there are other countries, and it's likely they will appreciate those as well, but I'm sure they all think that Australia is number one anyway.

As I say, as they grow older they come to appreciate the other part too, because we tried to, I will say they all tried to learn to speak Italian as well, and they can get along with Italian, and I guess they have all been over there to a school, except for Helen, she wasn't able to be there, but Christine and Vicki both had schoolings in Italy, and I guess they all appreciate the things over there as well. But we've always tried to, when we talked about Italy, we always tried to be positive about everything, you know. There could have been some negative situations, because the Italian people before the War were one way, after the War they come over in droves here, the first lot were not too bad, the second

lot that came over, they were a bit, they'd gotten a bit too Italian in many ways.

What I'm trying to say is that when you come to a country like Australia, regardless whether you go to Australia or America or Argentina, you've got to appreciate the country that you're going to and not think that you're over here in Australia or in the other countries, that you're in Italy. You're not in Italy anymore, you're in Australia and you must take the law and abide by the laws and go by the Australian way of life, and eventually it works out very well for those people who appreciate that point, because everyone, in my opinion every one in Italy should travel the world before they start talking too much [laughs], because some of them are too, when I say too Italian, I don't mean to say too Italian, but they seem to have blinkers in their eyes and they can't see other people's good or bad, whatever the case might be, but if they travel a bit it broadens their outlook and they become better people, and some of them in the later years that come over here, they're a bit hard to change a little bit.

**OH: Are you talking about a generation of Italians who are migrants, or who were migrants?**

OM: Yes.

**OH: And which generation would that be?**

OM: Well I think it would be, oh, say 20 years after the War.

**OH: So the late-60s?**

OM: Yeah, '60s, '70s, yeah, they come along with a little bit of a chip on their shoulder type thing, whereas when we come along naturally we couldn't afford to have a chip on the shoulder because we didn't have any chips to put there [laughs], but yeah, different outlook, you know, the ones that grew up before the War have a different outlook than the ones that came after the War, especially the ones later, not straight after the War but the ones a bit later, and some of them even, you know, even now you get Italian people who have been here quite some time and they're still, you know they're still, they're thinking too Italian, in my opinion anyway. That's only my say [laugh].

**OH: That's interesting, Oscar. In what you're saying I'm understanding that you'd say that there were three different kinds of Italian generations of migrants?**

OM: Yes.

**OH: So what made the people different, who came immediately after the War?**

OM: Oh, because they were needed, they needed to – Italy wasn't going too well at all – they needed, and they appreciated more coming over here and finding things that were, whereas the ones that came about 10-15 years afterwards, because things over there started to go better, and they weren't quite prepared to accept the changes that they would have to make coming here. They'd be

happy to be here making money, but they were still very Italian, and I think the Italian people, even in Italy, even those who haven't come out here, even those in Italy in that period, and now as you can see in the world affairs of today, that how the last 20-30 years they have been living above their means in many ways. They weren't prepared to do the hard work but they didn't mind these, what do they call them, people coming in from North Africa or from East Europe, to come and do the slogging work and the hard work, and they weren't prepared to dirty their hands. Now they find themselves in a position where they'll have to do something about it because they've lived above their means for too many years in the last 30 years at least, and this is the payback for this.

**OH: And Oscar, I'm going to take you right back to Frogmore Road when you used to go there as the delivery person for your aunt's grocery shop. What have been the most significant changes in that area over the time, you know, since you first went there?**

OM: I imagine that, well the big development there. I mean when I started to go down to, we called it Lockleys because that's the area we refer to, although it's Flinders Park and Findon and all that type of thing, there wasn't so many houses there, a lot of gardens, and a lot of empty spaces, many empty spaces, and it wasn't until, let me see, until 1960 that things started really to develop Lockleys, and market gardens were being cut up for blocks of land and all that type of thing, until today now there's hardly any market gardens around there, but there was a lot of market gardens there, a lot of land, and I guess that's the biggest.

It's developed pretty well and those market gardeners who had land in those days are really well off today because, you know, the value of land has gone up so much and they find themselves in a very good position, not only I suppose the older ones but also the young, the children or the families there, they're reaping the rewards of their parents there. It's a great development, developed very well.

**OH: And are you aware of many of those families who have retained houses or land there?**

OM: Oh yes, most of them that had land that had market gardens there, they've retired there. Well some pieces of land, some sold quite a bit. I mean regardless what they did, they made a lot of money out of it, and I think they came out on top quite well. Of course remember that the older people were market gardeners and loved working the land, but the younger ones of course with the study and all that, they venture out in other ways, doctors or professionals of some sort, and I guess that's life, you can't, you can't ... a farming family is not a farming family anymore, they've got other avenues. That's progress actually you call it. So you find that a lot of those families, their children and grandchildren, are out in other professional ways, which of course is the way to go, but they still hold their, you know, they still, I'm sure they still hold their thoughts about Frogmore Road and Lockleys, and all that type of thing.

**OH:** Well thank, Oscar. I think that's a really good place to end our interview, so thank you very much for your contribution to this project, thank you.

**OM:** A pleasure.

**End of recording**

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**Interview 10 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan**

**at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,**

**on 6 June 2012**

**Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend  
contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH):** Thank you very much, Oscar, for agreeing to yet another interview. In the previous interview you reflected on different aspects of your life in Australia, and today I'll continue by asking some further questions about your reflections.

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Fine.

**OH:** So the first group of questions are about living in Adelaide, and just a general one to begin with, what do you now see as the benefits of living in Adelaide?

**OM:** Well Adelaide has always, as far as I'm concerned has always been pretty good, not a big city as cities go, but it's got everything that every big city has, and it's so close to everything. Adelaide itself is between the mountains, Mount Lofty, and the sea, the beaches, so if you live in the centre of Adelaide you've only got about 8 or 10kms and you've got the beaches on the right and on the left you've got the mountains, or the hills, which is a perfect way of getting away from Adelaide at the weekend, or picnics, etc like that, or going to the beach in summertime, etc, so it's very, very convenient. If you look at other cities, you have to travel a long way to go to these places, and I mean small is nice compared to big, not so much traffic, our traffic is much slower than the eastern states, and so that suited me fine, and you can do whatever you can do in other big cities, you can do it here in Adelaide quite well, so for me Adelaide is OK.



**OH:**        **And Oscar, what do you think your parents hoped to find in Adelaide when they made that decision for your family to emigrate when your father came in 1927?**

OM:        Well they didn't, let me think, put it this way, things were so bad over there that anything would have done better than what we were in Italy. When my dad came out in 1927 he had other, like my Uncle Rossetto and my aunt, and my Auntie Carmela Rossetto, they were already here for a few years, and naturally they write to one another, and there was quite a few people from our little town, Bigolino, that came to Australia before that, and they all spoke well of it, although even in those days the Depression was taking its toll as far as making money, but at least they could live fairly well, and well, the Depression was here in Australia but it was all over the world anyway, so in '27, around about the end, it started to get to the end of the Depression, but that didn't bother my dad, he thought that anything is better than where he was in Italy. I don't think they had a great, well the only expectation they probably had is to try and have a better life, and make something of it, and the opportunity according to the report he was getting back from here, there was opportunity here        if        you        were        willing        to        work.

It may be hard in the beginning, but it worked out pretty well, there was never any shortage of work, not after the Depression, and things, you know, and even those days when we come out, mum and I came out, and dad was up in Central Australia, he wasn't very lucky with the minings and things up there, and we were helped by the government in rations, which of course, you know, you wasn't getting that in other countries, and we lined up for hours getting our ration tickets, which kept us going OK, but the unfortunate part dad was not lucky in his ventures up in the Northern Territory, and my mother was always ill, and therefore we had it hard, but mum was always laughing, and I guess I did the same, I don't know, I can't remember very much about that [laughs], but money has never been a worry to us. I mean money is always a worry if you haven't got it, but you know we were used to it, so we did make things do, eventually        things        got        better        and        better.

I think whatever my dad was looking for when he came out to Australia, he found it here OK. It might have taken a bit of time and patience, but it came through alright. He always said, he was always saying that in later years when I went tripping away to Italy, he said *I would never go back to Italy because I've suffered so much over there that I don't want to go to Italy, I just want to stay here and be happy.*

**OH:**        **And Oscar, when did your father die?**

OM:        1982 was it?

Christine Rebellato (CR): 1974.

OM:        1974 is it, yeah.

CR:        I think.

**OH:** So you'd already made some trips overseas by then?

OM: Yes, yes I made several, '74, it would have been about three or four trips away by then, and he never, never wanted to go to Italy.

**OH:** That's interesting.

OM: No, he was so tired, he said he suffered too much because of the War over there. He was in the army for seven years.

**OH:** This is the First World War?

OM: Yeah, First World War, and coming home from the army going to his family, he had it pretty rough there, so he was glad to be in Australia.

**OH:** Oscar, I'm aware that in your mother's family a number of her siblings were in Australia.

OM: Yes, there was my Uncle Quinto, my Uncle Beniamino, my Auntie Carmela Rossetto, and then of course there was my mother and dad.

**OH:** And in your father's family, had anyone come to Australia?

OM: No, no.

**OH:** Cousins?

OM: In later years, yes, but not cousins. Oh yes there was, from the Mattiazzo ...

CR: Butcher.

OM: The butcher, and ...

CR: zia Anna's father.

OM: Yeah, there was Emilio Mattiazzo who was a butcher in Currie Street, he was here quite early, and also, I'm trying to think Celeste his name was, he was mainly up at Mildura, and yeah, there were several of relations, yes, and they also worked together, dad and a couple of them worked together in cutting timber or whatever work was found here in South Australia. Yeah, they're all happy, none of them went back to Italy, and yes.

**OH:** And Oscar, this is a hypothetical question, but how do you think your life would have been different if your parents had not migrated or emigrated to Australia?

OM: Well I'm so, so glad that they did, I tell you that now [laughs]. Really it's pretty hard to say what would have happened to me, but by going by other cousins about my age, zio Beniamino was here in Australia, but his family was in Italy, because his wife refused to come to Australia, and they had three children, and one of them, his name was Primo, he was caught up in the War and eventually lost his life in Russia, on the Russian Front.

Now I'm not surprised if I probably would have finished up the same way because he was a year older than I, and I guess we used to do everything together, and I think I probably would have finished up as a soldier, etc, and God knows where you finish up [laughs] in the War like that, but yes, that was a sad story there because my Uncle Beniamino wanted his wife to come, his wife and children to come out to Australia with us, with mum and I. She refused, Beniamino's wife refused, and he said *At least let Primo come with the family, with us*, and she refused again, so from that moment on he refused to have anything to do with the family over there because when he was killed on the Russian Front, he sort of blamed her for not allowing the son to come out to Australia, which made it very difficult, and he never, another person will never go back to Italy in any shape or form. He always kept talking about his wife and his other two children, they were both girls, but he would never, didn't want to write anymore to them or do anything like that, yeah, that's a sad story there.

**OH:** **Mm, and a really different outcome of emigration?**

OM: Oh yes. Well anyway, coming back to your point there, I'm glad that dad decided to come here, but what would have happened to me over there I only can conjure up, like probably finished up in the army like Primo, because I was a year younger, and yeah, it's hard to say where you finish up.

**OH:** **Just a general question, how has, you know, the fact that your family migrated to Australia shaped your life?**

OM: Well I think that being the only son, I'm not saying that I was spoiled but I was sort of, perhaps you could say a little spoiled, but at the same time I didn't have a really easy life because my mother was always ill, my dad was away up in Central Australia. In fact when I was going to school and I was 13 years old then, at St Dominic's in Franklin Street ...

**OH:** **St Mary's Dominican School?**

OM: Yes. Is it St Mary's there?

CR: It's called St Mary's now, and it's run by the Dominican Nuns. I don't know what it was called when you went to school.

OM: And I used to do all the washing, and I did it for not only that year but up in Nuriootpa and places we went to, I did all the washing for the family because my mother could not touch water because she was so, her rheumatic pains were dreadful, and so they used to call me *the washer woman* as a matter of fact.

So I didn't have it, I had it easy but not that easy. I felt that I always had to do something for the family, and I think that's a very good point there for me, it made me realise that things are not just, you know, go home and have a glass of lemonade, we just didn't have it, it's one of those things, and I think it sort of brought to me that life is not that easy, but then you can, you have to take it

and go on with it. Perhaps in later years in the beginning of Port Augusta there I came off with that saying *che sera sera* [what will be, will be], it really started those years, because it wasn't easy but I was always happy, that's it.

**OH:** **And obviously a lot of changes in a short time after you arrived with your mother?**

OM: Oh yes, yes, because we changed from, the first year was in Naracoorte, the second year was in Adelaide, the third and fourth years were in Nuriootpa, and the fifth and sixth and seventh years were in Adelaide, and then of course the War broke out and so I was sent to, first of all to Dry Creek to make those salt pans for the ICI – not by myself, there was 100 in the camp – and then eventually up to Port Augusta for the rest of the War, and I was there for, well from practically the beginning of the War to the end of it, under the Allied Works Council.

**OH:** **And that was specifically because you were the child of migrants from non-English speaking background, but particularly Italian?**

OM: Well particularly Italian because the War broke out, Italy was on the side of Germany and Japan, therefore because my father was not naturalised, and naturally we became 'aliens' to Australia, and treated as such, so all the 'aliens' were directed to join the, well we had no choice really, Allied Works Council. Either that or some of them were interned in different places because the Allied Works Council, the government sent a number of people, 30, 40 or 100, or 200, whatever, they needed to work in the forest, in the railways, anything where Australia wanted you, some workers, we were sent there, and my destiny was Port Augusta [laughs].

Well in a way it was quite good because being young, just over 18, and spoke English and Italian pretty well, I became an interpreter, which naturally they were looking for, and I was always the youngest in every aspect of those years, I was always the youngest person, but because I had the schooling I was also picked to do the, you know, in charge of the camp, or be an interpreter, so it was a good life in many ways. Life is what you make it, but I took it as a lot of fun at the end, or in the beginning [laughs], otherwise you go mad [laughs].

**OH:** **Oscar, talking about migrants, how do you think Italian migrants have changed Adelaide in your lifetime?**

OM: Oh, in many ways I think, starting with the market gardens, they were a great influence of the produce that they produced there. Also they were great workers, cement workers, terrazzo workers, and all the buildings that you see in Adelaide built in those years required a lot of terrazzo, a lot of cement work and all that, and they were the forerunners of all that type of work around the area.

**OH:** **Are you talking about the Italians in your parents' generation?**

OM: Yes, yes, because there was quite a few, well firms, and they brought out workers from Italy to work for them, in the terrazzo or in the cement industry, and they were very good.

**OH: Do you remember the names of some of those?**

OM: Yes, there was Del Fabbro, there was two brothers there, Vittorio had one firm and Albert had another firm. Then there was a Floreani, the two brothers Floreani, and there was, oh, I can't remember all of them but that's the main ones there. In fact I worked for the Floreani's when I was dismissed, because I was an apprentice fitter and turner at Pope Brothers, and they, when the War broke out with Italy, and because I was not naturalised, they had to let me go, and the first job I got was working for Floreani making cement troughs, those days. Now they're all aluminium and stuff, but the cement washing trough like that, and that was the first job I had after the War broke out, and then I went away from there because I kept on asking for money, more money, more money.

I worked hard, I always worked fairly, you know, fairly right, and produced these troughs that they were doing for, so I only went away on a bet with one of the bosses. I said that I can get a job and get £4/10 [four pounds, ten shillings]. He said *You couldn't. You're getting £4 [four pounds] now and you're the best paid man we've got*, or person, or young one there, *you can't get £4/10*, so I said *Right*. I found a job, I got £4/10 making furniture at Walker's Furniture factory on Anzac Highway, Ashford, and they paid me £4/10. The first week's wages I went back to Ron, that's the boss, and I said *Here you are, £4/10* so he had to ... oh, by the way we had a bet of a pound that I would get that money. He had to pay up. That's how I got it [laughs], but then from there that's when they picked me up to go to Allied Works Council.

**OH: And Oscar, what about your generation? You and Virginia and her brothers were first generation Italians who came as children, and there were a number of other *Veneti* [people from the Veneto Region] that we have talked about who came as children. What has been the impact of your generation as Italian-Australians?**

OM: Yes, well we, coming back to the market gardens which I know very well down there, in Lockleys, and they were all hard workers. They had these four, five acres, or ten acres, or whatever acre of land, producing these vegetables, and of course they had children, and they all were going to school because of their age, but they always helped at home working in the gardens with their father and mother, and all the rest of the people there, and they were in a way lucky although, you know, we didn't think of it then, but looking back at the situation now, they were lucky in a way because the father and mother were working hard, they saved money, and most of them if not all of them, bought the land that they worked on.

In those days market garden land was a fair price, but it wasn't like a development land, and the whole thing sort of, it's like an evolution that this land became, because it was so near Adelaide, the centre of Adelaide, and

Adelaide was expanding, expanding, right, left and centre, and the market gardens became valuable land as housing projects, too valuable to work as market gardens because of the money they were being paid for the land then, because it was so close to Adelaide and all the development going on, of course helped the original farm or the original market gardens there. In that period of time they had bought that land, the value of the land went up sky high, and they made good money out of it. Some sold it to land developers, some developed the land themselves, but the benefit, coming back to the question, went to the children.

Now the children then were able to attend school for further education, not only just to grade 7, but then they go to high school, etc, which in turn, instead of being very few followed the footsteps of the father and mother, those market gardeners, they naturally, because of further studies, they were able to find different, or go into different careers, doctors or chemists or carpenters, or whatever, it was a different thing altogether, and that's how mainly then the, you know, years after, how the Italian market gardeners sort of, they were doing it alone because the children would not be going into the market, the big market garden, not, it didn't happen to everybody but quite a lot of them didn't get into the market garden.

**OH: And of course, Oscar, Virginia had how many brothers?**

OM: Three brothers.

**OH: And they were all in the Lockleys area, weren't they?**

OM: Yes.

**OH: Or Kidman Park?**

OM: Kidman Park. Well they had 12 acres on Frogmore Road, Kidman Park. Now this is an example. First of all they were working the land off Valetta Road, partly with another set of brothers, the Berno brothers.

**OH: And Virginia's family was the Santin?**

OM: Santin, yes, and they eventually bought this 12 acres on Frogmore Road, and they had a big, which had a big house up there, those homestead type things. Well two of the brothers lived in that and the other brother built himself a house on Frogmore Road, a small type of house, so they all lived actually on the land, and they worked that land for quite a number of years until, you know, as I said before, it became too expensive for, well they could still work it there, it didn't cost them anything anymore, but they could sell that, and what they did, and many other market gardeners did, they sold the land, either they developed it themselves or sold it to a developer, and then they bought land in Bolivar, Virginia, Salisbury, Two Wells, and that's where they restarted. They continued their market gardening produce in that area because the land was much cheaper, plenty of water, etc.

**OH: And Oscar, did any of Virginia's brothers' children work at any point as market gardeners?**

OM: There was two of them, two of the boys, started to work with the parents, but they soon gave it away because they found other avenues better for them to, you know, different jobs, and that's sort of, that sort of went right through the board like that, you know, not very many followed their father or mother's footsteps in the market garden, and those who did, they done well as well but, you know, the reason being of course there was more money then and they could please and choose certain things, and they saw other avenues better for them than working in the garden, and yeah.

**OH: Do you know if the same thing happened in families who were in the terrazzo or cement business?**

OM: The same thing happened there, yes, there was a lot of ... In fact, when the older generation passed away, there wasn't very many that took up the what's name, what the father did in the terrazzo and cement. Those people who continued on terrazzo and cement were people that when these companies brought people out from Italy to work for terrazzo and cement, you know, for someone to come to Australia, had to be sponsored [migrants]. Well they were sponsoring these people to, they had to sponsor and be responsible for them for two years, and these people of course were contracted to work for them.

Now they're the people that carried on, those people that came from Italy, mature age, say, I don't know, between 20 and 30, whatever, and eventually some of those carried on the work of the terrazzo and cement, or they started out on their own in a little way, and then they kept on going and going, and getting bigger, or whatever. They're the ones that carried on the cementing, but not the actual family or the people of those early years.

**OH: Is it possible to draw a conclusion about that?**

OM: Well the position is that they all made good money, and most of the children of those people that I mentioned before, I'm sure most of them became doctors actually, doctors or in a different, you know different field altogether, different, because of the opportunity of study, etc, and they didn't want to be workers in the cement when they can become different. I don't blame them because that's how it went. There are still some cement workers, you know, companies, Italian companies. I can't remember offhand but they're still about, but not as strong as before, and that's it, so it's a bit of an evolution there, but the children themselves didn't carry on that trade.

**OH: So we've talked about two generations of Italian migrants, so your parents and then your generation. What about the generation who migrated post-War, any observations about that group?**

OM: Yes. The ones that came straight after the war were very, very good workers. I remember, coming back to the market gardeners at Lockleys, most of the market gardeners down there, not only their family worked in the garden but also some of these fellows who came out after the War, well when I say most

of them had a job at Holden's, and that was shift work there, and those boys used to work at Holden's at shift time, and the other part, and they were single people, and the other, when they had spare time they'd go and work in the market gardens to help out with the produce there, and a lot of them, you know, having two jobs, they made some good money, but they worked hard, they worked hard, and some of them went on to be gardeners as well afterwards, and they worked hard.

But then there's another wave that came along after, of Italians, and by that time Italy was starting to find its feet after the War. For a while there, for five, ten years after the War, they were struggling, and why these people came out, but then Italy started to become a little bit better to stay, it's better to stay, they were better off in Italy than coming out here, because Italy was in the progress of a good time, good development, and those people that came out here, the few people that came out then, they had a different attitude to the first wave of Italians that came out after the War.

**OH: What sort of years are you talking about after the War?**

OM: I would say 1970s, '70s, '80s. They came out with a ... they weren't prepared to knuckle down as well as – I'm not saying everybody, this is general I'm talking about – they weren't prepared to knuckle down like the first that came out, the second lot that came out, the first lot that came out after the War, and because they were, in Italy they were going pretty well over there, so some of them lasted a little while and then some people went back to Italy, but yeah, it was a different wave of people, different attitude, different way of looking at things, and I find that, as we all know now, as today, that Italy is not going so well because of the fact that whilst they had their big development after the War there, and Italy went from a Third World country to a top world country, some of the last 30, 40 years, at least 30 years, they were a bit, you know, they felt that they were a little bit too good to do manual work, so they allowed a lot of these North Africans or people from Eastern, Eastern Europe, to come in and do the manual work there. As we understand it a lot of work was done under, what do they call it, on the black market type of thing, where they didn't have to pay, they didn't pay taxes and things, and eventually now we find Italy in a very difficult position because of the fact that they produced alright, but nobody was paying taxes.

**OH: And Oscar, how do you keep up with this news from Italy?**

OM: Oh, I go to bed at night around about 10 o'clock. I've got a little radio there next to my pillow, and I listen to the Italian news that comes through the Italian radio station of Adelaide, and there's also an Italian station in Melbourne, so either one of them. They broadcast Italian news and the going ons in Parliament, and what the Italian papers say, and they read out all articles from the Italian papers, and you form a bit of an idea as to what goes on there, and of course, as I say, they haven't got a government in Italy now, they've only got a, what do they call it, a government picked out by the President. They're not elected, they haven't got an elected government in Italy at the moment, they elected these people who are – I'm trying to think of the name



that they call them – and they run the country now, and they're doing a fairly good job except I don't think they're hitting the right type of people at the moment. They need to get more work done there, and as you can see by the papers.

The difficult part about that is that because they're not going good over in Italy, there's also other countries in Europe, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and especially Greece, the Greeks have had it the same way, not work too hard, they like to play cards all afternoon and go home when they feel like it, and all that type of thing. Well that's been going for years and now they find themselves in a very difficult situation, but the thing that I can't stomach is the fact that their woes are reflected on our market here, in our shares, they're going down all the time. Don't tell me to explain why because I can't see why. If they're not working properly over there, why should we suffer here, but that's how the system of the world is today.

**OH:** **And Oscar, we were talking before the interview about, well you were talking I should say, about the idea that there's another wave of young Italians looking to emigrate.**

**OM:** Oh yes, oh yes, I heard the other day there's thousands of them got their name down to come to Australia. In fact I was asked a question, *What do you think of it?* only the other day, a couple of mates, we were talking, and I said *Oh, I don't mind them coming*, I said, *as long as they haven't got the same attitude that they've had over there for the last 30 years*. I want them to come over here to work, and knowing that you're going to another country, and not Italy, to come here and go by our laws and the way we work here, the way we do everything here, and not try to introduce their way of life over here. They must come here and respect everything that Australia has to give them, and if they don't do that, it's better that they stay home. That's my opinion of it, and I think that it would be a pretty general one, because after all you come here, they come here to work.

We know there's plenty of work here and it's a good country, the best country in the world at the moment, and they think they can, if they think they can come over here and do exactly what they did for the last 30 years over there, there's no benefit to Australia, they have to tow the rope here, not hard, they'll be treated pretty well. I mean we're all happy the way we're being treated at the moment here in Australia – or at the moment, for a long time – and they should be, and not think that they can come here and bring their rather – how can I put it [laughs] – rather strange way of making it.

*Laughter*

**OH:** **Oscar, I'm going to ask you about your Italian heritage, but I just wanted to backtrack one thing. You know when you were talking about Virginia's brothers and other people in that generation who began selling their market gardening land at Lockleys or Kidman Park, can you estimate around what years that would have been?**

OM: Gee, I don't know, 19..., let me see, the '80s, '70s, '80s I think.

Assunta Giovannini (AG): Mid-70s I think.

OM: '70s, mm, '70s and '80s because you see in many ways they were pretty lucky. They started off in the market garden there and they worked hard. They bought the land, they leased it first and then they bought the land while still working there, and when the land became available or became so expensive because of the house development, a lot of them bought these lands up in Bolivar and Virginia and Salisbury and Two Wells, and things like that, which was market garden price, and then again the same thing happened up there.

In lots of those places where they bought land they became, they became expensive because of the development of the spread of Adelaide going up that way, and so they got a double whammy, they got good money for their land which they bought in the first place, and then they got good money for the land that they sold up in Bolivar, Bolivar and other places up there, so they were pretty lucky that way, lucky for the children as well, and down here in Lockleys or Flinders Park and Kidman Park, and all that, when they sold their land they kept some blocks for themselves to build their own homes, then build the homes for the children, you know, it's quite a good story there that they, they were very ... they worked hard and they deserve every bit of it, but they were lucky to find not one, but two, ways of making money without, like not working for it because of this development.

**OH: It's interesting, isn't it, because I was thinking those people who arrived in the 1920s, like Virginia's parents and say the Tonellato's, and Piovesan's, and Marchioro's, and other people, Berno ...**

OM: Berno, Santin's, and like the Fazzalari.

AG: Ballestrin's.

**OH: Ballestrin's. Who would have thought that, you know, within 50 years that two generations, and as you say, they did pretty well?**

OM: Well they did, they all did pretty well. I mean OK, it's a bit of luck to get these two good things going for them, but at the same time there's ... because they stuck there. They went there with nothing, they worked hard, saved money, bought the land, and then eventually the whole thing started to come into fruition like that, because of the development of Adelaide, spreading out, whether you go north, west, or east, or whatever, it happened, all around Adelaide. We talk about the market gardens at Lockleys, but of course there were other market gardens up the other side, in the eastern side, like Paradise and Payneham, and those areas up there, so everywhere around Adelaide, down south at Marion, and all those developments, they were all market gardens and now they're all houses.

**OH: Mm. Also the Hills.**

OM: And the Hills, yes, yes. Beautiful place Adelaide [laughs].

**OH:** **And Oscar, moving on to your Italian heritage as an adult, how important has it been for you to gather with, and meet up with, other Italians?**

OM: I think it's pretty important because having been born over there you still think of Italy as your native land, to a degree, because you're born there. Now I suppose the same feeling doesn't occur to people who are born, from Italian parentage and born in Adelaide, or born in Australia. But for those like me born in Italy, you still hold a little bit of something there, and I think it's only, well I think it's only natural anyway that you should in many ways but, as I say, you've got a little bit of, a little bit of Italy in you, even though things are not so good, or they've been doing the wrong thing over there, I can still criticise them but I don't want anyone else to criticise [laughs].

**OH:** **I won't criticise. So when you say you've got a little bit of Italy, could you put a figure on it, a percentage?**

OM: Oh, I don't think you can put a percentage there, it's a feeling that you ... I always like to visit Italy because I like it and I think it's a great country in many ways. It has a lot to offer and it's a traditionally old country, and a lot of tradition there but, you know, I always say, I always say even when I'm over in Italy, to different people, I say that all of the Italians should go out of Italy for a holiday or for a break, learn a little bit of the world, and then go back to Italy. They'll be better people. This is what I say.

*Laughter*

OM: And they are because you find that a lot of the young ones have travelled a bit now, they, they're coming up, as long as they travel and learn from their travel, they go back and they are better people, and even people who migrate to Australia, or to any country in the world, and they live there say for 10 years, if they go back to Italy, some have done, but it's never the same anymore there for them. I noticed when I've been to Italy that in my little country town there, there's quite a few went away from there and they came to Australia, went to Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and America, and when they come back to Italy to live, to return and to live there after being away for 10, 15, 20 years, they can't, they can't settle down anymore.

On the occasion of going out to the *osteria* [tavern or bar] on a Sunday, or whatever it is, they're always looking for a person who has been away like them. They cannot relate, fully relate to the Italian person who has been there in Italy all the time. They always have to look for a person who has been away from Italy for a while, because they seem to be able to talk the same language, whereas with the Italian person who has been in Italy all the time, they can't, they can't relate to them anymore.

It's strange, it's a strange thing that happens over there. I did notice a couple of times that I was over there, you go to the *osteria* and the tables are there, people there, people, people, people, and always the table that takes most notice is the people who have been to Argentina or Brazil or America or Canada, or Australia, and things like that. They always seem to be in a group

of their own, they don't come and mix with the Italian-Italian. That's a strange thing.

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

OM: Because somehow, it doesn't matter how long they've been away from Italy, they learned something while they were away, where the Italian person who's never been out, can't relate, they can't relate to each other.

**OH:** **And that brings me to the question, Oscar, how would you define yourself? Are you Italian, Italian-Australian, Australian?**

OM: Well I guess because I was born in Italy I find that I'm still Italian in many ways. I feel hurt when I hear that Italy is not going so well, or they're not doing, you know, something went wrong, I do still hurt about it, but at the same time I've lived out here for what, 70 years, and I'm also very Australian too in many ways. I can, you know, I can see it's a bit of a battle sometimes, when it comes between Australia and Italy. If it's another country well it's a different story, but when it comes to these two countries here, sometimes I'm Italian and sometimes I'm Australian, but it's a bit of a battle.

**OH:** **And did you join Italian clubs here in Adelaide?**

OM: Yes, I was on the committee of the Italian Association, in Carrington Street, Italian Club, and that's the only club that I joined up because that was, to me that was Italian, because I feel greatly this way, that when you're in another country like now we're in Australia, when you're in Australia, you're Italian, and when you're in Italy, you're regional, you're Veneto, Calabrese, Molfetta or whatever the case may be, but I feel very strongly that when I'm here that I don't say that I'm a Veneto, I'm an Italian, because I feel that we should all be together as we came out here. It's OK to distinguish the differences over there because, you know, one eats spaghetti, the other one eats *radici* [Italian chicory plants], but here we're all [laughs], you know, we're all Italians.

**OH:** **Thank you, Oscar, and just one last question, do you have anything further to say in this interview?**

OM: Well, I guess not in the order that it comes out, but I think that the best thing that ever happened to me, first of all without knowing, for dad to decide to come to Australia. Then my attitude towards life itself, because I think that was instilled into me with the hard years that we had in the beginning, not because of Australia's fault, it's because our family, the sickness of mum, and dad not being lucky in the North etc.

We had hard years but it taught me a very good lesson to be very, oh, *che sera sera* in a way, and of course in my, I was so keen to be a fitter and turner, when that broke, when Italy went into the War, that broke everything up, so many things happened. I was bike riding, I was playing soccer, then the War broke out, everything stopped. I restarted the soccer after the War with Juventus [Soccer Club] and played until the week before I got married, but those years like that, they taught you a lot to take things as they come along,

and not be very definite in your set ideas.

Then I was very lucky. I married a girl that was worth her weight in gold, Virginia, which coming from a market garden family, and I was always working in a shop or living in town, different, I suppose different moments of life, but she adapted to my way of life of working in a shop and being as she was, she was a great thing. Working in the shop itself has been a great what's name, because I had a lot of people who worked there very, very hard, and very, very, very honest and very, they gave you their 100%, and I have been very lucky there.

**OH: And Oscar, we're just going to halt this for a little while and I'll pick it up in the next card for the interview.**

**End of recording**

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**Interview 11 with Oscar Mattiazzo recorded by Madeleine Regan**

**at West Lakes Shore, South Australia,**

**on 6 June 2012**

**Christine Rebellato, Oscar's daughter, and Assunta Giovannini, an old friend  
contribute occasionally**

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**Oral Historian (OH): Oscar, we're just picking up from the previous interview, and I'd asked you about final reflections, and you were talking about the things that you felt fortunate to have in your life, and you got up to the point of talking about the shop in Croydon.**

Oscar Mattiazzo (OM): Yes, that's correct. I was saying that I was very lucky to find, we were there for just over ten years in the shop, and all the workers that were there were all very, very good. I found them very honest and hardworking. They never looked at the hour, I mean if there was people in the shop, I mean time to knock off was half past five at night, but if people had to be served they wouldn't knock off until everybody had been served, which is, you know, it's a great thing when you're running a business because that's part of your, running the business is the service you give to the people, and when you've got staff that does exactly that, you can't find anything better, so I was very, very lucky with all of them there, and I was sorry when I left the shop but circumstances had made it that way and, you know, I can name a few but anyway, I'm saying

that they were all very good [laughs].

Assunta here can bear that out, she worked for me for a number of years and she was tops, and that's the reason why we're still friends today, and always probably will be talking to each other [laughs], and that goes with everyone that worked in the shop, I still see people that worked in the shop in past time, and good friends, but even after selling the shop we were still as good as before, and it reflects with the, even the other day with another one that worked there, Laurie Horne, he come to see me and we exchanged things, and we see each other again, you know, it's a pity that some of them have passed on now, like Niilo Piovesan and Jimmy Compostella. No, there's quite a few that really stand out, well they all stood out, and I was very, very, very lucky that way.

Then of course we come back to the family, you know, Virginia and I had three daughters and I couldn't wish for a better situation than that. We were very unfortunate that Virginia passed away 20-odd years ago, but the children, Christine and Helen and Vicki, they all grew up pretty well, and they're a great – how can I put it without embarrassing me too much [laughs] – I couldn't wish for anything better, put it that way, and friends as well, and the husbands, they all married. Christine has got three children, Helen has got three, and Vicki's got two, and all the husbands are very, very good to me, and they help me all they can, especially these days that I'm getting a bit, getting a bit old and a bit [laughs] all sorts.

**OH: You've got a few challenges with your health, haven't you?**

OM: Oh well, I'm looking at it that it's another *che sera sera* [what will be, will be]. If something can be done I'm always pleased to hear about it, but there are things that can't be done and you have to take them as they come along, and just make the most of it of course. I also must say that the ill health started not so long ago, but up to that stage, two or three years ago, I was pretty good, you know. Now I can't drive anymore, or not allowed to drive anymore, and all that, but I'm still very lucky, I'm happy. I mean Christine here is just too good [laughs]. She looks after me like a lost dog [laughs], but yeah, it's something that you look back when you're at my age, at 88 now, and you look back at the years that you've had and the life that you've had and, you know I done, practically everything that I wanted to do I done, even you know with the horses, with the dogs, or with the [laughs], or travelling or business. In business most things went well, sometimes there's always something that goes wrong, but you can't be perfect about everything, and fortunately everything came out pretty well. And I can't thank the Lord enough for all that.

There's things that, you know, you reflect back and say, I can always say how lucky I've been in everything, although there might be other things that I've left out, but whatever it is, it's good and, oh no, that's about it.

**OH: Well thank you, Oscar.**

OM: Excuse me. Is there anything that you ...?

**OH:** Oscar is asking Christine or Assunta if there's anything that they would like to add.

Assunta Giovannini (AG): Your dad's lucky to have you.

**OH:** Oscar, I was going to say I think you've given a fantastic set of interviews, and particularly today's interviews for your reflections, they're so broad and thoughtful, and I found them really moving, so thank you very much for that.

OM: That's OK.

**OH:** And I'd also just like to ask, I often ask people at the end of interviews if they have any messages to give the younger generation. Is that a question that you could answer to complete this interview?

OM: Well, I think I could say that whatever happens in life, none of us are really perfect, but be as just as you can and fair as you can, and take things very – how can I put it – in a position like *che sarà sarà*, not to dwell too much on the things that went bad for you because you must learn by your mistakes. And if you learn by mistakes next time you might not do that mistake again, but if you do it, you do it a little bit less hurting, or whatever. Or not at all. So don't think that you're perfect because you're not, and just play fair. That's the main thing I think, and be honest to yourself. You know your limitations and you should work on those, and yeah. But as I repeated, you know, I've been very, very lucky in my life, very ... in every way.

**OH:** Well thank you very much, Oscar, for all the interviews and for your beautiful reflections, and your contribution to the Italian Market Gardeners Oral History Project.

OM: Yeah [laughs], yeah it's good, the market garden there has been a lesson for me too to see the development from zero, you might say, to what it is today, and what will be in the future as well because you can't stop, still it will go on and on and on. But yeah, as I say I'm sure that most people that went down to work in the gardens in those years never thought that they would get to the point where they are today, but that's how this young country of ours can develop some this way. It's such a good country. Of course we've got our problems with all sorts of things, but generally our democratic way does pretty well. I suppose I could talk about politics, but I think I'd better not [laughs].

**OH:** That's a whole other story, isn't it [laughs].

Christine Rebellato (CR): It's a religion [laughs].

**OH:** Thank you very much, Oscar, I really appreciate your contribution, thank you.

**End of recording**