

## **Italian Market Gardeners' Oral History Project**

### **Interview OH872/32 with Lena Moscheni nee Rossetto**

(Also present are: Claudio Moscheni, Lena's husband and Amanda Rossetto, Lena's niece)

**Interview deposited in the JD Somerville Oral History,  
State Library of South Australia  
recorded by Madeleine Regan at Woodville South, South Australia**

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Oral Historian (OH): Thank you Lena for agreeing to be interviewed today. We're going to start with some questions about your family background, but first of all can you tell me your full name?

Lena Moscheni (LM): My name is Elena Moscheni Rossetto. I live in 10 Athlone Street, Woodville South, 5011.

OH: And what about your date of birth?

LM: My date of birth is 8 December 1932. I was born during Depression days.

OH: Were you named for anybody?

LM: Yes, I was named after my Nonna (grandmother) in Italy, whose name was Elena as well.

OH: And was she your mother's mother?

LM: She was Dad's mother.

OH: Right! And can you tell me about your parents, first of all your father, what was his name?

LM: My father's name was Gelindo and my mother's name was Adelina.

OH: Do you have an idea of when they were born?

LM: Dad was born in 1895, and Mum was born in 1904.

OH: Thank you.

LM: In June.

OH: In June, thank you.

LM: And Dad was born in January, 14 January, 1895.

OH: That's great, you've got a terrific memory. Where were your parents born?

LM: They were born in Italy, in Treviso. Dad was born in Bigolino, Valdobiaddene, and Mum was born in Biadene of Montebelluna.

OH: Thank you. And in Italy, what work did they do?

LM: My Mum's mother died when she was only ten I think. They sent her to work with a very rich family, and she was a nanny in Venice. She looked after little children, but as she got older she had to do domestic work as well. She lived in a place in Venice where the, the big bells, there were bells there, and they were really annoying, she used to tell me anyway.

My Dad, well he went to the First World War but he was, as they say *contadino* (farm worker), worked on the land I think, because Nonno (uncle) Rossetto in Italy, he owned a fair bit of land there, and they used to grow grapes. I can't remember anything else, but that's what he did anyway.

OH: And Lena, where were you born?

LM: I was born in Adelaide, in the Queen Victoria Hospital, as were all my, nearly all my brothers, three of us. No, Romeo, me and Aldo were, no, Romeo and me was born in Queen Victoria, Aldo was born at Keswick somewhere, in a little hospital that's no longer there. She had two, one in Calvary (Hospital) and then she had some others in Queen Victoria. One died at birth Michael, three hours old, one boy, and the others were born there, that's it.

OH: Do you know what your parents were doing around the time that you were born, because you were the first born, weren't you?

LM: No, second.

OH: Second born, that's right, sorry, Romeo was the first.

LM: My Dad, when he first arrived from Italy, he worked in the quarries up at the hills there somewhere, pick and shovel, you know, and then after that he became a gardener down at Lockleys. By the time Romeo and I was born he was working down in Frogmore Road, working for somebody else, I don't remember who actually. Mum did, she had boarders because there was not much money around. The vegetables weren't selling, it was Depression time, and Mum took in boarders. Two of them were her brother-in-laws, and one was Vittorio Marchioro, and another one, I don't remember who the other one was now, but I remember Vittorio because I used to, he used to tell me that I used to sit on his lap, and Mum, Mum had all these boarders to look after, Dad, and two children by then, me and Romeo, it was a lot of work.

She used to wash and cook and iron; she had chickens, and when I was two years old, every day I used to go down to the chicken coop and drink an egg, put a, make a little hole. When they were just laid they were warm, I'd make a little hole and drink this egg. I couldn't stand it now but anyway, every day Mum went to pick up the eggs, one was always empty, and she couldn't work it out why.

[Laughter]

LM: So then one day she followed me and she caught me, but she didn't hit me or anything. Then she knew what was happening to the egg. I remember that, and I was only two, because I suppose she told me about it so many times that I kept it in my head.

OH: And this was on Frogmore Road?

LM: On Frogmore Road somewhere.

OH: Can you remember the location on Frogmore Road?

LM: I know it was an old house, really old house. I used, Mum got a little bike from somebody, and I used to ride this little bike around the, the property. I don't really remember too much, but I remember once Romeo, he was, if I was two he would have been three, because we were only one year and a bit different age, and I remember Zio Ato saying that, Mum said actually, that Romeo was

missing, and they didn't know where he was. My uncle, Zio Ato, he got on the bike and he went up the street looking for him. He found him, he was walking with a whole lot of stray dogs, and he was talking to them, you know how kids are, walking and walking and walking. He didn't even worry where he was, and it was getting dark too. Anyway, finally my uncle picked him up, put him on the bike, and brought him back home. Mum and Dad said, *Romeo, what were you doing?* He said, *I was taking the dogs home.* That was his answer.

OH: Lena, I think you told me that the house was quite close to the river on Frogmore Road.

LM: I remember that we lived next door to the Rebuli family, like Zia Nana and Zio Bruno, Guido wasn't born then. We lived next door to one another, and that was near the river, near the Torrens River. Then my Dad and Zio Bruno had a row over something in the farm I suppose, and so that's when, that's when they shifted, then they went up to Fenn Place.<sup>1</sup>

OH: That's right, and we're going to talk about that a little bit later, but just to finish off about your family, Amanda here is Aldo's daughter, and your first brother, Romeo, died at a very early age, didn't he?

LM: Seven years old, yes.

OH: Yeah, yeah. And then the other brother in your family ...

LM: Aldo.

OH: Aldo, and then?

LM: Then there was a girl called Joyce, Juliet Joyce, yeah, and then there was another boy, that was Michael they were going to name him. Then she had another boy, what was his name, another Romeo, that's right, another Romeo, he died too, then there was Silvano, and Silvano was born in Calvary Hospital.

OH: Right.

LM: Yeah, and my Dad was up in the Northern Territory, in Alice Springs in the mica mines, when Mum was having Silvano, and they let her know that she was ready to have the baby, and he flew down. They didn't have jets at that time, they had aeroplanes and it took eight or nine hours to come down from Alice Springs. Mum got in the taxi and they took her off to the Calvary Hospital, and as she was being driven by taxi, Dad arrived, so he got back in the taxi and went up to the hospital with her.

OH: That's a lovely story, isn't it?

LM: Yes.

OH: And what about your own family? You married in what year?

LM: I married in 1956, to Claudio Moscheni, he came from Istria. He was here on his own, he didn't have a family here except for this brother who went missing for so many years, we never knew where he was, and yeah, he came in 1950 and worked in East-West line there on the railway line, as a fetter I think they call them, loading the MacArthur, the big one in the front that, you know, loading up with coal. He worked there for two years on contract from the government. Then after that he was allowed to go wherever he wanted, and he came to

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<sup>1</sup> Lena corrected this in her reading of the draft. The family moved to another house on the western side of Frogmore Road close to Valetta Road before they moved to Fenn Place in the City.

Adelaide. I met him when I was 18 the first time. Then he went away to Renmark, Broken Hill, he was still a young man and I wasn't even thinking of marriage then, all I wanted to do was go dancing and going down the beach, and things like that. Then he came back when I was 22, and we met at the dance.

OH: Where was the dance?

LM: The dance was at St Patrick's Church (Grote Street) there, at the back. There was a little hall, very small, and it used to start at 7pm and it would finish at 11 o'clock. We lived close by, we used to walk there and walk home, yeah, and that's what happened.

OH: So when ...?

LM: And we married in ... I met him, I think it was 195..., end of '54, '55. '56, yeah, about end of '54. We went out for about nearly a year, then we got engaged, and a year later in '56 we got married.

OH: And you have ...?

LM: And then I had three children, David was born in '57, Duane was born in '61, and Adrian was born in '64.

OH: And how many grandchildren have you?

LM: I only have three grandchildren, a boy whose name is Adam, who belongs to Duane, and he is not, he has cerebral palsy, he can't talk, but he runs around. He understands and things like that. Then I have two granddaughters, Alina, Adrian's children, Alina is nearly 18 in December, and Jenna is 10. David never had any children. Well he might have had some on the sly, you know [laughs].

OH: Well thank you for giving that background, Lena. I'm now going to ask about your parents and their arrival in Australia.

LM: I can tell you this that Mum ... Dad arrived, I don't know, in a ship sometime. He worked here for a while, and then Mum, she arrived by ship also, but in Port Pirie, and Dad couldn't afford to go and meet her, so she came with a bus, with her big trunks and other stuff that she had, and he met her at the bus station. He didn't have a house for her, he rented the house, a room in the house, with other Italians.

OH: Where was the house? Was it in the city?

LM: It was in the city, in the West End somewhere. I can't remember, I never asked Mum and Dad that. Anyway, the first night, when they arrived they had dinner with other people that lived in the house, it was a boarding house sort of thing. Dad had bought an old, very, very old bed, and it squeaked when you got into it. They had their dinner and Mum started to wash up, and Dad stood up, got a tea towel, and was going to wipe up, and said, Mum said, *No, no, no, you don't have to do that, I'll do that*. She said she should have shut up because he never did it again, offered to help.

[Laughter]

LM: Yeah, and then that night they went to bed, and you know what happens in the bedroom. The next morning the people that lived there, they were all laughing because they could hear the bed, the bed was squeaking.

[Laughter]

LM: Is that funny?

- OH: So there was something interesting about your parents' wedding too, wasn't there?
- LM: Yes. Mum, Mum couldn't come over here unless she was married, so my Nonno, Dad's father, they got married by proxy, and my Nonno took Mum to church in a little cart and a white horse. As he was riding along to the church, Nonno called out to all his mates, they were sitting on the side of the street, outside of their doors, and they were saying, *Where you going with that young girl?* He said, *I'm going to get married, I'm marrying this young girl. You can't get married, you're already married,* things like that.
- Yes, and Mum spent six months in Nonno's and Nonna's house, because Dad was still working and he couldn't get a place for her to live, so she stayed six months in Bigolino with the family. And they all loved her, because Mum helped cooking and ironing, you know, they really loved her.
- OH: And there's a beautiful photo of the wedding, isn't there?
- LM: Yes, yes, that one there.
- OH: Yeah.
- LM: And he's pointing. Did you see Nonno is pointing that he's got two wives, one on this side and one on the other side of him, which one was Mum and one was Nonna?
- OH: I hadn't realised that because I had seen the pointing, yeah. We know that your Dad had arrived in 1927.
- LM: Yes.
- OH: So he'd been here for three years.
- LM: Yes, and Zio Cuogo (Domenico), he was already here. He's the one who got them over. My Dad ...
- OH: Cuogo was Domenico?
- LM: Domenico. Zio Ato, my Dad, and I think Zio Angelo, they came out together. No, no, wait a minute.
- OH: Giuseppe I think.
- LM: No, no, Giuseppe came later. He's the youngest.
- OH: That's right. We know three of them came in 1927.
- LM: So that would have been, that would have been Dad, Zio Ato, and Zio Angelo.
- OH: Right, right, and Domenico was already here.
- LM: And Domenico is already here with his wife, Zia Carmela, and I think they had a little girl, Anna.
- OH: Right.
- LM: Yeah, Modesto come later because ... Anna came from Italy I think, I think. Was Anna born in Italy?
- Amanda Rossetto (AR): I can't remember, but Bruno Rebuli came out with him on the same ship as Angelo.
- LM: Oh yes.

- OH: That's right, and he was called Brunone (Bruno).
- LM: Bruno, Brunone.
- OH: Yeah.
- LM: He was lovely, Zio Bruno.
- OH: Just going back to your Mum, how many people would your mother have known in Adelaide when she arrived?
- LM: Let me think. Well she would have known her brother-in-laws, like Zio Ato and Zio Cuogo, Zio Domenico I should say, and Zio Ato. Who was the other one?
- OH: Angelo.
- LM: Angelo, yeah. No, she, she wouldn't have known many people, but they soon made friends, and when we were growing up Mum never went to work, she stayed at home all the time, and had people boarding so she could make a bit of money to live. She never went shopping, they all came home, like the butcher came over to get an order, the grocer, which is my uncle, came home to get an order, and anything else she needed they'd come at home, get the order, and deliver it. Mum never went out anywhere, that's why she couldn't speak English for many, many years, and then she could. When she used to go in hospital and have her children, the only word properly she could say was *milk* and *parsley*. They were the only two words that Mum could say in English, properly, the others were all broken English sort of thing. She didn't like tea with milk, she didn't like tea, no, coffee was her thing.
- OH: A proper Italian.
- LM: Yes.
- OH: One other question about your mother. Do you know if she brought with her any special items from Italy that ...?
- LM: Oh yes, she brought all her, how do you say ...?
- OH: Trousseau?
- LM: Yeah. What's that other word?
- AR: Chest.
- LM: A chest full of clothes. She had beautiful embroidered sheets. I've got some pillowcase and a sheet here still belonging to Mum, with all embroidery.
- OH: And who would have done the embroidery?
- LM: She would have done some, and other people, like her relatives maybe, her sisters and relatives. They sit around at night and sew. Yeah, she brought a lot of stuff. She even had a, a nightdress. It was a white, kind of a white cotton or linen, I don't remember exactly, all embroidered around here, no sleeves, and pretty short, it wasn't really a long one. I had it for a while, I used to use it as a blouse because it was beautiful up top here. Yeah, she brought a lot of stuff like that, not crockery or things like that, just linen stuff, towels. She had this underwear, oh my God, they were like that wide with buttons.
- OH: Like bloomers?
- LM: Bloomers, yeah, with buttons up here, long up to there with a bit of lace down the bottom, up to ...

OH: So down to the knees?

LM: To the knees. Oh, they, they were funny.

[Laughter]

LM: You saw them, eh? Yes, and that, I remember she, and when she died she still had them. Marietta (sister-in-law) got some of those, and I got some sheets and pillowcases, yeah.

OH: And what about the Rossetto family? I'd like to ask you about the aunts and uncles and cousins.

LM: Well, well then after my Mum was here for a few years, her sisters came out, first Irma and then Zia Maria, but Zia Maria came out with her husband, but that's not Rossetto. Oh, the Rossetto's, I remember just after the war, see Zio Angelo went back before the war to get his family, but when he wanted to come back the war broke out, and he couldn't come, so he had to wait to after the war, and then Severina came with Zio Galliano and Johnny and Maria (Rosa).

OH: The Tormena?

LM: The Tormena's.

OH: So you would have remembered them coming?

LM: Oh yes, yes. Maria was, Maria is six months younger than me, so she was about five or six years old, and Johnny was 12 I think. Yes, I remember Johnny coming. We lived in Crowther Street by then, and then they got a house in Waymouth Street. This was Crowther Street, and Waymouth Street just around the corner. Yes, I remember when they come, we had a big party at our house.

OH: And what was it like to have a cousin around your age?

LM: Oh, oh, it was lovely. Maria and I used to get up to naughty things.

[Laughter]

AR: Still do!

[Laughter]

LM: And she swears like a trooper, and she tells dirty jokes.

[Laughter]

OH: What about the other Rossetto...?

LM: And then Zio Angelo came out, my Dad got him out, he paid for his trip for the family. Zia Maria, his wife, there was Luciana, Johnny, and Anita, and then later on they had another daughter but she was born in Melbourne. They stayed with us in Crowther Street for a little while, and my Dad by then had that mica mine up in Alice Springs, in the Harts Ranges, so he sent my Zio Angelo and Zia Maria, and the children, up there to work in the mine. Zia Maria went as a cook and Zio Angelo worked in the mine, and the children had to go to Alice Springs to school, like boarding school or something. Yeah, and they stayed for a few years up there, and my Zio Beppi went up there too, and Zia Bruna. That was later on of course.

OH: When did Beppi come?

LM: Oh boy, I'd have to ask Zia Bruna that. Can you ring her?

- OH: I've got that information somewhere.
- LM: Oh, have you?
- OH: Yeah, and I should have brought it today. What about Zio Domenico and Zia Carmela Rossetto?
- LM: Oh, Zia Carmela was a lovely lady. She used to, because we were poor, she used to ... See that little dress in that photo?
- OH: Yes.
- LM: She bought me that. She used to buy me shoes and, and the dress, because Anna was a lot older than me ...
- OH: She's your cousin?
- LM: My cousin, her daughter, and Modesto, and yeah, she used to – I loved going there – she used to always give me cakes and lollies. They had the shop you see.
- OH: And what was the shop like if you remember?
- LM: I worked in that shop.
- OH: Right! After you were married, is that right?
- LM: After I was married, not in the old shop but in the new one they built across the road, Maria worked there too, Maria Rosa and I.
- OH: But in the early days, say when you were a child, what was that like?
- LM: Yes, we used, we used to go to that. They had their, they lived in a two-storey home right on the corner of Gray Street and Hindley Street. The shop was in the front, it was a big room and they had everything in there, and then they got a licence to sell wine and beer, and things like that. They used to do orders and take them out to all the houses, all the Italians that lived down at Lockleys and the other side of town and that. We lived in Crowther Street, we still lived in Crowther Street. We used to, my brother Aldo, used to go to Mod's [Modesto's] place, he'd promise to take him somewhere, and when Aldo used to arrive there they'd already be gone, they wouldn't wait for him. Oh, that happened so many times, yeah, that's the sad thing.
- OH: Mm.
- LM: And anyway, yeah, we used to go a lot, and then in the later years Anna got interested in showing films. In the shop, it was quite large the area where people came in to buy, and she'd put up a big sheet and that, buy films, and show films, and we'd all go around there on a Sunday night.
- OH: What sort of films would they have then?
- LM: Any sort, good ones, real romantic ones, cowboy ones.
- OH: Was this when you were a kid or when you were older?
- LM: When I was older, yes, when I was older, and even after I married. When they had the other shop across the road, then she bought ... She made the new shop, upstairs she built a house for themselves, and also a theatre room, it was beautiful, she had it all laid out, it was lovely.
- OH: Oh, that's really interesting, isn't it, yeah.
- LM: Yes, yeah.

- OH: And what about the Rebuli relatives, because your Zia Nana was your father's sister?
- LM: Sister, yeah. Well my father, he was a kind of a guy that never ... He had to be always right, there was nothing that anybody could say, but he was always right, and he was in a way; even had bets in the, in the ... He used to go and play cards in the Greek Club in Waymouth Street, and he would get into arguments with the people about political things, because my Dad liked politics you know. He'd come home, he had a ... it was an Italian book, and it was like an encyclopaedia, and he'd come home and he's say to Mum, *Where's that book?* Mum would go and get the book, go back to the club, and he'd have £10 bets with certain people, and Dad used to win all the time. It was, he had to be right, eh?
- AR: It ran in the family.
- [Madeleine laughs]
- LM: Yes.
- OH: Lena, do you know why your Dad came to Adelaide?
- LM: Oh, because there was no work in Italy when he was growing up, when he was a certain age. After the war there too, they had ...
- OH: After the First World War?
- LM: First World War, yeah. Dad also went to work. When he came back from the war he was hurt, I think he was shot in the leg, and then there was no work. He also went to work in Germany and Belgium and France. He went for, I don't know how long, but that's what he used to tell us.
- OH: And in his family he was one of how many?
- LM: Twelve, he was the eldest.
- OH: And how many of those children came to Australia?
- LM: Everyone of them except one, to live I mean. Zio Genio, whose name is Eugenio, he came, when I got married in 1956 he was at my wedding, and he came here for nine months. All the brothers and sisters paid for his trip to come here, and he worked in Adelaide a bit, then he went to Zio Angelo in Melbourne, because Zio Angelo eventually went to Melbourne to live. He went to Melbourne and worked there for a bit, then he came back and he stayed with us, he stayed with Zia Severina; he stayed with Zio Beppi, for nine months anyway.
- OH: Moved around.
- LM: Moved around, he made a bit of money, and you know what he bought me for a wedding present? An iron, which I hated ironing too, I might add. [Laughs]
- OH: A very practical present.
- LM: Yes. Mum told him to buy that. [Laughs]
- OH: One of the other Rossetto aunts married a Bernardi.
- LM: Yes, that was Zia Nina, and that's Leone and Danilo, and they had a sister called Mary. She lived in Italy though, she didn't come with them. I think she might have been already married.

Well you know in 1980 I went overseas with Mum. We went to Bigolino, and she said, *Lena*, she said, *guess who's coming to see us today?* and I said, *Who?* and she said, *Your cousin Mary*, and when I saw her, Madeleine, I thought I was looking at myself. She looked just like me, I couldn't believe it. I said to Mum, *Mum*, I said, *she looks like me*.

[Laughter]

LM: She was very nice, a bit shy, but anyway we got talking and that. I just couldn't believe it that she looked so much like me.

OH: Did you see much of the Bernardi cousins here in Adelaide?

LM: Well I don't know if I should say this but my father, as you know, had rows with his brothers and sisters.

OH: A strong man?

LM: A very strong man, he thought he was always right, and most times he was. Maybe sometimes he could have been wrong, but I don't really know that. But when they arrived, Zia Nina and Zio Bernardi, I forget his name, first name; anyway we always called him Zio Bernardi, Narciso.

OH: Narciso.

LM: Yeah, that's right – he, he wasn't talking to his sister, right – so when they arrived I, well I was introduced to them and everything. Dad never told us not to talk to them. Just because he wasn't talking to them he didn't stop us from going to see them, but I didn't see them all that much, the boys, when they first arrived. They also worked at Zia Carmela's shop, Zio Domenico's shop, Leone and Danilo, and yeah, for quite a while they used to deliver wine and things like that, to the houses.

Yes, my mother and her didn't get on either when they were in Italy, when she first got married. Because the Nonno and Nonna loved my Mum she got jealous, Zia Nina got jealous, and she didn't, well she used to do things to Mum. I don't know, I can't explain. She used to, I don't know if I ... Can you stop it for a minute?

OH: Sure.

*The recorder is turned off – the interview then resumes*

LM: I forget what I said. [Laughs]

AR: This is your earliest memories of, well, earliest memories ...

OH: Yeah! We're resuming the interview and Lena, we're talking about your early memories of growing up.

LM: Growing up, mm. I lived in, from Lockleys we came to live in Fenn Place, which was a little, tiny little street, which wasn't really a street, it was sort of a bypass sort of thing. It used to go down to North Terrace, and then across the road where the railway lines, yards ... I remember that Mum used to deliver milk, and the dogs used to chase her. She never wanted us to have a dog because of that reason, she was scared.

Aldo was only a little boy, it might have been Aldo being born, I think it was Aldo, because he was, the girl, yes, it was Aldo, because we left Lockleys, me

and Romeo only, and it must have been Aldo she was pregnant with. Yeah, Romeo was a little boy that used to run away a lot, you know, hide. I used to hide in the hotel in Hindley Street, the Royal Oak (Hotel) I think it was called., I used to go inside the hotel and hide behind the door, and Mum used to come looking for me, couldn't find me, but then I'd come back home, but Romeo used to run down to the railway yards. It was dangerous to cross North Terrace, Mum was always scared ...

Anyway, I remember at three there used to be a family in Hindley Street called the Basso's. They were grown up, they were about 14, 15 maybe 13, and they used to go to school at St Mary's Dominican Convent in Franklin Street, and because I was so running away all the time, and she was pregnant and so on, so she asked the teachers, the Nuns up in Franklin Street, if I could go like a kindergarten. There wasn't any kindergartens there but they took me in, and the Basso's used to pick me up and then drop me home at night, afternoon. I remember going to school at that age, very young, never did anything because I could hardly talk properly, I don't know.

Anyway I remember that, and then we left Fenn Place, and we went to live in the corner of Weymouth Street and – what's that street where Badenoch's was? North Street I think it might have been – we went to live there on the corner. It belonged to Clorinda Cescato, whose husband also worked in a market garden, but he was, he worked for the Chinese people. You remember Linda De Marchi, that's her mother and father, they lived there on that corner.

OH: Where were the Chinese market gardens?

LM: Down at Lockleys, yeah. Anyway, and I remember living there, Romeo was still alive then, and then we had Aldo, that's right. When we were growing up there we all went to St Mary's School by then, I was a bit older, and I remember, [Aldo] my brother, going into Badenoch's, and the guys, they used to be, Badenoch's was a removalist, and Aldo was fascinated in keys, and he'd go in there and pinch all the keys from the trucks, yeah, and then the guys, of course he'd come home with the keys and he'd show them to Mum. Mum used to say, *Where did you get them?* and he wouldn't tell her.

Anyway, one day the man came running [laughs] inside Mum's, knocked at the door. They saw him run away, so they decided to follow him up, and fair enough he had two or three lots of keys belonging to the trucks. He wasn't allowed to go there anymore.

[Laughter]

LM: Then me and Aldo and Romeo, we used to, my uncle, one of my uncles, gave my brother a drum, the other one gave a little piano accordion. Aldo and Romeo and myself used to stand on the corner with a box, sitting on a box, and I used to sing. One used to play the piano accordion, the other one played the drums, and people would come along and give us money [laughs].

OH: Did you know how to play the instruments?

LM: Not me, they, the boys were playing. They were just banging away. Anyway, people used to give us money, and Mum used to grab the money from us.

[Laughter]

- LM: Anyway I remember that, and I remember New Year's Eve, the three of us, or New Year's Day I should say, we'd go around to people's houses. It was bad luck if a girl went, it had to be a boy first, and we'd go to the people, Italians, and say, *Buon anno!* (Happy New Year!). and they used to give us 20 cents or 10 cents, just like that, but the boys had to go first and I had to come last, because I was a girl.
- OH: And were there many ...?
- LM: We used to do that, all of us did that, not only our family, all the families.
- OH: And were there many Italian families that you went to?
- LM: Oh yes, all of them, all in Waymouth Street, Currie Street, Hindley Street. Zio Cuogo lived in Hindley Street. In Currie Street we used to know the Crotti's. They had a shop, a corner shop, there, right on the corner of Gray Street and Currie Street, and then they also had the boarding, boarding house in North Street. I remember when, I think I was about seven, I still lived there, they used to have an Italian school. Now we weren't supposed to do, the Australians didn't want us to learn Italian. I don't know, Nives knows more about that. We used to go to the Italian school and Nives has got a photo of us, standing on the steps of the St Patrick's Church. We're all standing there and we had a photo taken. I wished I had of remembered. Linda might even have that photo.
- OH: Do you remember who taught Italian?
- LM: There was an Italian lady, I don't remember the lady who taught us, but anyway, I didn't go for very long to learn Italian. I knew how to speak [laughs] *dialetto* (Veneto dialect), that was enough for me.
- [Laughter]
- LM: And my father wouldn't let us speak English at home. When we were around the table eating, if Aldo and I or Romeo – no, Romeo wasn't alive then – anyway Aldo and I, that's right, he had died, Aldo and I, and Silvano was only little, we weren't allowed to speak English at the table. Dad used to say, *Qua se parla Italian or dialetto!* (When you are here, speak Italian). *E quando che te se a fuori con i amici se poi parla come te vuoi!* (When you are outside with your friends speak as you wish). I shouldn't have said that in Italian, I forgot.
- [Laughter]
- OH: That's perfect, it's lovely.
- LM: So we weren't allowed, and if we did anything wrong, I will say that about my father, he never ever hit us, ever. All he had to do was give us a dirty look, like cross-eyed dirty look, and we'd shut up, we'd clamp up, but Mum used to hit me a lot. She even threw a piece of wood at me and hit me on the ankle, and then she had to bathe my foot [laughs] because it made a big hole, but I was naughty that day.
- OH: Lena, I was doing to take you back to Lockleys, because I remember that you said your Dad had two market gardens.
- LM: No, he, he had the one in Frogmore Road that he worked with Zio Bruno Rebuli, and then when they split up and we went to live in town, then he, then he had the one in River Road.
- OH: So can you tell me roughly where it was?

- LM: You know when you go Rowells Road, you know where that dog park is?
- OH: Yes.
- LM: Well across the road, across the river was all land there, there were no houses.
- OH: So it's on the Henley Beach Road side?
- LM: Side, right, of the Torrens (River Torrens), and he, he never, we never had a house there, we lived in town in Crowther Street, and Dad used to ride a bike every morning, and come back every night late, 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock, when it got dark, on the bike, and work the land and pick up the, the vegies.
- OH: Do you know what he grew there?
- LM: Oh, he grew tomatoes, cauliflowers, peas, beautiful peas. I remember Dad had a lovely garden. I don't think he had celery, but had cabbages, cauliflowers; tomatoes was his thing.
- OH: Did he have glasshouses?
- LM: Yes, glasshouses, and I remember he had a horse called Beauty, it was a race horse. He had like a sledge, a real big one, and when he'd go into the glasshouses and put the tomatoes in the boxes then put them on this sledge, me and Aldo used to sit on them and the horse would drag us along. I remember that.
- OH: Where would your father have sold the vegetables?
- LM: At the market, East End Market, and I think somebody used to cart them up and bring them in for him, because he didn't have a vehicle then. His tomatoes used to all go to Victoria, because they were number one, but you know in the olden days, I mean in the early days, during Depression time, they used to go to the market with their vegies, and couldn't sell them because nobody had money, so they used to bring them all back and bury them into the garden, back into the garden. I remember that, yeah.
- OH: Who would have helped your father in the garden?
- LM: Oh, he did have a helper. I think Vittorio Marchioro worked for my father in the early days, but then he got his own market garden. Do you know where Vittorio lived, his house, in White Street [Avenue], White Street?
- OH: White Street in Lockleys.
- LM: That used to be part of the land that Dad used to work, and the garden. There was no houses there, they built them later.
- OH: Do you know how much land your father would have had?
- LM: No, I don't know that.
- OH: And I think you told me that Zio Beppi worked there with your father for a while?
- LM: Not in the garden. Zio Beppi, when Zio Beppi arrived, then he got married and had some children. By then, when my father left the garden he bought a part of a mine, with other people. Actually Dad had three parts. There was eight, eight people that owned this mine.
- OH: Was that the Spotted Tiger (mica mine)?

LM: Spotted Tiger Mine, and when Zio Beppi and Zia Bruna and the children were quite young, three years old and maybe seven, something like, my father asked Zio Beppi if he would go, if he would go up to the mine and work for him in his place, because he wanted to stay in Adelaide. So Zio Beppi and Zia Bruna, his wife, Valerie, Allan and Denis, they went up there. The two eldest went to boarding school, and the youngest one stayed in the mine. They stayed for quite a while. Also Zio Angelo worked there. When he arrived from Italy ... Stop.

OH: You'd like me to stop?

LM: Yeah, one minute.

OH: We're just pausing for a moment.

*The recorder is turned off – the interview then resumes*

OH: We're resuming the interview with Lena Moscheni, and we're just going to finish off talking about the Spotted Tiger Mine, because you said that your Dad had three-eighths of a share. What were some of the other names of people who were there? I think you said Strappazon.

LM: Oh, Strappazon was one and there were some young, young boys, single men. I know that maybe Zia Bruna nee Battaglia (Rossetto), she might know because she was working there. Piovesan, no, I don't think there was any Piovesan or Griguol there. Piovesan worked on the land with Dad.

OH: But he also went up to the mines at one point.

LM: He might have.

OH: Yeah, yeah.

LM: Yeah, he might have.

OH: But it's interesting, a lot of Veneti went there, didn't they?

LM: Yes, yes. There was the Rech brothers, which my Zia Maria, Mum's sister, married a Bernardo Rech. Now a couple of his brothers worked up there, Verino Rech and Luigi Rech.

OH: How do you spell Rech?

LM: [Lena spells Rech].

OH: And is that Veneto?

LM: Well they were born in Belluno via Monte Grappa, whatever they call it, yeah, but they were good friends of Dad's too, and they had another mine. They worked in another mine close to them, it was called Billy Hughes Mine, that's it, Billy Hughes Mine, and then there was another. There were three mines, different mines, that belonged to all the Italians, and that's it, yeah.

OH: Going back to your family, Lena, what were the kinds of things that were important to your parents as they were raising their children?

LM: Oh, family. Dad wasn't a kind of a bloke that used to take us out much. It was always Mum that used to take us out. I remember when the war ended, 1945, and all these people gathered up in King William Street. Now Silvano was only a baby in a pram, he could have been – he was born in 1943 – oh, he would have been two, but he's still a baby, and I remember going with Mum and me and Silvano, went up to King William Street to see all the people rejoicing, and we got caught in the crowd with the pram. Oh, we were getting squashed, and

this man came along and grabbed the pram, lifted it up above his head, Mum held Silvano and I was hanging on to Mum's hand, and he guided us out of the crowd. I remember that as if it was now, it was really frightening.

But Mum used to take us down to Lockleys to see the Marchioro's, to see the Piovesan, to see the Tonellato's. We used to go quite a lot. By then my father had a ute, a Ford, a flash one not a ...

Claudio Moscheni (CM): Not a ute, not a ute.

LM: Sshh [Lena speaks in Italian].

CM: ( ).

LM: Sshh!

CM: Yeah.

LM: [Lena asks Claudio to stop, in Italian].

CM: I'm sorry. [Laughs]

OH: Also present at the moment is Claudio, Lena's husband.

LM: He's trying to butt in. Anyway, by then Dad had a ute, but he never took us anywhere in the ute. He was a terrible driver, we were scared, Mum and I were scared to go with him.

OH: So if you went to Lockleys with your Mum ...

LM: We'd go in the tram, and we'd, see Mum and the pram, we'd go and visit different people, different families. I used to have a ball at the Tonelleto's because they had a wagon for a house – oh it was lovely down there – and the Piovesan lived in the same block on the other side, they had a little house there. One day, it was a Sunday afternoon, Mum was inside talking to the older people, and us children, the cow was having a baby, I mean a calf, and we all went in the shed and we were watching. Then our parents saw us and they didn't want us to see that, but we were interested, you know, we were about 14, 15 maybe, and we'd never ...

They never spoke of the sex life or things like that, things that happen to young people and so on, they never used to speak about that, it was all taboo, so we had to find out on our own, things. So we were there watching this cow trying to have this calf. We saw half the birth, and then my parents pulled me out, my Mum, and the other ladies, pulled out all the children, we weren't allowed to watch. But anyway that was something different.

OH: So it was a usual kind of thing to go visiting down at Lockleys?

LM: Oh yes, we loved it down there, us kids.

OH: And I think you told me a story about taking Silvano for a walk when he was in the pram one day.

LM: Oh yes, yeah, we were going through the land, from one property to another, and Silvano was quite small that time, he was only about nine months, and we were going through this property to the other, and there was kind of a little ditch like that. As we were going down the ditch we saw a snake, Mum and I – Silvano didn't because he was in the pram – and we got scared. Mum, she fell down to the ground, the pram got stuck into the ground, and she couldn't get up.

She was so terrified she couldn't, she said to me, [spoken in Italian]. So I grabbed Silvano in my arms and I ran for my life, and left there Mum on the ground, she couldn't move.

[Laughter]

LM: Anyway, it wasn't a snake actually, it was kind of one of those ground tree snakes or something. Oh, but she got such a fright, yes.

OH: And do you remember what the land looked like at that time, around there?

LM: It was all, there was nothing in it, maybe it was just after harvest time, it was bare that time, that time that that happened.

OH: But as a child, when you used to go and visit in the area, which did it look like?

LM: Oh yes, we used to see all the, all the glasshouses, and we'd go in there and pick up the ripe tomatoes, bring them home. Of course we were allowed to.

OH: Were there many houses around at that time?

LM: Not, not close together, like there was a garden and they had a house, and then there was another garden, they had their house. It wasn't like it is now, all houses close together. When they cleared the land away and there were no more market gardens, they went down Virginia and Two Wells, all down that way, so they cleared all the land in Lockleys and that, and built houses, lots and lots of houses.

OH: We're about to finish this first interview, but I just wanted to ask you another question about your parents. Who were the people that they would have seen most of as you were growing up?

LM: Oh, relatives, friends.

OH: Who were the friends?

LM: There was ... We used to have a lot of parties there. By then we had boarders that played soccer, we used to go and watch the soccer, and after the soccer they'd all come home and have drinks. Then sometimes we'd have birthday parties, and when Zia Bruna and Zio Beppi got married, we had the wedding reception at our house in Crowther Street. We had a big backyard, fairly big, and we had all, like the Griguol's were there and other relatives like Zia Severina. None of Zia Bruna's family came, the father wouldn't let them because they were, how do you say, not talking, because Mr Battaglia didn't want Zia Bruna to marry Zio Beppi because he was 30 and she was only 17, but she fell madly in love with Zio Beppi, and he, he wouldn't let the family, the mother or their other sisters and a brother, to come to the reception. They didn't even come to the church.

So Zia Bruna got married that day, she was very sad, in her wedding photos she looks sad, not smiling like. She got married instead of ... a white dress, my Mum, they went shopping and bought her a black dress with a bit of criss-cross up here, a light colour, white I think it was. I mean why not buy her a nice crème coloured dress, even if it wasn't a wedding, and a hat. It was really sad.

OH: A bit of a different kind of wedding. Well look, thank you very much, Lena, for your interview today, and I look forward to the next one.

LM: You know, I'll tell you, when we had that ...

OH: We might have to wait until the next interview for that.

LM: Yeah, but I'm just going to say ...

**Second interview with Lena Moscheni nee Rossetto**

**recorded by Madeleine Regan for the Italian Market Gardeners' Oral History Project  
at Woodville South, South Australia**

**Also present are Claudio Moscheni, Lena's husband and Amanda Rossetto, Lena's niece**

**12 September 2014**

Oral Historian (OH): Thanks, Lena, for agreeing to a second interview. It's great to have the opportunity to ask you ...

Lena Moscheni (LM): Glad to, glad to.

OH: We're looking at the map of the Frogmore, River Road area from 1949, and we've got some pieces of land identified with some of the market gardeners, and I thought that we'd just have a look. The first one is obviously where you were born, and maybe we can describe where that is?

LM: It's in Frogmore, it was in Frogmore Road. I know that we lived next door to our Uncle and Auntie Rebuli. They had the three children, like Vito and Shorty (Elvio), and Dorina. I don't know, I must have been about two or three years old when we left there, because my Dad and Zio, what was his name?

OH: Bruno.

LM: Zio Bruno and my Dad had a bit of a blue over something to do with the garden, I don't know, so my Dad left there and went to live in Fenn Place, which is off Hindley Street.<sup>2</sup> We stayed there for a few years, then we went to live in Waymouth Street, on the corner of Waymouth and North Street, I think it was. We lived there a few years and then from there we went to Crowther Street, which is a bit down Waymouth Street into, opposite the hotel there, I forget, Launceston (Hotel) I think. These people who owned the house there, we were renting the place from, they were, it was a new house, we were renting from Lebanese I think they were called, or Syrian, something like that. Then Dad had this, rented this piece of land on River Road, which was near the bridge and, and then ...

OH: So it was near the bridge with Rowells Road and River Road?

LM: Yeah. Can you stop?

OH: We'll just pause this for a minute.

*The recorder is turned off – the interview then resumes*

<sup>2</sup> Lena corrected this fact when she edited the transcript. The family moved first to another residence on the western Frogmore Road close to Valetta Road before going to live in the City of Adelaide  
Lena Moscheni-Interviews 2014

OH: We're resuming the interview again, and Lena, you've just been thinking about the sequence here?

LM: Yeah. We went to live in Fenn Place, I think I might have been about three, maybe close to three or after three. Then my Dad went up to the mica mines in Harts Ranges. Mum was living in the house with Romeo, myself, and Aldo, and she was pregnant with another baby when she was doing the milk rounds. Did I talk about that?

OH: Yes, you talked about the milk round.

LM: Then my Dad went up to the Harts Ranges, he was away for a, a few years, but he used to come home now and then, but the aeroplane used to take about 12 hours, from Alice Springs to Adelaide used to take a long time. As a matter of fact when my eldest brother died on the 1 November, my Dad was still in Harts Ranges, and it was hard to get messages to him. Somehow or other somebody from Alice Springs had to go to the mine and tell Dad that my brother was dying. He tried to get back to Adelaide before he died, and the doctors in Children's Hospital, kept him on oxygen to keep him alive until my Dad arrived back. The plane trip took about 12 hours. Then he, he went to the hospital, he saw my brother, and then as soon as he saw him they took the oxygen off him because he was dying anyway. He had a bad, he had this disease which wasn't well known at that time – in 1938 he died, on 1 November – it was called osteomyelitis. It's a marrow in the bone had gone kind of rotten, I don't know what it is really. Years later they asked Mum and Dad if they could do an autopsy on my brother, and my Mum didn't want my brother to be cut up, but they begged her to because it was something that they hadn't heard of, and they wanted to find out why, why he died. There was no reason because he was a healthy little boy. So in the end she agreed, and then they found out what was wrong with him. That was a very sad time.

OH: Mm, and you were ...

LM: And I do remember because I was six, and Aldo was five, because there's only two and a half years between the three of us, I remember that all the kids from school, we all walked to the cemetery behind the hearse, me and Aldo, Aldo and I, I should say, with a wreath, one on either side, and all the school kids, his friends, there was about 30 or 40 kids, we walked from St Patrick's Church to the cemetery, West Terrace Cemetery, and behind that was all the other people in cars, and that's, and then ... I don't think my mother came to that funeral, she was so upset and she couldn't ...

OH: It must have been very hard.

LM: Because she'd already lost a little girl in May, and Modesto (Rossetto), my cousin, he had a photo of us at the gravesite, me and Aldo, and Romeo, and I've got a smile on my face. Well I was young, I probably didn't know much about funerals or death, or anything like that. Yes, and so Mum was so upset that she, she was, she couldn't walk, she couldn't go to the funeral, yeah.

OH: What a hard time for your family.

LM: Yeah, for my father, was so upset too. My father was a really hard man, we realised later in life he was a hard man, and he couldn't cry, he just couldn't cry. It was really hard, yes. Then I think maybe when he came back from the Northern Territory, I think he went back again, and then when he came back to

Adelaide again, that's when he started this, this garden at River Road, it was called then River Road.

OH: So it's on the southern side of the river?

LM: That side.

OH: Yes.

LM: Going down River Road, it's on the left-hand side, and it's on the other side.

OH: Yes.

LM: Yeah, southern side I suppose.

OH: Yes. And we talked last time about what your Dad grew, and the fact that he, he didn't, your family didn't live on the land there, did you?

LM: No, we didn't.

OH: So how did he travel?

LM: He used to ride his bike from Crowther Street in the West End. He'd get up not too early, Dad liked to sleep in a lot [laughs] like I do, and he used to ride his bike and come home about 6 o'clock at night, every day, because he had to water, he had to spray I suppose, or dig, and things like that.

OH: Did you ever go there, do you remember?

LM: Yes, I remember going down there with the tram on Henley Beach Road, and Aldo came too. Dad had a, what do you call it, like a horse and it had a big, I don't know what you call those things, like a ... No, it wasn't a cart.

OH: Sledge or a sleigh?

LM: A sledge, yeah, a sledge, and Aldo and I used to sit on the edge of it, because he had all his boxes of tomatoes and whatever, all the fruit and vegies, and the horse used to drag the boxes along with us on it, we thought it was lovely. The horse's name was Beauty. She was a race horse, and her name was Beauty. My Dad really liked that horse.

Yes, and then, by then my Mum had, after she had the little girl that died in May 1938, then Romeo died in 1938, November, she had another two babies, three I think, yeah, three boys. One was called Michael, he only lived six months.<sup>3</sup> That's when we lived in, in Fenn Place, she had a little boy called Michael<sup>4</sup>, but he died at six months and with ... He had something wrong with his ears, he was operated at the Children's Hospital. He was, I'm not blaming the Children's Hospital, but he was in a cot right underneath a window, and the window was open, and he'd had these anoids (adenoids), whatever they call it, they cut them behind the ear, he had an infection or something, he was alright, he went through the operation alright, and then he died with double pneumonia.

So then she had another boy and when she was carrying him she had an accident with Zio Ato. One of my Dad's brothers had a car, a little old car with a canvas roof, we were going down to the Anzac Highway to have some photos taken, us children, and we got hit from behind from a big truck, a quarry carrying rocks or something. Luckily we weren't, none of us were hurt, we just got like a little

<sup>3</sup> Lena's brother, Michael lived for only three hours

<sup>4</sup> The brother who lived six months was named Romeo

push or something, none of us was hurt, but Mum was pregnant, and that could have done something to her, and she had a stillborn baby – he only lived three hours – Dad was the only one that saw him, Mum didn't see him. He died three hours after he was born, and Dad was the only one that saw him.

Then she had Silvano in 1943, and by then we were living in Crowther Street. Dad was up in the mine and he, he came home and Mum was, well she couldn't wait any longer, so the taxi took her to Calvary Hospital. Then Dad arrived with the taxi also, so he had to go, rush up to the hospital and, and I don't know if he saw him born, but he was there anyway. Then he came home and told us that Mum had a baby boy. We was hoping he was going to call him a good name [laughs], Australian name, because I had, my name was Elena, but they called me Lena. Aldo hated his name as well, he said, *Dad, why did you call me that name?* Then when the youngest was born, they called him Silvano, and when I went to school the next day they said, *Oh, did your Mum have the baby?* and I said, *Yes, she had a baby boy. Oh, what's his name?* I didn't want to say the name, so I said, *His name is Silvano, but I don't like it.*

[Laughter]

LM: They said, *Oh, that's a nice name.* I don't know if they were being nice to me, or whatever, but anyway, yes, and then ...

OH: So that was the story of your family?

LM: Of my family, yeah, exactly. And then maybe, I think when Dad come back from the mica, that's probably when he started this other farm.

OH: You told ...

LM: Because I do remember we were grown up when we went down there. I wished I'd had asked my Zia Bruna, to ask her if Zio Beppi worked on the phone, hah, on the phone, on the farm I should say.

OH: With your Dad?

LM: With my Dad. I know somebody helped him.

OH: You also thought that your Dad wanted to buy some land during the war?

LM: Yes, during the war he, he told Mum and us that he wanted to buy his own land and be his own boss, and he went to the government, I don't know which department he went to, and he put in an application to buy the land. Then he got a letter back saying that they wouldn't sell it to him, so that's probably why he rented this place in River Road.

OH: If we look at that map, there are a few families that you remember, Lena?

LM: Yes.

OH: What about if ...

LM: I remember the Santin's, the Berno's.

OH: Living on Valetta Road?

LM: Yes.

OH: What do you remember about them?

LM: Well we used to go and see them on a Sunday, catch a tram in Currie Street, and go down there, go to the Tonellato's and the Piovesan's. We were very, very

good friends with the Tonellato's and Piovesan. Piovesan was also the, Mr Piovesan was also godfather to one of my brothers, so we were really good friends. We'd go a lot to Marchioro's, Mum was very friendly with Rita Marchioro and her husband, and also Vittorio Marchioro and Angelina (Marchioro). Angelina and Mum were really good friends, and even in the later years when Mum was still alive, she'd go down to Angelina's place. Marietta, my sister-in-law, used to, she lived at ...

Amanda Rossetto (AR): Oh?

LM: No, she lived at ...

AR: Hectorville.

LM: Hectorville, she lived at Hectorville. My, my sister-in-law, Marietta, used to go and pick her up and bring her down to Angelina's place for lunch. They'd watch their favourite programs, 'Days of our Lives' and the other one too. What was the other called? 'The Young and the Restless'. Mum and Vittoria they used to have their lunch, have their coffee with the grappa in it. Then they'd sit down in the lounge with the fire if it was winter, and watch the soapies. Then I used to go and pick her up, because I lived at Woodville South, and I'd take her home, back home to Hectorville, me and Claudio, my husband, we used to do that. They were really good mates and they used to tell each other secrets that I don't even know about, but anyway that was their business.

OH: So they were close?

LM: And they were very, very close. Her husband, Vittorio, he used to look after me when we lived at Frogmore Road, and he used to work for my Dad in the garden. He used to look after me, he used to hold me on his lap and sing me songs. We were very good mates, yes.

OH: Do you remember any of the other families?

LM: Then the ... Yes, Luigi Griguol and his wife was called ... We used to call her *Griguoletta*, because she was small. I can't remember her name now. They had a son called Dino, yes, they were good friends.

OH: And do you remember, did they have a market garden?

LM: Yes, they had a market garden, the Berno's and the Santin's, they had the market gardeners, and ...

OH: Do you remember going to any big social occasions at the Berno shed?

LM: Well look, there was a, there was a place down at Lockleys, I can't remember, he had, he had a *bocce* (bowls), that's right, and my Dad used to go down there to play, and one New Year's Eve he had a big party down the *bocce*. They played *bocce* during the day, but at night we had a big party, Christmas party I think it was, we had such a lovely time. Everybody were there, the Santin's, the Berno's, the Griguol's, the Rebuli's, the Tonellato's, the Piovesan's, were all there having a great time, singing and dancing, and eating, Italian food of course [laughs].

OH: Do you remember any of the songs?

LM: Oh yes. My Zia Severina, Maria-Rosa's and Johnny's (Tormena) Mum, I think she was there too, and she used to sing with the men, get in a group, the men, she'd join in. Do you know that Zia Severina died at 97, she had dementia?

When I lived in Darwin, I used to come down and see her. I used to come and see Mum, then I'd go and see Zia Severina in a nursing home, and I'd say, *Maria, I wonder if she can still sing*, and I said, *Let's start a song up, me and you, and then see if she joins in*. She did, and yet she had dementia, she knew all the words.

OH: And what, what would be an example of a song?

LM: *La Sparasina*.

OH: *Massolin ...*

LM: *Massolin de Fiori*. Oh, there were all these, all these songs from where she came from, from Bigolino, and she used to sing, and I'd say, *There you are, she remembers*.

OH: So singing was a part of these parties?

LM: Yes, singing was a part of, of these parties. The men, there was music for dancing, and yet they'd get in a corner and sing all these songs.

OH: Was the ...

LM: And I learnt them too. Do you know, even now, I belong to the, this club called *Famiglia Istriana*, because my husband is from Istria, and when we go to a party, a luncheon or a, a dinner dance, a few of us get together and sing, and I sing along too because I remember all the songs that they sang.

OH: And you must love it?

LM: Yeah, I do.

OH: When there was music, what kind of music was available?

LM: Oh, piano accordion.

OH: Who would have played the piano accordion, kids or adults?

LM: Adults, adults, yeah; piano accordion and drums and guitar, mostly piano accordion, that was really something for the Italians, yeah. My husband used to play the accordion too. He had one and he gave it away. He's also got a, what do you call them, like a guitar. I can't think of the name of it. Banjo, yeah, banjo.

OH: Oh okay, yeah.

LM: He can't play that, he tries, but when he makes a noise I tell him to be quiet.

[Laughter]

OH: Some of the other social occasions that you told me about were when you went down to the beach.

LM: Yes, we, us children, like Johnny and Maria, my cousins, and I, and Aldo, and Silvano but he was a lot younger, we used to go every Sunday, catch the tram in Currie Street, go down to the beach and meet the Tonellato's, the Piovesan's, the Rebuli's, maybe some of the others but I don't ... The Marchioro's, and we'd all meet down at Henley Beach. There'd be a whole ...

OH: Near the jetty?

LM: Yes, near the jetty, and we'd ... Aldo used to go and sunbake a lot, I don't think I sunbaked much, but I did get burnt. Maria-Rosa and I got burnt to cinders one

day. It must have been really ... We had all bubbles on our chest and arms. Maria was home from school for a whole week, sitting up in bed, couldn't lay down.

OH: Did you, were you accompanied by adults, or you just went as a group of young people?

LM: No, no, young people, 15, 16, 17, 18-year-olds, just like that. We were all very close, and we used to all ... The Tonellato's and the Rebuli's and us, we used to meet at Rowley Park (Speedway), go to Rowley Park every Friday night, and get covered in dirt when the cars used to go round and round. [Laughs]

OH: How would you have got to Rowley Park?

LM: With the tram, yeah. We'd meet all the boys from Lockleys, we'd meet somewhere there at Rowley Park, and then all go in together. We had some fun.

OH: Your parents thought that that was okay, I guess because you were with Aldo?

LM: Yes, yes, yeah, I was with older people, you know older boys and girls, and we were all together, we were all ... We weren't into bad things, there was no drugs. There was drink but we never, do you know that we never drank at all, us children, our adults, teenagers I should say, we never used to drink, and yet our fathers and aunties and uncles used to make their own wine. We never touched it. It was just ... Sometimes Dad at night time, we'd have dinner, he'd always have a flagon of wine on the table, and they used to give us a little bit like that in a glass. We used to drink it and thought nothing of it, but we never took it up, and we never took smoking up either. None of my brothers or myself ever smoked. A lot of the children, we tried, and we all got sick of course.

The Stocco's in Waymouth Street, they had a boarding house, all the migrants used to go there, and they also had stables there, horses. One day with my brother Aldo and the Stocco's and the Stocco's cousins, I don't know where they got the cigarettes from, but they were as strong as anything. Aldo and I were both sick, coughing up and everything. [Laughs] We said we'd never touch another cigarette, and we never did.

OH: That was a good lesson.

LM: Yes, it was. Maybe if we'd liked it we could have gone on and smoked, but it made us both sick, especially Aldo.

OH: You spoke earlier ...

LM: Oh, the Adami.

OH: ... about the Adami's who were on River Road.

LM: Yes.

OH: Up towards ...

LM: They were, they were good friends of my Dad's and Mum's, and Mum even became a godmother to their daughter. They had, they had all sons except one little girl called Mary. These Adami's now have this sand and gravel and everything else here in William Street.

OH: At Beverley?

LM: At Beverley. One day Claudio went to get some sand there, my husband, and I went into the office to pay, and I said, *Do you have a sister called Mary?* They

said, *Yes. I said, I know her, I remember her when she was a little girl, and I said, My mother was her godmother. He said, What's her name? I said, Lina Rossetto, and he said, Oh, I know that lady, yeah. But Mary lives in Sydney, but the brothers all live, they all work together.*

OH: And that family weren't Veneti, were they?

LM: No, they were Calabrese I think.

OH: So how would your mother have got to know them?

LM: Through the gardening, through gardening.

OH: Did your mother work on the garden as well?

LM: I don't think so. No, she, when we lived in Frogmore Road, Mum took in boarders because it was bad times, you know Depression times. So I think two brothers, my Dad's two brothers, Vittorio Marchioro, and another guy – I can't remember the other guy – and Mum used to wash, clean, cook dinner for them, their meals, just to get a bit of money. They used to work the land. When times were tough those days, and they'd bring their, their vegetables up to the markets to sell, they would, they couldn't sell it and had to bring it back home and bury it under the ground, because they couldn't sell it.

OH: Lena, who was your godmother?

LM: My godmother was a lady called, she came from Broken Hill, and her name was Rossetti. Their name ended in an 'i' and ours in an 'o'. They were named Irene, Gustin, or another name but that's the ... they shortened the name Gustin, Rossetti, and they had two boys and a girl. They lived in Broken Hill, but then they left Broken Hill and came back to Adelaide. She was my godmother.

OH: And were they Veneti?

LM: And, and the godfather was a guy called Costa, from Italy. I think this Costa, Luigi, I think it was Luigi Costa or something like that, he came from Bigolino. He's the one who came to Adelaide first, and he, he's the one who got my Dad and my uncles and Zio Cuogo – I mean Zio Domenico his real name – he's the one who got them the visa to come to Australia, to Adelaide.

OH: So that would have been in the early-20s?

LM: Early, very early, yeah, because Zio Domenico came, my Dad came in '27, Zio Domenico was here for about two or three years before, so that would have been, what, '23, '24, 1923, '24?

OH: Yeah. I think it was '25 when he came.

LM: '25?

OH: Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's interesting.

LM: Yes.

OH: So Costa. I was going to ask you about whether you've got any memories of the war years.

LM: Well I remember we didn't have, Dad had, oh, my Dad was kind of interned.<sup>5</sup> He was called up, he was a naturalised Australian by then, and he was called up

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<sup>5</sup> Lena's father was most likely conscripted into the Commonwealth Government Allied Works Council as an 'enemy alien' after Italy entered the War with Germany in June 1940  
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by the Army, to go to Darwin. He had to make tea, all he had to do was make tea, but the soldier used to get the wood ready, light the fire. He used to just make the tea, wait for the copper to boil, then put the tea in the copper, and they used to help themselves with the tea. That's all he had to do, but it was breakfast, lunch and dinner, in Darwin, for six months. Dad stayed in Darwin for six months, yeah, and the, and the money, he never got any money. The money he earnt in the Army, went to my Mum to live on, for the children.

OH: And at that time where would you have been living, in Fenn Place?

LM: No, we would have been living in Crowther Street probably.

OH: Do you have any memories of other people, other Italians, who were affected by the war?

LM: Yeah, I suppose. We all, we were all poor, we didn't have much money, and we had rations like, you know, they used to give us pieces of paper like that, we could buy butter, we could buy sugar and rice, everything was scarce. We were happy though. We went to school, and Mum used to make us sandwiches with jam, apricot jam. One day I was at school and this Australian girl that I was at school with, at lunchtime she come up to me and she said, *Lena, would you like to exchange sandwiches with me?* and I said, I felt shame, I said, *I've only got jam sandwiches.* She said, *That's alright, I've got ham sandwiches,* and I said, *Oh yes please.*

[Laughter]

LM: And so I gave her my apricot jam sandwich and I ate ham sandwich. That was the first time I've ever eaten ham I reckon. Yeah, we were happy at school. I played a lot of sport at school, you know school sports. I wasn't too bright at school actually, I was really a bit dumb, but anyway I got by. I used to pass with my school.

We went to St Mary's, Franklin Street, and when we went there, there was, there was an upstairs and a downstairs. Downstairs were for the poor people like us, all Italians, all children of a migrant; all the poor people went to school downstairs, and all the rich people went upstairs. The Nuns used to teach us, they were all the same Nuns, there weren't poor Nuns and rich Nuns, they were all the same. Then after about, I don't know how many years, they let us go upstairs too, so we went upstairs and downstairs. Anyhow I was happy at school, I liked at recess time and lunchtime, like playing, eating our jam sandwiches, and then playing sport. We had a good time at school. Johnny liked school too.

Did he tell you about an episode that happened at school with him? They were sitting underneath these trees, I think they were olive trees, and they were reading, having a reading class. All of a sudden a bird [laughs] did a shit, and Johnny said, *Oh shit* [laughs], and the Nun said, *What?* He said, *Oh no, Sister, the bird done a shit on my book.*

[Laughter]

OH: Did he get into trouble?

LM: No, Sister Mary Reginald her name was. She was a bonny lady. She was Irish I think, short. One day, one Saturday, I had to the school to help them clean up the yard for some reason. After I'd finished I went on the swing and I said,

*Sister, can you give me a push please?* So she got behind the swing and pushed me, she fell, she went under the [laughs] swing with her garments all up in the air, and I didn't know what to do, whether to jump off or stay there, but I think I stayed on the swing. Then it stopped and I helped her up.

[Laughter]

OH: It's funny what we remember, isn't it?

LM: Yeah, I remember that, yeah. We used to have concerts in the downstairs, before we went upstairs. They had partitions in each room, like to make a class here and a class ... and they'd open up the ... then we'd have like a, a stage, and have concerts and singing and things like that. I remember that.

OH: So good years at school?

LM: Yeah, and then when I, I went up to a second year high school, and then I left in that, end of that year, because I wasn't very smart, as I said, so I wasn't going to be something. I was already working at the Star Grocery. He was Greek, and I used to go there in the, in holidays, and weigh up sugar and salt and flour, in the holidays, in the, in a really dark room, it was so dark. Even with the light on it was dark.

OH: And this is on the corner of?

LM: Oh no, this was the old shop in Hindley Street, next to the butcher shop, Liascos it was called.

OH: On the corner of Hindley Street and Morphett?

LM: That was later on, that was years later. They bought that block and they made up a new shop, but we were in the little old shop. One day, one Saturday ... Can I tell you a kind of a funny thing?

OH: Mm.

LM: One Saturday the boss, whose name was Con, very kind to us, every Saturday he used to give us goodies, like he used to give cigarettes for my Dad, or tobacco, whichever I wanted to take home. He used to give me chocolates. There were two other girls working there.

OH: Were they Italian girls?

LM: One was Italian, one was Greek, and there were two Greek boys too. He used to give us goodies, biscuits and things like that. He was very good. Anyway, they had a kind of a, the shop was very small, and they had a, like a little, how do you say?

AR: Mezzanine.

LM: Mezzanine thing, and he used to put cigarettes and packages and so on. He got up on the ladder to get it, and there was a hole on the floor, but the hole had been fixed with a bit of metal. One Saturday afternoon, it was just after finishing work, he got up on the ladder and the ladder fell through the hole. Well, I was only 15, maybe 15½, and I couldn't stop laughing, it was so funny, but it wasn't funny for him.

OH: Was he injured?

LM: No, he wasn't. He fell through, he was fat, round like a little barrel, and you know the ladder was about this far apart, he fell through the ladder. He didn't

really hurt himself, but it was so funny and I couldn't stop laughing, but he still gave us our little things, little packages.

OH: It's interesting that two Italian girls were working in the Greek grocery.

LM: Yeah.

OH: How did that happen, like would he have asked your parents or what?

LM: Well my Mum asked him. She used to go and get groceries there. She used to also go to my uncle up the road a bit, but Mum used to go to the East End Markets when she had boarders, in Kent Town – by then we lived at Kent Town – and she used to go to the East End Market on her bike, from Kent Town. She'd have a bag on this handlebar, a bag on this side, then she'd have a basket in the front with all stuff; and in the back she had other things too. One day she's coming down Hindley Street, it's raining cats and dogs, and she's got all these groceries, vegetables and fruit, with an umbrella [Madeleine laughs], holding an umbrella one hand, and the other hand holding the handlebar. All the people in the Star Grocery looked down and they said, *Oh, Lena, look, look, there's your Mum coming on the bike with an umbrella.* [Laughs] That made me feel shame a bit, it did, because it looked, it looked strange to me. [Laughs] Anyway, he was good to us, the boss, and Mum used to do all her grocery shopping either at the Greek, the *Greco* she used to call him, or up at Zio Cuogo's place.

So Mum asked the *Greco* if I could come there in the holidays, and he said yes, so I went to work there in Christmas holiday, one Christmas, and then I went back to school for another year until I was 15, then when I was 15 I went straight to work. For six months I was working in that pokey little, dark room, it was horrible, from 8.30am, then I'd have an hour for lunch, and we used to finish at 5.30pm. At 4 o'clock he used to let me out of that room and come in the shop and watch the others serving. He said, *Lena, you have, you're not allowed to serve, you just have to watch the others.* So I used to stand there and watch them. Do you know at, at school I was dumb, dumb, dumb in arithmetic? When I went to work at the Star Grocery I used to do the orders, and add up. I was really good, and I was quick, and I never ever made a mistake. I don't know how I did it.

OH: Sometimes school doesn't suit people.

LM: Yes.

OH: Whereabouts exactly was that shop? I'm trying to work that out.

LM: When it was the old shop, there was Morphett Street there, and this is Hindley Street.

OH: Was it towards West Terrace?

LM: No, you know Hindley Street.

OH: Yes, I know Hindley Street, but where on Hindley Street?

LM: You know this is Morphett Street.

OH: Yes.

LM: This is the bridge going up here.

OH: Yes.

- LM: This is Hindley Street there.
- OH: Yes.
- LM: Well, we were about four, five shops here, really old.
- OH: So towards King William Street?
- LM: Towards King William.
- OH: Right.
- LM: And next to us was a Greek butcher, Liascos.
- OH: And where was West's Theatre?
- LM: West Theatre was, the Metro (Theatre) was here and the West was here, there was a ...
- OH: So a bit further down?
- LM: Yeah! Up here there was a Greek chemist too, Ciacos I think they were called.
- OH: Oh yes.
- LM: And then there was the West Theatre, and over the other side was the Metro.
- OH: Right.
- LM: And further up here was the Civic Centre.
- OH: Right.
- LM: And over here was the, the Royal.
- OH: Right.
- LM: Right? Miller Anderson's was there.
- OH: Right.
- LM: Right?
- OH: Yep.
- LM: Yeah! Then in King William Street there was the Majestic there, and further up here was the Rex, the Regent, and I can't remember them all.
- OH: We've just been joined by Claudio, Lena's husband. So Lena, I want to move a long way into the future, and ask you about when you first went to Italy. Can you tell me when that was and who you went with?
- LM: Well in, I was, in 1972 my husband and my three boys, David, Duane, and Adrian, we moved to Darwin for good. Oh well, for a few years anyway. So my mother's sister in France, was very sick, she had breast cancer I think, and she wanted to see me. I was the only one of my mother's side of the family she hadn't seen, and she said she'd love to see me. So Mum came up from Adelaide, then we got our tickets, and we went over for six weeks but we stayed ... We went straight to France, we didn't, we stopped in Rome and then we caught the train and we went to France. So we stayed with them for two weeks.
- Auntie had an operation, had her gall bladder out. She was doing fine, I was sitting with my auntie in the morning – her daughter used to go to work, do cleaning work – and Mum used to do things for my auntie and her niece, help her doing cooking and things, and I'd sit in the bedroom with Zia Amalia her

name was. I'd tell her about Darwin, about the crocodiles, and things like that, and how Claudio used to go fishing and see all these big crocodiles. One night she dreamt about these crocodiles. The next morning she said to me, *Oh Lena*, she said, *I, I had a terrible dream. I, I dreamt that the crocodile got your husband*. Yeah, she said, *Tell him to keep away*.

Anyway, we stayed with auntie and cousin for two weeks, Anna used to come home at 1 o'clock from her cleaning job. and then we'd hop in the car and she'd take us up to the Pyrenees to see all the sights up there. That was the first time I ever seen snow, up in the mountains, but I wasn't very close to it.

Anyway, we'd come home at night and then cook. Zia Amalia stayed in bed the whole time we were there. I used to go in there and tell her about my life in Darwin, the children, things like that. Anyway, we left to come back, we went back to Italy from, from – what's that place called, Tarbes – and we went back to Italy, we got to Montebelluna and we, we had ... Mum had written a letter that we were coming back, and when we got to Montebelluna there was nobody there to meet us. The same thing happened in France by the way. When I went over to France, Mum had written auntie a letter to say we were arriving such and such a day, when we got to the Tarbes, from Italy to Tarbes, nobody there, so we caught a taxi. We didn't have any money – that's another story – but anyway we didn't have any money, only had Australian money, we didn't have any French money, and so the taxi driver took us to auntie's place, and in some sort of way we said we had no money. I said, *If you like, we'll give you some Australian money, and if you can come back later on we can exchange it with the French money my auntie would give us*, I said. When we got there, nobody was awake, everybody was still asleep. We knock at the door and then Anna come out and she says, *Shoosh*, she said, because the little boy, her grandson, was still sleeping and we weren't allowed to make a noise. Anyway, that's alright.

We went back to Montebelluna, nobody is there, so we caught a taxi, and we went up to Bigolino, because that's where my Dad was born. Yeah, we went there and they were surprised. *Oh Lena, you arrived*. And I said, *Yeah, we were waiting for you at the station. Oh, we forgot all about you*.

[Laughter]

LM: So that's alright, lucky we can speak the language.

OH: And what was it like to meet your relatives?

LM: Oh, it was the most beautiful thing that I ever done in my life, was to go over there and see all my relatives, plus we went to Florence to see his sisters. You should have seen their faces when they saw me. They were crying and hugging me, they were pinching me to see if I was really there. His sisters were so emotional, it was so beautiful.

OH: Did you meet your mother's relatives as well as your father's relatives?

LM: Yes, yes. Mum had her sister, her cousins in France. She had three girls, there were three girls and a boy that lived in France. That was Zia Amalia's children. I met all them, went to see them all. When I came back to Bigolino I met all the relatives in there, and then I went to Biadene where Mum was born. She had a cousin living there, we stayed with her, and then she had another cousin living

up there a bit, we went to see them, and then Mum knew a lot of people, excuse me, a lot of people of course. So we borrowed bikes and we went all around the *paese* (countryside), Biadene. *Lena, I'm going to take you here. Lena, I'm going to take you there*, and they were all old people, and I said, *Mum, I don't want to go and see old people, I want to see young people*. I mean I was, I was 48 then, and Mum was 78, she's 30 [years older than me]

OH: And she was riding?

LM: She was riding her bike, me too, and we'd go all around the *paese* to meet everybody. Then we went to Venice mind you, in the train. She had a cousin called Virginia, who was 98 years old, and she had a memory, oh, really, really good. Her and Mum were talking about the 19, the 1800s. I mean Mum was born in 1900, but she was born in 1800 and something, and they were talking about all the rellies and what they did, and this and the other. Oh, it was amazing, she was a lovely lady, I really liked her. Then Mum's cousin's daughter lived in Venice, and we went to see her. We went up and down, around those little ...

AR: Canals.

LM: No, not the canals, walking on the footpaths kind of thing, and seeing all the shops. We went to the St Mark's Square is it, and fed some pigeons.

OH: The pigeons.

LM: Yeah, yeah. We bought some wheat and they came and ate off our hands, yeah, yes.

OH: That must have been a great experience.

LM: And then I went back in 1985, and it wasn't the same. It was nice still, we went to France also, and then we went to Italy and Florence. It was still nice but the first time was the best, you know.

OH: Yeah.

LM: And sad to leave too. I was only there for six or seven weeks I think; the second time I went over we were there for three months. I tried to get back earlier because he was moaning and, and so I went to the travel agent and they, they didn't have a flight to come back.

OH: Oh, good for you. It meant that you could stay longer.

LM: Longer, yeah. I didn't come back until, my anniversary was on the 6 October, I think I got back on the 8 October.

OH: Lena, we're coming to the end of the interview, but I wanted to ask you about in your lifetime, changes that you've seen like, you know, if you think back to say when you were in Frogmore Road and Findon Road, and you go there now, how different is it?

LM: You know, every time I drive past River Road, which is Rowells Road now, I always glance over there to where Dad had his farm, his garden I should say, yes, and every time I go down Frogmore Road it reminds me that I used to live there. I've got some friends that live in Frogmore Road, or just off. They live in Santin Court or Avenue, whatever it's ... I've got a friend that lives there, and plus sometimes I used to go to the Tonellato's to get ... He, (Luigi) used to make salami – I can't say that – I used to go there and pick up the salami, a nice

fresh one. The homemade stuff is always the best, and he used to make the musette. [Laughs]

OH: Lena, what about your Italian heritage, what does that mean to you?

LM: Oh, it means a lot because I, I've know another language, not that I can speak Italian, but I can understand it very well, and it, it also helps other people too. I, I worked, as I said I worked in the Greek shop for ten years, and after five years I started to speak Greek. I could speak Greek really, really well. The Greek ladies used to come to me to get served because they liked me. Then one day in Darwin there was this little Greek lady, I knew her daughter, Alice, too, and she was trying to tell the girl over the counter, in Woolworths, that she wanted the salami sliced, and I went up to her – the girl couldn't understand her – and I went up to the little Greek lady and I said, *What, ti théleis* (What do you want?) I said to her, and that means, *What would you like?* She said, *I want the salami copse*. 'Copse' means cut, so I told the girl to cut the salami up for her, and she thanked me so much. I can still understand a bit of Greek. If I was to go to Greece, Greece, now, I reckon after a week I'd pick it up, because a lot of their words are like Italian words. So in a way it's good because you learn different things in your culture.

OH: Lena, if I asked you whether you saw yourself as an Italian, or an Australian, what would you say?

LM: I see myself, I see myself as an Australian. I'm born here and I go by the Australia. I barrack for Australia no matter what. When the Italians played against the Australians in, in soccer, I went for Australia. I go for Australia anything, soccer, football, rugby, whatever sport, I'm an Australian, and I go for them. A lot of people don't. They're born here but they barrack for, like I know a girl, she barracks for the Greeks, she's a Greek. She doesn't barrack for Australia, she barracks for the Greeks, and I said, *But you're Australian*, I said to her.

OH: What about coming from the Veneto, is that important to you that you've got your relatives ...?

LM: Oh yes, I really loved going to Italy. What I liked about Italy was one day we went for a ride in the bus, Mum and I. We went to the Montebelluna markets, and we bought a few things. so we caught the bus, and instead of coming from Montebelluna straight to where my Mum lived, or my cousin, you have to go right all around all the *paese*, (villages) I can't remember now all the names, and what I liked being on that bus, you wouldn't believe it, everybody was talking the same language.

[Madeleine laughs]

LM: No English, no German, no nothing, all in *dialetto* (dialect), I loved it.

OH: Beautiful.

LM: And then there was another thing, I said to Mum, we were at a railway station – we caught trains a lot in Italy – and I said, *Mum, you know what I notice in Italy? There's a lot of bald men*.

[Madeleine laughs]

LM: There were bald men everywhere.

OH: Lena, I ...

LM: And I've never noticed it here.

OH: Well I think that's a great place to finish off the interview, it's amusing, and your memories, and I'd like to say thank you very much for your time and for contributing to the Italian Market Gardeners' ...

LM: And I'm very happy to have done it, it's really good because it brought back memories of mine too. I mean I do think, think about things sometimes.

OH: Yeah.

LM: But when you speak about it, it's even better.

OH: That's great, thank you very much, Lena.