

Italian market gardeners oral history project

Interview OH872/3 with Mary Tonellato

(Also present is Albert Tonellato, Mary's husband)

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

recorded by Madeleine Regan at Kidman Park, South Australia

3 October 2008

This is an interview with Mary Tonellato by Madeleine Regan on 3rd October 2008 in her home at Kidman Park. Also present is Mary's husband, Bert. Mary's family name was Zoanetti.

So, Mary, the first part of this interview is about your background and about your family. Would you be able to start with your parents and when they were born and where they were born?

MARY: Okay. My father was born in 1896 and he got married in 1922, and to my mother, who was born in 1904, and I was the only child in the family.

You were born in?

MARY: I was born in Zucllo, which is the town, and Trento, which is the province.

In Italia.

MARY: In Italy, that's right.

And your year of birth?

MARY: My year of birth is 17th September 1924. And my mother and I came to Australia in 1931, on 21st December, to join my father, who came in Australia in 1927. And there, when he came here, he went to work in cutting wood in the forest and when we came he went into a market garden up the Hills, called Basket Range, and in 1942 we came down towards Kidman Park, Fulham.

You came with your parents?

MARY: With my parents I came. And then after we just kept working. I was working in an office for a few years and then in 1947 I got married to Albert Tonellato and we just continued our gardening and working in the glasshouses.

And we used to plant potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers and beans and even watermelon, in the beginning of those years.

Mary, can you tell me a little bit about life with your parents at Basket Range? What was your father and mother, what were they growing?

MARY: We had potatoes, and then we had cherry trees and strawberries.

Wow, beautiful.

MARY: And apples.

Good climate.

MARY: Yes, that's right.

Do you know how much land you would have had up there?

BERT: Twelve and a half acres.

MARY: Was it twelve and a half acres? Yes.

And very hilly?

MARY: Yes, yes. There was only very, very little flat area.

Were there many other Italian families there?

MARY: Yes, there were, there, at that time, then, yes. And they all had orchards and that type of – you know, they used to grow that type of vegetable, cabbages and cauliflowers.

And did your father take the produce to the East End Market?

MARY: To the East End Market, that's right, yes. At first he started off with some horses and then he gradually got himself a little truck, and they used to leave early in the morning, even sometimes at three o'clock, to come down with the horses especially.

How far is Basket Range from the city, do you think?

BERT: I think it's about 12kilometres.

MARY: No, be more than 12 kilometres. I thought it was 12miles out, but I'm not sure.

BERT: It might have been.

MARY: I don't know exactly.

BERT: You know where Castle ... [Marble Hill].

Oh, yes.

BERT: Just behind that.

Oh, right, okay. And did your parents move because they got better kind of situation in Fulham?

MARY: Yes, yes, yes. We just moved because he wanted to come down closer to Adelaide and we started off a garden down here, and then in 1943 he passed away so my mother and I just continued with the glasshouses.

By yourselves?

MARY: Yes, us two.

How much land did you have?

MARY: Not much. We only had six glasshouses, that's all that we had.

So how old were you when your dad died?

MARY: It was 1943, nineteen years.

And were you still working in the office?

MARY: I was working in the office and then I was going to go into Calvary for nursing, but then he passed away so that blocked everything.

And did you stop working at the office so that you could help your mum in the glasshouses?

MARY: Yes, that's right, yes.

So how long would you have continued that work together?

MARY: It would have been about ---.

BERT: She got married and she started again.

Yes. (laughter)

MARY: No, with her it would have been about three years. Three years, yes.

Wow, hard work. And then I imagine that there wasn't welfare.

MARY: There was nothing, no welfare or whatever.

So it was really important that you kept up that work.

MARY: Yes, you kept going.

How old, in 1943, would your mother have been, then?

MARY: Well, she was twenty years older than me.

Thirty-nine.

MARY: Yes.

Young.

MARY: Yes, that's right.

But she obviously was fit and healthy and so were you.

MARY: Young, yes. (laughs)

And you grew tomatoes?

MARY: Yes, in the glasshouses, and beans, and I think we grew a little bit of potato but not very much at all because we couldn't, you know, it was too hard for us.

Can you tell me exactly where your land was in Fulham?

MARY: Our land actually, when he passed away, we came away from Fulham and we came down here near Grange Road, near Findon.

Right. So the piece of land that has got the boundary with Grange Road?

MARY: Yes, that's right. And towards Frogmore Road.

Right.

MARY: Between Findon Road and Frogmore Road, that's where our land was. But bordering Grange Road.

And how many glasshouses did you have then?

MARY: Six.

Do you remember what life was like? You know, say, what would your average day have been with your mum at that time?

MARY: Oh, heavens above! (laughs) It was quite normal. You know, we never used to go out that often, so that's how it went.

Up early?

MARY: I used to go out with some girlfriends in the Sunday for a walk.

BERT: Not the boyfriend?

MARY: For a walk. For a walk, that's all.

But you would have had a pretty early rising to work in the gardens, I imagine.

MARY: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes.

Especially in summer, picking the tomatoes.

MARY: That's right, yes. We only had the six glasshouses, but all right, we were only two women working.

Was that unusual, for you and your mum to be working by yourselves like that?

MARY: Not really, because some people used to come and help if we needed it. It was next doors that had the same type of work and they used to have more machinery – like not big machinery, but just easier to work with, light machinery to work, when there was a bit of digging or whatever.

But I was wondering if there would have been many women working by themselves, or was it more – – –?

MARY: Oh, no, no. They were all married, but all the women that we had around our place there were all working in their glasshouses. (laughs)

Yes, but probably alongside husbands and – – –.

MARY: Yes, yes, yes.

So unusual to find the mother and the daughter.

MARY: Well, that was the only way, I suppose, that we could get something out for living and being together, really.

Yes. And was your home on the land there, too?

MARY: No, it wasn't a home, it was just a little shed. And those years there wasn't much accommodation at all around.

BERT: There was nothing.

MARY: There was nothing, and most of the people used to live in sheds. Sheds, and they used to split it up and build dividers and sleep in the sheds.

So what was your accommodation like, then, with your mum?

MARY: We had one bedroom and a little spare room and a kitchen in the veranda, type of thing, like pulled down from the shed.

And floor, did you have concrete?

MARY: Board.

Boards. So who would have built that?

MARY: Well, there was a friend that lent us his shed that he had because he went overseas, so he said we can use it, and they pulled that shed over where we had the land so we can live in it.

You were lucky to have that.

MARY: Yes.

So that would have been 1943, 1944, 1945.

MARY: Yes. Well, say even '46.

BERT: Bruno's father helped a lot.

MARY: His father and his uncle, and actually his uncle's shed was the one we were living in.

Okay, and that's the Piovesan family?

MARY: Yes, that's right.

So you were living close to them.

MARY: Yes, not far.

So we're talking about the war years, really, aren't we?

BERT: That's right.

MARY: Oh, yes. Just after, yes, that's right. Actually, when my father died I remember the day of the funeral the siren at Holden was let off and that was closed during the War and then after that day there, you know, they opened up the factory, whatever they were doing, I can't remember.

Oh, that's interesting.

MARY: Yes.

And a strong memory for you.

MARY: Yes.

Where was your father's funeral conducted, where was the church?

MARY: It was down at West Terrace. He's down at West Terrace.

And which church did you go to?

MARY: Saint Patrick we used to go to.

Oh, in the city.

MARY: Yes. We never had that much time to go to church those years.

No, you would have been very busy.

MARY: Yes.

And can you tell me how, then, you and Bert met? Because you told me that your father died in 1943, then you and your mum had those years working.

MARY: Yes, yes. And what we were doing is – it was a community that we were all close together. His family used to live next door to Bruno’s father.

Bruno Piovesan.

MARY: It was all connected, type of thing. And that’s how we got to know each other.

About how many families do you think were living in close – – –?

MARY: Close by? There was –

BERT: Piovesan.

MARY: – Piovesan.

BERT:

MARY: Zalunardo.

BERT: What’s-the-name’s father and mother.

Marchioro?

BERT: Yes, Marchioro, yes.

MARY: Yes. We were bordering where they had their land, and then there was a Ballestrin. There was Ballestrin, Zalunardo, Piovesan, Laio and Tonellato. We were all not far from one another.

BERT: Each one, they had their own garden.

MARY: Little bit.

BERT: Little bit.

So a tight community of people, which would have meant that that’s how you and your mother would have got help when you needed it.

MARY: Yes, yes, yes, yes. People were very helpful then with one another.

And had all those families come from a similar place in Italy originally?

BERT: Fairly close.

MARY: Yes, they would have, wouldn’t they?

BERT: Yes. We come from Treviso, I don’t know if you ever heard – – –?

I have been to Treviso.

BERT: Not far from there. Not far, it would be about — — —.

MARY: Yes, but that section there, that area. Region.

BERT: They all come from that area.

Would your parents have known Bert's parents?

MARY: Not before, no.

Not before.

MARY: No, no. Because I come from further away than Trento, near the border of Austria.

BERT: Zuclo, not far from the border.

MARY: Zuclo.

BERT: [Zuclo is not far from the border.]

But still in Veneto?

MARY: No, no. Trentino.

Trentino, ah, right.

MARY: Trentino way.

BERT: From the mountains.

MARY: I'm a different race. (laughter)

What's the difference, do you think, between — — —.

MARY: I don't know. Just maybe in foods and I don't know about ways, really. No, see, we're more used to mountains.

BERT: Mountains, all right. They give you the — — —! (laughter)

MARY: Whereas, I think they had a different — well, up where I came from, the people, I was only small when I came here, but the people over there, they used to go out up into the bush and get the grass, the dry grass, and heap it up and then take it down in huge amounts and carry it on their shoulders, on the back of their shoulders here, rest it on their neck.

Gee, strong.

MARY: Yes. It wasn't heavy, because it was just sort of more volume.

BERT: They had to get ready for the winter because in winter they couldn't go out anymore.

So this was a way of preparing for ---.

MARY: Yes, and they used to get their timbers. And when the snow used to come they used to have to go and to open the door in the morning they would have to go with a shovel and shovel away the snow.

Because there was so much.

MARY: So much of it, yes.

Mary, we didn't talk about this at the beginning of the interview, but how old were you when you first came?

MARY: Seven years old.

Seven years old. And had you been to school in Italy by that time?

MARY: Just – I can't remember if it was one year, but it wasn't even quite one year.

So when you arrived in Adelaide and you went with your mum up to Basket Range –

MARY: Up at Basket Range, yes.

– you went to school there?

MARY: Yes.

And was there a school at Basket Range?

MARY: Yes.

And do you remember much about that?

MARY: Yes. (laughs) Better not say. (laughs)

Go on.

MARY: No, no, no. I don't know. You know, they were very friendly. I mean, they used to make friends, just as if I was their next-door neighbour, and they were very good to us – up in the Hills, at any rate.

And you finished primary school at Basket Range School?

MARY: Yes, and I went to high school at Norwood.

Oh, down the hill.

MARY: Yes. Used to come by bus every morning.

And how many years of high school did you do?

MARY: I went to two years: I did my Intermediate and then I got a job in town.
And I started work, and I was still up in the Hills.

So you would have gone into town by bus.

MARY: Bus, yes.

And then when your parents moved down here ---.

MARY: Yes, I used to go to catch the tram on Henley Beach Road. (laughs)

Oh, right. Little bit of a walk.

MARY: Yes.

BERT: Those years there was tram everywhere.

MARY: Yes, that's right.

BERT: Now they're trying to put them back, first they take them up.

And now we've got them again, yes. So, Mary, if we go back to the '40s and you and your mum are working away and keeping busy, did you go to market then with your produce?

MARY: No.

You would give it to someone else?

MARY: Yes. I can't remember just who.

BERT: That would have been the Chinese.

MARY: I can't remember.

BERT: East End Market.

MARY: But we never used to go to market.

So maybe one of the other families would have ---.

MARY: Must have helped us out that way, but I just can't remember.

BERT: Yes, there used to be the packers, they used to call them, in the market.
They used to go around. If you rang them up they'd come down and pick your tomatoes up and sell them for you.

And maybe that's ---.

MARY: To the packers, yes, but I can't remember how it was taken there or whether they came to pick it up or what, I can't remember that.

And tell me what happened when you and Bert met.

MARY: What happened? (laughter)

BERT: If I tell you where we met ---.

MARY: Ssh, no.

BERT: We went, the first night I took her out, went to see *Naughty Nineties*. That was the first time I took her to the pictures.

MARY: It was the first time that the Can-can came here in Adelaide.

Oh, really? And where was it?

MARY: It was in Hindley Street.

BERT: That's right. It was in town.

MARY: I can't remember. It was in Hindley Street, you know where Miller Anderson was?

Yes. Oh, there was a theatre there.

MARY: Yes, not far from there. Yes, not far from there, but I can't exactly pinpoint how far.

Oh, so that was a big night out.

MARY: Yes. (laughs)

BERT: After that we were in trouble. Because of the dog. The dog, after that night, he used to come around to our door, the kitchen door, and Mum goes, 'Berto, there's somebody waiting for you outside'. It was the dog there, sitting there. He was the ugliest dog, but every night he used to come around.

MARY: See, he went home with him one night, and from then he started going to pick him up.

BERT: You wouldn't believe it.

Because he knew that you were going to get together.

MARY: Maybe, yes. (laughs)

What kind of dog was he?

MARY: He was a terrier, a real jet-black one.

BERT: But ugly.

MARY: And he had moustaches coming out from everywhere.

And he obviously really liked you, Bert.

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Maybe, you see, because my father wasn't around – he was the one that brought the dog home from market, see? And because my father wasn't around maybe I thought that that's why he got attached to him so much.

Another male.

MARY: Another male, yes.

Isn't that interesting?

MARY: Yes.

So you got to know each other and decided – – –.

MARY: Just carried on like that.

And what year did you marry?

MARY: 1947.

BERT: '47.

1947. And what happened with your mum then?

MARY: Well, she stayed with us. She lived with us all the time. She passed away, how many years? It's 13 years she passed away, so what year would that be?

So you got married in 1947. I'm adding up here. 1960.

MARY: Yes.

So when you got married to this handsome gentleman here where did you go and live?

MARY: We built a little house and that's when we moved to Frogmore Road. We built a little house there, asbestos, and it was the first little house that was built in this area here. Like I said before, everybody used to live in sheds.

So 1947 the first kind of house. And if we look at this little map here that Johnny Marchioro drew, so here's Grange Road in the north –

MARY: Oh, right.

– and here's Frogmore Road and here's Findon Road –

MARY: Findon Road, yes.

– to the west, here is the name Piovesan and Tonellato.

MARY: That's it.

And that's where you lived?

MARY: No, we didn't live there. That's where his parents lived, and Bruno's parents lived, and we lived down here near Frogmore Road, in a bit, just a little fraction in.

And how much land did you have then?

MARY: It was about –

BERT: Two acres.

MARY: – two, two and a half acres.

Right, okay. And so you knew the life of somebody who was a market gardener.

MARY: Yes. (laughs) That's right.

BERT: Because she was such in love with me.

Did you have a honeymoon before you – – –?

MARY: In the glasshouses.

BERT: In the glasshouses.

In the glasshouses!

MARY: Pulling up the tomatoes because they were lying flat. They grew too long.

What month did you marry?

MARY: In April.

Oh, okay.

MARY: And we plant the tomatoes about February. So by the time they grew a bit too long and we had to put the strings and pull them up.

So that's what you were doing when you were [first married].

MARY: That's my honeymoon.

BERT: Yes.

And was the house already finished when you were married?

MARY: Yes.

BERT: The chap built it, the carpenter, he charged me five pounds to build it. To build.

MARY: You gave him five.

BERT: Not the material, just the ---.

MARY: No, you gave him --

Just to build it?

MARY: -- yes. For the work.

BERT: Yes, for the work.

And what was the house like? You had a bathroom inside and kitchen inside?

MARY: Yes. Like under the veranda we had the bathroom and a little bit of a laundry, and then inside we had the kitchen, bedroom, the lounge and our bedroom. It was three bedrooms.

Right, so it must have been quite luxurious after the kind of ---.

MARY: In the shed, yes.

BERT: It looked really nice.

It must have been lovely when you first got married.

MARY: Yes.

So when in the first weeks of marriage you were hard at work in the tomatoes, how many glasshouses did you have as a couple?

MARY: Ten. Wasn't it, ten?

BERT: Ten yes.

Ten. And did that include the ones that had been with you and your mum?

BERT: Yes.

MARY: I think so, yes. That's right.

BERT: I got her daughter out of her hands and she gave me the glasshouses for it.
(laughter)

**Probably wasn't fantastic pay, the glasshouses, for this wonderful ---. (laughter)
And can you remember about your first years of married life? (clock chimes)**

MARY: We were just happy and carrying on our work. We didn't worry about the work, no.

BERT: She was in love about two or three years.

And children?

MARY: Yes. Well, my daughter was born in 1948, the son in 1949 – there was 18 months' difference – and then there was, after three years, another one was born in 1953 and another one in 1956.

So altogether you had – – –.

MARY: We've got four children.

Two boys – – –?

MARY: No, one boy and three girls.

Yes. And how did you live as a mother and as the wife of a market gardener, how was that?

MARY: Oh, to get on together, you mean?

Well, the work.

MARY: Oh, the work. Yes, but that's a good few years ago. Look, these two are married, he's got four children.

Right. We're looking at a photo of Mary and Bert's children.

MARY: Yes. That's Raymond, that's our son there. There's his wife and then the three children.

That's lovely. And this is the whole – – –?

MARY: That's Linda's, is it? Yes, that's Linda. But this picture here was taken about five years ago. So others have been added to that.

Since then, yes.

MARY: Yes.

It's lovely. And Linda's your eldest.

MARY: Yes.

So I'm trying to imagine what it was like in your household with living next to or close to your work and the children.

MARY: It was enjoyable, really. When the children used to come home, they used to be big enough that they used to go to school, they all used to come over the glasshouses or whatever. And he always used to go and get them, pick them up. We always used to take them and pick them up.

Where did they go to school?

MARY: At Flinders Park first and then Hindmarsh, and then some ended up at Kensington when they went to high school.

Yes, Saint Joseph's at Kensington.

MARY: That's right, yes.

So they helped in the glasshouses a bit.

MARY: Oh, they only used to pass some time, just to carry empty buckets or whatever.

BERT: Used to love driving that little tractor.

MARY: And Raymond used to drive a little tractor – it was just a tiny one – because I used to drive that in the glasshouses, too. (laughs)

And you continued growing tomatoes and beans?

MARY: And then in the glasshouses, once the tomatoes were finished, the beans would be already up the same string, but then we'd cut the tomato at the base and that would be dead so the beans would be the ones growing up, or where we never had beans we had cucumbers.

And they'd be on the strings – – –.

MARY: The strings, too.

BERT: We used to get two crops in a year, instead of one.

That was really good planning.

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Yes. We used to have cucumbers. And then at the end we had to have capsicum, didn't we? But no string with them, they just had to be planted.

Did you also have vegetables planted outside?

MARY: In the beginning we did.

What did you have?

MARY: Potatoes, that was the hardest work. Digging with the hand – digging with a plough, yes, but then you had to pick them up with the hands and bucket them and then carry the heavy buckets.

BERT: We'd give the kids threepence a bucket, you'd pick up a bucket of potatoes, they'd get threepence.

They probably felt they were really lucky.

BERT: Oh, yes.

And what sort of life did you have outside the working life as you were raising your family?

MARY: Well, it was visiting people. We always used to go and visit one another. And even in the evenings if we would go, the men would play cards and the women, while the children were playing, being occupied with books or whatever, the women used to knit.

Knit for the kids?

MARY: Yes. Because once it was all knitted garments, especially with the babies, all knitted frocks or whatever, tops and that. And that's how it went.

And knitting's good because there's an opportunity for conversation.

MARY: Yes. We used to enjoy it. That was the way of life, you know. Well, then, as the children got bigger, then we could get more out and when the clubs came along we used to go to the clubs and whatever.

Like the Veneto.

MARY: And in town the Carrington [the Italian Club in Carrington Street].

BERT: Carrington's – we're still a member there.

MARY: We haven't been there for ages.

With your mum living with you, I guess that was also – she would have been a help.

MARY: Yes, for company for the children. At least I could go out and help him without having the hassle of the children at home on their own. I used to do the cooking and whatever and washing and whatever, but no, she was a help for the children.

And where did you do your local shopping and food shopping and things like that?

MARY: That was around here, down at Coles.

BERT: I don't know, it wasn't Coles.

MARY: There wasn't a Coles? I can't remember what it was.

BERT: Chicken from the corner there – – –.

MARY: No, but after, Albert. There was Coles there that came up after.

BERT: Well, even before, the poultry farming, that was Cole. The name of the person that had the poultry farm was Cole.

MARY: Coles, yes.

BERT: Then they built a Coles supermarket.

MARY: And we had a cow. We had chicken. And we had lots of kittens. (laughs)

And who milked the cow?

MARY: My husband.

Bert. So did you make butter and cheese?

MARY: We made butter, I used to make butter. Cheese, cream. Anything else?

Beautiful.

MARY: No. Butter, cheese and cream, and we used to have as much milk as we wanted, and the cream in the milk was so thick – not like the milk you get now.

Did many people have cows?

BERT: Everybody had a cow, really.

MARY: Most of them, yes, yes.

BERT: Most of them.

MARY: Most of them, yes.

A good way to have all that dairy product, fresh.

MARY: Yes.

BERT: During the War you had to have something to buy butter, you had to have it once a week or once a fortnight.

MARY: Oh, coupons.

BERT: Yes, coupons.

MARY: That's right, yes.

So if you had a cow?

MARY: Yes, you had no problems, yes.

So how long did you stay on Frogmore Road, then?

MARY: Yes, we were there, because 1951 we bought our land on Findon Road.

And I think that I remember you told me that the land on Findon Road was six acres and it had been part of ten acres of a returned soldiers' scheme.

MARY: Yes, that's right.

And whereabouts on Findon Road?

BERT: You know where the squash court is?

MARY: Maybe Johnson & Johnson.

BERT: Johnson & Johnson?

MARY: They've got their warehouses there.

Right. So that's quite close to the river.

BERT: No.

MARY: No, no, no. There's a garage there on Findon Road. As you come up from Grange Road there's a garage on the left-hand side, and our property was just –

BERT: Opposite.

MARY: – nearly opposite, just a fraction higher.

And what was that land like in 1951, then?

MARY: That land, it was this returned soldier that had it and I think he had pigs in there, didn't he, Albert?

BERT: Yes, pigs.

MARY: Just a few pigs, and that's all. And the old house, a nice, big old house.

BERT: It was nice.

MARY: And so we bought that land with the house on it.

And the house you were able to move into and live.

MARY: Yes, yes, yes, fix it and move in.

And what did you do with the land? You didn't have pigs?

BERT: No.

MARY: No. We had the garden.

BERT: Shifted the glasshouses.

MARY: That's what we had, the garden.

So did you move the glasshouses?

MARY: Yes.

BERT: We used to move them every two or three years, we'd shift them from one spot to another because we never had anything to what's-the-name.

MARY: To fumigate the soil –

BERT: Fumigate.

MARY: – for diseases and that that the tomatoes used to get, so you had to shift it into a different [position].

BERT: That was a big job. Still, never used to worry.

Very big job.

MARY: Yes.

And the Findon Road, is it north of Grange Road, then, the property?

BERT: About halfway from Grange Road to the river.

MARY: Is it north or south?

Oh, okay, it must be – – –.

MARY: It's more towards Henley Beach Road. Is that south, isn't it?

Yes. Were there many other Italian families near you there?

BERT: Oh, yes. Mostly all Italian.

MARY: Down along Frogmore Road and Findon Road it was occupied by Italians.

BERT: Used to be called Rowells Road.

MARY: Once.

BERT: They changed the name two or three times.

MARY: No, but Rowells Road is on Findon Road on the other side of the river.

And someone told me that this area used to be called St James Park.

BERT: That's right, yes.

MARY: That's right, yes.

I wonder when that changed.

MARY: I don't know, but then it changed, oh, it would have been around the '50s, the '60s, I think, because there's a St James Park at Unley, I think I remember hearing, but I'm not quite sure.

BERT: That's why they changed the name.

MARY: That's probably why they changed the name, I don't know. But it was St James Park, yes.

Sounds very grand, doesn't it, St James Park?

MARY: Unless – I wonder if it was because it was given to the returned soldiers. I don't know.

The returned soldiers had land on Findon Road and around this area.

MARY: The returned soldiers was where Grillos were, was that – I don't think that was returned soldiers, because that's where the horses were. And from our land and Tilley, there was Tilley there too, and from Tilley's land and up to the river that was all returned soldiers. About halfway up from Grange Road to the river, about halfway was all returned soldiers.

And what were they doing with the land?

BERT: They rented them out, Tilley.

MARY: Did Tilley rent them out? I know he sold it in pieces.

BERT: Next-door neighbour.

MARY: And so did Keele.

BERT: Keele, yes. He used to sell, I think, an acre every year so he could have a good time. The Italians used to buy them up.

And he was a returned soldier?

BERT: Oh, yes.

But did they actually have market gardens?

BERT: No.

But they had like ten acres.

MARY: They had land.

BERT: That's right.

MARY: Yes, yes.

BERT: They used to grow lucerne, some.

MARY: Oh, did they?

BERT: Yes.

MARY: I can't remember that.

BERT: And then they used to bunch it up, the lucerne, they used to sell it – I don't know to who.

And these were the soldiers returned from World War I?

BERT: Returned soldiers. Yes, that's right. Like my father, think it was in the war 1914–1918 –

MARY: Oh, that's right, yes.

BERT: – six years, because he was in the army before the War started and then he started to work – – –.

MARY: Down here.

BERT: Yes.

It's interesting that this land that was given to the returned soldiers was quite close to the city.

MARY: You would think, yes.

BERT: Well, in those years – – –.

So alongside the returned soldiers there were a lot of Italian people.

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Yes. That's right, because they would have been against one another, that right?

BERT: Well, we never had any trouble at all.

MARY: No, no problem.

BERT: My father was a quiet man. He never used to worry – he used to *worry*, but not to fight. He used to say 'If the War comes out like the other one', he said, 'Send a politician'. (laughter) He always used to say that.

So how long did you stay then on Findon Road? You went there in 1951.

MARY: And we shifted in 1974. That's when we sold the property.

And how much did you sell, like how big was your land?

MARY: The whole piece.

BERT: No, about two or three acres. We sold it to Johnson & Johnson.

MARY: Johnson & Johnson, I forgot that one.

BERT: Then we sold out all in one block. We had a nice house there because it was Basket Range stone. I think it was the best house in the street. Then we sold everything out, we wanted to keep the house but they wouldn't buy the land if we don't sell it.

MARY: Didn't sell everything.

BERT: I said, 'That's all right'. So we bought a block on Henley Beach Road, the best block in South Australia. It was next to the bank and opposite the hotel, Lockleys Hotel.

That's on the corner of Tapleys Hill Road and Henley Beach.

MARY: It's the first house from Tapleys Hill Road going towards town.

And it's still there? I have to look at it.

BERT: Yes. The smart, because his wife said, 'We'll go out and look for a house'. My son's wife said to Mary, 'We'll go round, see if we can buy a house'. So we had a double garage in the front, our house, and a garage out the back. He says, 'That's really the one we need'. So she said, 'You can have that one and we'll buy this one here'. (laughter)

So in 1974 you moved, and did you have any market gardening land then?

BERT: No.

MARY: No.

So you finished your ---.

MARY: Got rid of it.

BERT: Finished there.

And what did you do – I'll speak with you after, Bert – but, Mary, what did *you* do when you moved?

MARY: I was in the household, and then he was buying up units and that, old houses, and we used to fix them up to rent, for rental purposes.

And you helped out with that.

BERT: She was in charge.

So that was another team effort.

MARY: Yes.

And then you moved back to Frogmore road.

BERT: That's right.

MARY: Yes.

When was that?

MARY: That was 26 years ago, so that would be '82.

So you came back to the area that you both knew.

MARY: Yes, yes, where we'd built our little house, the first house, yes.

Is it on the same land?

MARY: Not far. The little house was just a little bit further up that way.

And can you remember when all the housing around here first started in a big way?

BERT: Oh, yes.

MARY: Yes.

When?

MARY: The housing just – no, really, not very many, because there was land in between, but then after, when the people had finished working with the gardens and that, then that's when it all started, about what, 20 years ago?

BERT: Cut them up in blocks and sell them.

MARY: About twenty years ago, I suppose.

So the land that you would have known changed so much.

MARY: Definitely, yes.

Not the same place, really.

MARY: No.

No. And Mary, if you look back over your kind of life as a market gardener, what were some of the things that you enjoyed?

MARY: As a market gardener?

Yes.

MARY: I don't know. We used to come home, I used to enjoy the family and just being together, I suppose, used to enjoy that. Work never worried me at all, nothing, never had the thought, 'Oh, gee, how much I've got to do and whatever'. Just used to carry on.

BERT: Yes, I think when you're happy, a man and wife, I think everything works out. Be happy together.

Yes.

BERT: That's what we were.

MARY: No, well, the family, I don't know. Just think of – you know, used to love to be – – –.

BERT: Every time we changed our motor car we'd go for a holiday, take the kids with us with a caravan.

So you saw a lot of the countryside.

MARY: Yes.

What about the seasons? Did you have a preference for any particular season?

MARY: Well, I used to like my summers.

Did you?

MARY: Yes. I don't like the cold weather that much. (laughs)

Must have been hard work in summer in the market gardens, though.

MARY: Yes. It was not scorching in the glasshouses, but outside it would have been, but not scorching; it was more steamy in the glasshouses.

And winter in the glasshouses?

MARY: It was good. (laughs)

That was steamy, too?

MARY: No.

BERT: She was young.

And tell me, did you go back to Italy?

MARY: The first time we went was in 1968 and then in twenty years after we went another once.

BERT: We stayed there six months.

MARY: The first time.

BERT: First time.

And did you travel very much when you were there?

MARY: Yes, yes. He bought a car and we travelled a good bit.

BERT: Twenty-nine thousand kilometres we did.

MARY: With the car. Then we went as far as Portugal with a tour, yes.

And did you have many relatives that you -- --?

MARY: No, I never had any, and Albert had –

BERT: A few.

MARY: – young boys, but when we went in '68 those cousins of yours, they were very young.

BERT: Yes.

MARY: You had an auntie still, though.

BERT: That's right, my auntie.

MARY: You had your auntie.

BERT: When we went over the first time we got a flat right opposite my auntie.

MARY: Sorry, I had an auntie, too. (laughs)

BERT: I was just going to tell her. You had an auntie.

MARY: Yes.

And what sort of experience was that, you know, when you first went?

MARY: Well, when I first went, when I met them, I got all lumped up.

BERT: She was crying like a baby.

MARY: Yes. It's funny. Although I didn't know them, because I was very little when I came away, I know *of* them, but that's all, I just got lumped up.

Very emotional.

MARY: I am.

BERT: Yes. Her auntie.

But that would be an emotional experience, like returning –

MARY: Yes, yes, yes.

– and for them, too.

MARY: Oh, yes, definitely.

BERT: Her auntie still had a cot in the bedroom and mother and father bedroom, bed, she had never took it away. She left the room how they left.

MARY: Yes.

Wow, gee. And did you remember what places looked like?

MARY: I can remember the piazza, because I remember when we left all the women got together, I remember that, all the women got together in the little piazza to say goodbye to us and they were all crying and saying, 'Where are you going? Where there's all animals'. (laughs)

They were really worried.

MARY: Worried, yes. So, you know, nobody knew but their own little area where they lived, that's all. It was very poor country, that's all.

And do you know why your father had come to Australia?

MARY: Actually, my father when he was 15 years old he was escorted to America by somebody, because he was too young to go on his own so he had to have some person to go with him, and he went to America, and he came out in about 1920-something.

And do you know why he left his home and his family?

MARY: Well, he left, there was no work or no money, no money anywhere. I'm sure that was the reason why, you know.

And was he the only one from his family to leave?

MARY: He was the only boy, yes.

Such a big thing. So he left at 15 and didn't return.

MARY: Yes, he returned when he got married, that's in 1920, something like that.

So he went back, married your mother.

MARY: Yes, and then in 1927 they came here – he came here.

And then a little while later – – –.

MARY: They came here because most of the people that went into other countries, and the ones that went to America, there was a lot from that same township that was over there, so apparently it was a good few over there, and they knew of America and so they used to go there. And when my father went to go back

again the immigration was closed, that's why they all turned to Australia that year there.

BERT: Same as us.

MARY: Yes.

BERT: We were supposed to go to Canada.

MARY: Even his family, even his father.

BERT: My father. And then they turned to Australia because they'd stopped the immigration.

So the decision for your father, then, was to come to Australia; and did he know anybody here or did he come with somebody?

MARY: There was nobody here, no, no, no. He was at an age that he could come. No, there was nobody here.

Such a big thing.

MARY: Not from the same township, at any rate, nobody that he knew of, you know. There were Italians here. Not very many, I don't think. Very, very few.

Because it was 1927, wasn't it?

MARY: Yes.

And when you arrived in 1931 – yes, four years after.

MARY: After, yes.

And your father would have made some money to pay for the – – –.

MARY: The trip, maybe. That's all. Because there was no money around. Actually, in the beginning, I think it was the first month or so when he went cutting wood, he didn't even get paid. You know, that's what it was like.

Do you know where he cut wood?

MARY: It was up Truro way, wasn't it, Albert? Up Truro, up Blanchetown, towards that area there.

Hard work.

MARY: Yes. And that was the only way, I suppose, that they could get some, maybe. I don't know what else would have been around. Gardening, that's all, I suppose, wouldn't it be?

Not much other work.

MARY: No.

BERT: I used to go to Truro to get our firewood. You know, about a foot long.

MARY: Mallee, the Mallee.

BERT: Mallee country. We used to leave about three or four o'clock in the morning, a couple of times a year used to go up and get ---.

MARY: When we used to have to wood stove.

BERT: Wood stove. You could just save a bit of money.

MARY: No, but it was good because you used to have the ---.

BERT: The whole house was warm.

MARY: The whole house always used to have boiling water. (laughs) It was good.

BERT: It was a good life.

And so, Mary, that is an interesting unfolding of events, isn't it, from like your father arriving here –

MARY: Yes.

– in 1927 and here we are in 2008 –

MARY: And eight.

– yes, 80 years. And a kind of life that maybe if you'd stayed in Italy you wouldn't have had.

MARY: I don't think so. I don't know. I don't think, though, because when we went in 1968 in Italy I thought those poor country towns were very, very poor. I felt sorry for families, you know? But that's how I felt, you know, because they were very poor, those country towns there. The cities might have been different, but I don't know.

BERT: But even in the city they never had any jobs. Hardly any.

MARY: Oh, I don't know. Whatever, yes.

And for you, your life was quite established here, wasn't it?

MARY: Oh, yes, definitely. I really enjoyed life, to be with the family and that's all. And you had lots of friends, and once upon a time there was more friends than now. Now everybody's glued to the television and (laughs) –

BERT: That's what it is.

MARY: – haven't got time to go out. And you're getting older, so – – –.

BERT: We used to play cards, too, once a week, the four of us. We used to go for dinner at times, one week they'd come here and the next week we'd go somewhere else, and the women would have got cakes ready for them.

MARY: We used to get supper and they used to go home about two or three o'clock in the morning.

Wild! So, Mary, the important things for you, then, have been like family, work, friends.

MARY: Yes, that's what it was like.

That's lovely. Well, thank you very much for your time and giving the interview.

MARY: All right. Nice to have been able to say something. (laughs)

It's great.

End of interview