

**Italian market gardeners oral history project**

**Interview OH872/5 with Bruno Piovesan**

(Also present is Graziella Piovesan, Bruno's wife)

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

**recorded by Madeleine Regan at Kidman Park, South Australia**

**4 October 2008**

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**This is an interview with Bruno Piovesan by Madeleine Regan on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2008 in his home at Kidman Park.**

**Bruno, we're going to begin this interview by talking about your background. So would you be able to tell me a little about your parents and where they were born and how they came to Australia?**

B.P: Well, my parents were born in a place called Ponzano Veneto, that's about twenty-five kilometres from Venice, very close to Treviso, and my father came to Australia at the age of twenty-two – he was born in 1905, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1905. He came to Australia in 1927. After seven years of working in Australia, my mother, which he knew as a fiancée in Italy, could not afford her fare to Australia, so she virtually had to find her own money to come to Australia. She come to Australia in 1934, and she was born on the fourth of the twelfth, 1907. They were both born on the same day of the month, virtually, but two years' difference. And, like I said, my father come here in 1927, after seven years my mother come here, and I was born in 1937 and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1937 – (laughs) which was pretty close dates, not easy to forget.

**You had also other siblings?**

B.P: Yes, I had two older brothers. One was born in '35 and one was born in '36, so the three of us were born within three years of my mother arriving in Australia. And they worked in the market garden, but my father at the time was working in the centre of Australia at a place called [Spotted Tiger Mine] – would have been above Tennant Creek, Northern Territory – mining mica. And a couple of the mines had names: one was called the Last Chance Mine, and one was called the Spotted Tiger. There were several others, but I can't virtually remember because I was very young at home.

**Bruno, do you know why your father decided to come to Australia?**

B.P: (laughs) I think, like many other people that immigrated from Italy in those years, it was a question of not much future in Italy and it was very, very tough living conditions and they sought a better life, so they decided to emigrate. I mean, people went to America, people come to Australia. Uncle of mine, he went to Venezuela, and before that they went to the Congo in Africa, which wasn't very successful – they had to run away from there – and then they went to Venezuela; and of course what made my father come to Australia I don't really know but I think it was a good choice in the end. (laughs) Very good choice.

**Did he come with any other family?**

B.P: No, no, he was by himself. He had to have a discharge from the army to be able to leave the country at the time, and I've still got that certificate with me, his discharge from the army, and he just came to Australia and started working very, very hard, you'd have to say.

**And a young man, twenty-two.**

B.P: Yep, very young man. Very young man, twenty-two. And things were pretty tough. I remember them saying they used to build roads at a place called Karoonda, that would be in the Mallee area, and they used to load metal – which are stones, virtually – with a manure fork. There were no front-end loaders or anything like that.

**Amazing.**

B.P: It was tough, yes.

**So when your father arrived he went straight to – – –.**

B.P: He virtually went into the mines straight away up north, he went up north. They had provisions sent to them about once every three months and they'd come down to Alice Springs probably once every six months and that. It was very hard work. They used to mine this stuff called mica, which was used in the resistors for the power, for electricity like, and probably toasters and stuff like that these days – of course, plastic's taken that over. And he barely wore shoes because they reckoned – I heard them say that they used to play jokes on each other for something to do and they'd put a hot coal ash under his feet and they wouldn't even feel it. (laughs) So things were pretty hard.

**And do you know how your father came to be in this area, in the west of Adelaide, as a market gardener?**

B.P: No, I really don't know the reason why – maybe Albert [Tonellato] might have known that, Albert and Mary might have known. Did they know why their parents came here?

**No.**

B.P: No, I think it was just the question of where you're going to stop, you know. And virtually probably there was a demand for people to come to Adelaide and they came to Adelaide. That's about the strength that I know of it.

**Yes. So you were born in 1937.**

B.P: Yes, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1937.

**And can you tell me a little bit about what your life was like as a child?**

B.P: I was very, very lucky, I suppose. But from when I can remember I always used to have to work because my father, after [working in the mines] he had glasshouses in this area.

**Do you know how many he had?**

B.P: I think about 12. And they used to make a good living out of 12 glasshouses, he used to make a good living just with twelve glasshouses. Had about five acres of land in those years and he used to plant potatoes and other type of beans and things like that – I remember sowing beans and all this business. And you had to dig potatoes virtually with a fork to start with, then they had a plough – all horse-drawn, there was no machinery, just all horse-drawn – and I very vividly remember digging glasshouses by hand fork, you had to dig the glasshouses with a hand fork, till the age of about 16 or 18. That was before going to work as an apprentice. And that was pretty hard. I remember coming home from school, didn't even know what homework was because we had our chores to do: take the leaves out of the glasshouse when they were pruning tomatoes; hoe around the side of the glasshouse so insects wouldn't get inside of the glasshouse. Always something to do. Sowing beans – – –. (laughs) We were kept busy all the time. There wasn't a question of having nothing to do, that's for sure.

**And there were three of you, so you were able to – – –.**

B.P: Yes. And I was the youngest, I was always the one getting kicked around I suppose, but (laughs) – I was always getting ordered around, but it didn't hurt me, I didn't mind.

**Did your mum work in the market gardens as well?**

B.P: Oh, yes, she used to. Well, the first day after she arrived – – –. They were married by proxy, and my mother used to say all the time she was the second lady in South Australia to be married by proxy. That's rather strange, I suppose, but in those years that's how it was. My father was here and my mother was in Italy, and they did – don't ask me how they'd do it, but that's how they used to do it, it was called 'married by proxy' in those years. Then my mother stayed there for several months before she boarded a ship to come to Australia.

**But they'd known each other for a long time.**

B.P: Oh, yes. Yes, they'd known each other from when they were 16 years of age, virtually, before that. But Mum used to say that things were that tough in Italy that once they got married she virtually was a part of my father's family. But she was told she had to go home because they could not give her enough food to keep here there. Things were a bit hard.

**Did she come from an area close by your father?**

B.P: They were same village, Ponzano Veneto. They might have been about two kilometres' distance, something like that. The original homes are still there. My mother's home is still there. My father's has been renovated, type of thing. But no, everything is still basically the same. And I've been back several times and it's very, very interesting: several cousins there, and I remember seeing a few of my uncles that have since passed away and they were very nice, they treat you very well when you go there and – oh! Unbelievable. I can only speak the Venetian dialect, which I couldn't the first time I went over there, but I learnt very quickly and I still speak it now. That's the only thing my mother used to speak because virtually schooling was limited in those years. She hardly spoke much English at all after all of her years in Australia. And of course when Dad died, he died at the age of forty-three – he had a cerebral haemorrhage, they said it was the result of some knocks over the years, don't know where or when; but these days they can be saved, but those days they couldn't. I vividly remember him coming home from the garden and he was very sick, he went to bed and I think he lasted about a week after that. That was it.

**And you were quite young, Bruno.**

B.P: Eleven years old.

**Very hard for your family, then.**

B.P: I reckon it would have been. I mean you didn't think much in those years. It would have been pretty hard on my mother, it would have been tough with 11, 12 and 13-year-olds on her own and that was it. No real help from the government in those years, you had to work all the time and that was it.

**And did your mum keep the glasshouses then?**

B.P: Oh, yes, with the help of this uncle of mine which was my father's brother, was up in the Northern Territory. He come down to Adelaide when my father had passed away and he virtually went into partnership with my mother with glasshouses, and they worked virtually together on the land. In those years, apparently you could earn a pretty good living with glasshouses, because there weren't fumigations in those years. And I mean every year one chore in the summertime was shifting glasshouses and we used to hate it all the time. You used to get two crops a year out of a glasshouse and after that they'd get disease, you couldn't grow any more plants in there, they'd all wilt away and die before the crop ripened; so you had to shift glasshouses, and that was a chore.

**Big job.**

B.P: Oh! Big job. (laughs) And hot.

**Do you remember what it involved?**

B.P: Oh, of course. You had to drill a lot of holes with a post hole digger, and it was in the summertime of course and the glass was hot, the rafters were hot, and I started an apprenticeship, I worked at a place called Gordon Tregoning, when I was fifteen I started there. And we used to get two weeks' holiday a year, and we'd come home and shift glasshouses, that was it. Pretty hard.

**Hard work for a young boy.**

B.P: Yes, but I never bothered. That was it. It was hard work.

**Gordon Tregoning's in Ashley Street [Underdale]?**

B.P: Yes, that's the one, yes. Gordon Tregoning in Ashley Street, yes. I worked there for eleven and a half years. I started an apprenticeship at the age of sixteen and worked there for a year before, and when I started working I was getting one pound, nineteen-and-six a week. That's not a lot of money, even in those years.

**So the shifting of the glasshouses was hard work.**

B.P: Oh, yes. The shifting of the glasshouses, that was hard work, and you had to carry these glasses – they were pretty heavy for being at young age and that, and you had to keep shifting them, and they had to set them up – – –. This was something that had to be done every Christmas because there was always some glasshouses that had to be shifted.

**How big were the panes of glass?**

B.P: They called them 14 x 16, that's inches. 14 inches by 16 inches. And those years a lot of the glass came from Belgium. And most of [the timber] was Oregon; the rafters were tin, virtually.

**And the dimensions of the glasshouses?**

B.P: The dimensions of the glasshouse was – I'm talking feet – about a 112 feet long by about fourteen foot wide. And of course in the beginning they were only two panes of glass high, which were very low, and they were a nuisance to work in. And then if you got a bit more wealthy you put an extra pane of glass so you made them a bit higher, which were much more comfortable to work in. But you used to have to sow the tomatoes in virtually the late summer and towards June, July, you put in a crop of beans underneath and hoped the crop did all right. But they got by, that was always a profitable type of business to be in. Of course, many years after, fumigation came in and then they didn't have to change glasshouses every year; they could stay in the same place for twenty, thirty years, because the fumigation used to kill all the microbes in the soil and that, any disease, and they'd be okay. That was a big help for market gardeners. I think Johnny [Marchioro] might have told you, you could have glasshouses in the same place for years and years and years and that was it; but before that, no, we had to shift them every second year.

**And your uncle, Bruno, what was his name?**

B.P: Attilio.

**And he was your dad's brother.**

B.P: Yes, younger brother, a bit younger.

**And was he married?**

B.P: Yes, he went back to Italy and married – oh, gee, in about '48, 1948 he got married.

**So the year that your father died was?**

B.P: 1949, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1949.

**And after that your uncle came?**

B.P: Came down from Northern Territory and worked in the garden with my mother.

**And lived in the house?**

B.P: Oh, no, they had their own houses. We used to live next door to Albert Tonellato, and it was a converted, renovated cowshed – they reckoned it was a cowshed. (laughs) But anyway.

**This is your family home?**

B.P: That's right. We were next-door neighbours with the Tonellatos. Always I grew up with them to the age of about I think fourteen, and then we shifted to Frogmore Road and my mother built this house in 1951. The date's still in the back of [the chimney]. (indicates)

**You've got a photo of it here.**

B.P: Yes.

**And there's a story about building this, isn't there?**

B.P: Yes. The foundation, there was no such thing as foundation rods. The steel in the foundations were the offcuts of the FJ Holden, first FJ Holdens. I remember they were about six foot long, they were about three-quarter of an inch, seven-eighths of an inch one end, going down to about three-eighths of an inch, and strips of about – ooh, might have been eighth of an inch thick or maybe less – and we used to lay them one in front of the other, stacks of them, used to just lay them around the place and they were your reinforcing for the concrete. The blocks – you could not buy bricks in those years, so we made our own solid cement blocks on weekends and that was hard work, too, because they would have been about – I don't know, what, sixteen inch by eight inch by four inch. Still talking imperial. (laughs) And they were pretty heavy.

**And where did you get the material – –?**

B.P: That's another thing, it was very hard to get cement in those years. Through friends of friends that – my father used to know people before he died and that and they used to help out. There was a lot of helping out in those years, you know. It was built on weekends. And those tiles, like a lot of other tiles in those years, came from India. There was no building materials, not many building materials in Australia.

**Because this is post-war.**

B.P: They were the orange-type-coloured tiles. They're still very good, they're still a very good tile. And of course the Oregon timber all come from America in those years, all the roofing timbers come from America.

**And how long do you think it took to build that house?**

B.P: Two years. And you could only build a certain area to the size of the family. You weren't allowed to build any larger than family requirements. But because my mother had three sons she could have two bedrooms. (laughs) In those years, a lot of homes were built just the back section – like the laundry, the kitchen and probably one room – and then they'd build the next section on after, when they had a bit more finance, of course. But many places you used to see just the rear section of the place built and eventually they'd build the front section. But that was real luxury in those years, to be able to live in a house finished like that in those years, because they were all still asbestos, that was the main thing used in those years. Probably basically a lot of asbestos homes or fibrous plaster inside, of course. But that was solid concrete and it was a very, very good home in those years.

**And rare to find along Frogmore Road.**

B.P: Well, that would be one of the first. There was an older settlement, which has been knocked down so many years ago now, but corner of Valetta Road and Frogmore Road. But between from where our home was, Frogmore Road to Valetta Road was just a series of potholes. In the wintertime it was impassable because it was just full of water, and when I used to go to work at Tregoning with a pushbike you had to go in the gardens to get through, you could not get through the road because it was impassable. And many times we used to pull out cars that got bogged in there with water and that, you'd have to pull them out with a tractor or a truck or something – because tractors did come in later on – and the saying was at General Motors they tested a few of their cars along that track to see if they water-leaked inside. (laughs) Oh, it was very bad. You couldn't go in the middle of the road in the wintertime. I've never seen a road like it. There wouldn't be a road around like that now, even in the country.

**When would it have been bituminised, do you think?**

B.P: Oh, that would have been bituminised – that house was built in 1951; I suppose that would have been bituminised '55 or after that. Did you see it, too, Graziella, did you?

G.P: No.

B.P: What, still rough? Oh, well, that would have been in the '60s. That'd be going back in the '60s. Was just the section between Valetta Road and [two hundred metres from Grange Road]. One check where this house was, it had a like stone base with a bit of bitumen on top. And I think – because just down the side of this house [was] the Santins' home, they lived there at this time – but before that it belonged to some people called Fewings, and they were landowners at the time and they probably surfaced the road for their own use to go into their property, and that's where it stopped, virtually.

But it was all market gardens. I mean the front section of this five-acre lot where the house was built was pretty good growing soil, but the rear section was just sandy and you couldn't do much with it.

**Was that going west towards – – –?**

B.P: Go west, yes, towards the sea side, you know.

**Right. And when your mother and father were on that land first of all, they were leasing it?**

B.P: Oh, yes, they were leasing it. They reckoned it belonged to the Scarfe family.

**The Harris Scarfes?**

B.P: The Harris Scarfe's family. They were ladies, apparently. Look, I stand to be corrected there, but there's other people – Albert [Tonellato] would have known a bit more about that.

**No.**

B.P: They all said it belonged to the Scarfes and that. But in those years the occupiers of the land had first option to purchase. Of course, we had five acres and that was it; other people had twelve acres. But when they come to survey it with proper means, with *better* means than they had in those years, people finished up with 13, 14 acres for their 10 acres. We finished up with about six acres for five acres, you know what I mean? But didn't make any difference, anyway, in those years; you occupied that area and that's what you kept.

**So if you say that there was five acres, six –**

B.P: Yes, that's right.

**– 12 glasshouses?**

B.P: 12 glasshouses.

**And anything else growing on that?**

B.P: Not really, not much. Only a few beans, outside beans, at the time and a few potatoes. But, like I said, at the rear section about half of the land would have been just sand and you couldn't do much with it in those years.

**And was it level or was it starting to be – – –?**

B.P: No, pretty level, pretty level. But behind that property of ours – I don't know who it belonged to, but we called it 'the sand hills', and that's where people used to go and get this red sand for doing whatever. They might have been using it in the building industry. Because it was commercially dug out, type of thing. Kidman Park, through here, there's a lot of sand. If you go down, there's a lot of strips of red sand. But we weren't too keen in going there because there was a lot of brown snakes around in those years, there was heaps of brown snakes. I remember with Albert Tonellato, he was giving me a ride on a bike and we're coming home from an adjoining property and this brown snake was in the middle of the road, and it stood up on its tail – you know, like you see in the books and that – it really stood up and it stood around about one and a half metres high. And he got off the bike and he killed it.

**How did he kill it?**

B.P: Oh, he got an old fencepost and killed it with a fencepost. He was pretty game. Albert would have been, I don't know, 22, 23 at the time.

**And how old would you have been?**

B.P: Oh, me, I think I would have been about eight or nine, something like that.

**So quite dramatic for you.**

B.P: Oh! Yes, I think so. Of course, the story was that these snakes would never stop wriggling until the sun went down, so we used to go and check it out. (laughs) But didn't wriggle too much. Oh, there's heaps of things that I can remember.

**There's another story, Bruno, that you told me about a young woman.**

B.P: Yes, that was a tragic one. This would have been in about the summer of '49, I'd say. And apparently this woman – I don't know, very nice, pretty woman, she would have been in her probably mid-twenties; they said she was the daughter of a hotelier here, a chap that owned hotels and that – and she started off, they said, from Frogmore Road and she just did a direct crossing, she just [took] a straight line, they say.

**In what direction?**

B.P: Of course, I was eleven, twelve at the time. She's heading east, towards the city from Frogmore Road. And she'd jumped through one glasshouse, she went right over one glasshouse, crawled over one glasshouse, and somebody saw her and they said, 'What are you doing?' She just kept walking, she just kept walking, didn't say nothing. And then she come up to this boundary of the Tonellatos where we were staying with them, and we were kids playing outside – this was about one o'clock in the afternoon type of thing, summer, the elder people had went to have a rest type of thing and we kids, we were playing around outside. I remember this woman, she stood on top of this – it was a timber-type fence, they used to be around in those years. It was about a six-by-three rail across the top with wooden posts and they slotted in, and they were the type of fencing used around the place in those years. I remember her standing on top of that and then she just threw herself on a glasshouse. Of course, we got scared.

**And how close would you have been?**

B.P: The glasshouse wouldn't have been more than about two or three feet from the fence.

**And you were standing quite – – –.**

B.P: Oh, no. We were a fair distance away. We might have been say two hundred yards away, two hundred yards away, no more.

**But you were watching her.**

B.P: Yes. We just saw this lady. She was dressed in a white dress. And then she went over a couple [of glasshouses] and the next thing I heard people screaming around the place, called an ambulance out, and I remember the ambulance picking her up and taking her away. But she died, she bled to death virtually, she was cut everywhere, she was just cut everywhere.

**And what sense did you make of that?**

B.P: Well, we weren't allowed to go close, of course, because just my Uncle Attilio was there at the time, and they just started ripping up sheets to bandage her up before the ambulance come there. But you don't forget it.

**It's – no – like such a dramatic thing. It's almost like hearing something from a movie.**

B.P: Yes. I mean, like I said, I was only about eleven or twelve, probably just turned twelve at the time, but I vividly remember that. You don't forget that.

**No. And what other things would you have done as a child growing up – – –.**

B.P: Well, we went to what was called Underdale School, which now is called Flinders Park, and I've never, ever – well, we went to school during the war years, virtually – but never found any difficulty, like being – what would you call? Like these days they'd call it 'harassed' or something. No, no, never. No, never. Always been accepted at school and that. And not a great student, I suppose. (laughs) But of course homework was working around the glasshouses, and that was it.

**What sort of social life would your family have had?**

B.P: Oh, their social life was pretty limited, I think. They used to get together of a Sunday afternoon and I suppose they used to just play bowls if they could find a spot. I remember we used to go down to Rosewater, my father used to go down Rosewater. But in those years you only had so many gallons of fuel, you were restricted with your fuel because of the wartime and that, and you had to be careful where you drove a truck because if they saw you driving a truck without the purpose of going in the garden industry I think they could have fined you or something. Yes, that was right. And used to take a chance and go to Rosewater, they had these bocce courts and that, and as kids we used to go there and just play with all the other kids and their parents at the time, you know, and that was Sunday afternoon fun. And then they used to go to St Kilda, which is just north of Adelaide of course (laughs) but it felt like it was miles away at the time: that was a picnic time, once-a-year picnic time.

**On the beach?**

B.P: Oh, yes, on the St Kilda beach. And they used to have motorbike races and that and different things and that. And they called it a 'swimming pool', but gee whiz, it was just a hole in the dirt, virtually. (laughs) Used to have their own way of having fun. As kids we used to play cricket and football and that. Of course, you'd

make your own bat, you couldn't ever buy one. To have a tennis racquet, that was a real luxury; couldn't afford a tennis racquet. (laughs)

**And there were quite a few families, weren't there?**

B.P: Yes, of course, yes. There would have been about seven or eight of us as young children from other parents that were all around about the same age – some a big younger, some a bit older – but you always used to get around. And the parents used to get together on a Sunday, and of course my father, being a heavy smoker, and a few others, we all thought we'd try that smoking bit, you know, like kids used to do and that, and I think I was about eight at the time. And that's when I stopped smoking, because one of our friends, a couple of years old, he thought he'd grab some cigars from his parents. Of course, he got us smoking cigars and I think we threw up completely for a long time (laughs) and that was it, no more smoking after that.

**That was it.**

B.P: That was history. Probably a good idea. (laughter) But they were good days, though, they were good days, where everyone got together. And you waited for the weekend, you all got together and you'd have your fun. They'd have their bottles of beer in those years, and that was even restricted. You had to be careful because some people started having these butcher courts[?] and that and they'd supply beer; but you had to have a licence and that, they used to get raided, and they all had their own little box to put their beer in and all that business. Oh, for God's sake, it was real [pain] – I don't know who around the country in those years, (laughs) completely different to now, that's for sure. But they were the good old days, I suppose.

**And, Bruno, you left school at what age?**

B.P: The age of fifteen.

**At fifteen, and you went to the – – –.**

B.P: Gordon Tregoning's. You had to be there a year – you had to sign up as an apprenticeship at the age of 16, so I was there a year from 15 to 16 before I could sign up as an apprenticeship, fitter and turner.

**And there wasn't any possibility of you staying and working on the garden?**

B.P: I didn't want to work in the garden. No, no, no. I had enough of shifting glasshouses. And I remember going to work there at 15 and 16 and have to get up early, and we used to have to hand-dig the glasshouses because we had to dig them properly before you planted the tomatoes, of course. And the hand-digging, that wasn't easy, and I did that a couple of times and then I felt a bit sick at going to work after that and I said, 'Look, I'm not digging glasshouses anymore, that's it'.  
(laughs)

**So how early would that have been?**

B.P: Oh, you'd have to probably get up at five o'clock in the morning, dig glasshouses for a couple of hours and then start work at 7:30.

**A long day.**

B.P: That was a long day, yes. Tregoning's was good, but there we worked nine hours a day. But then we used to finish at 11:30 Friday morning, and I think he still does that now. And he was a pretty tough master, but you learnt the value of time. I mean you learnt that if you talked about the job with someone there, even if you talked about what you was doing with a fellow worker and that, he'd come up and say, 'Look, mate, your time's work fourpence a minute. You have to keep doing your job'. And you learnt the value of time and you learnt to do things pretty right, too. Because after that I went to General Motors Holden and worked in the toolroom there for a couple of years, and I thought if I'd had to learn my trade there I'd have learned nothing compared to working for a private person, type of thing.

**How big was Tregoning's at that time?**

B.P: Twelve workers. Twelve people.

**And you would have been the youngest?**

B.P: Oh, at the stage I was. When I left I think I might have been about the second or third-longest-serving person there. Then I bought my own machine and that and I started doing work at home, and that's when I left there I went to work at General Motors because he thought I might have been taking some business from him. And he wanted to have a look at it – and it wasn't a toy; it was a fairly big machine, ten horsepower motor, about eight foot between centres, it was a pretty big lathe – and I started working at Holden's there for a couple of years, working afternoon shift from about 3:30 – well, four o'clock we used to start; leave home 3:30 – until about

twenty to one. Then I'd come home and work on the lathe till about five o'clock in the morning.

**What would you do?**

B.P: Oh, anything. I'd just machine up things for – I had a friend that had a workshop and he used to pass work on to me and that, and he said to me, 'I don't know if you want to do this job?' They're not around at the moment: they were called three-inch T-piece. E&WS Department in those years, they were cast iron, they were 75-mill[imetre] T-pieces in cast iron and you used to have to bore them out both sides, or three ends of them, and [screw-cut] them, put the thread inside them. But not with a die or nothing, you had to do it all by hand – with the lathe, of course, but manually, not with a die or anything like that – and I had no go/no-go gauges to make sure they were right. And did a heap of them, did anything. I never said no to any work. I just didn't know how to do it, but I did it in the end.

**So you'd come home at, what, one a.m.?**

B.P: Oh, about one o'clock in the morning, yes.

**And then work for another four hours?**

B.P: Yes. And after that I used to grow potatoes, too. (laughs)

**So you were living with your mum.**

B.P: Yes.

**And what about your other brothers?**

B.P: No, they were married, they'd gone out by then.

G.P: Yes.

B.P: They'd left the place, they'd gone. They'd married and they'd shifted out and there was only me and my mother home.

**And what about the market garden, then?**

B.P: No. [My brothers] bought 10 acres at the place called Bolivar, where Johnny [Marchioro] used to be, and they shifted all the glasshouses and things up there, so this land was vacant, and I used to grow some potatoes on it. It was always going to be sold in those years, but there was a credit squeeze I remember, and – gee, might have been the early '60s, very early '60s – and you couldn't sell land, couldn't sell blocks of land. Bit different to now.

**Yes, especially so close to the city.**

B.P: (laughs) You couldn't sell blocks of land in those years, nobody wanted the land. So that got stuck there for a while. And eventually it got sold, type of thing. But, ah yes, there's a lot of history in the place, there's a lot of history.

**And what happened then to your uncle?**

B.P: Well, after we grew up a bit older, my brother took over the garden and he got his own place, he bought his own property and started his own market garden business.

**And where did he buy?**

B.P: At Bolivar, out at Bolivar there, and he worked out there for several years, then he went back to Italy in '65 and he wanted to go back to the home country. And, strangely enough – he never, ever did smoke, but he did die of lung cancer. Maybe through the mines dust or something, I don't know, but it's just one of those things. Never did smoke and died [of lung cancer] – how old was he, Graziella?

G.P: Yes, 62, 63.

B.P: 62, 63, yes. But looked much older than his age he looked at the time, but it was all hard work, all physically hard work.

**Very hard. And what about your mum, and her life? Can you tell me something about her life?**

B.P: Oh, very tough, yes. Well, I can always remember my mother working all the time – although, when we were kids, I always remember on the Sunday she used to take us to Elder Park, you know, get on the *Popeye* and that, go to the zoo. Always remember that.

**How lovely.**

B.P: We'd have been probably about four or five, six, those years. And then she had friends that lived in Hindley Street and she'd call in there and have a cup of coffee and then we'd come home with the tram, virtually catch a tram at Henley Beach Road and walk back from there, which was a bit of a distance. But Mum was very family-orientated, she looked after us very well. Can't say enough about that. Very, very good.

**Did she return to Italy ever?**

B.P: Actually, I took her back to Italy when I was twenty-seven, and Mum hadn't been back for 30 years, or just a bit over 30 years, she'd never been back to Italy, and I

took her back. And she went to see the place where she was a housekeeper at a young age. This lady, she was still there. And she enjoyed it, she really enjoyed it. It's the only time [she ever went back to Italy].

**Your mother must have been young to be a housekeeper.**

B.P: Oh, yes. Well, that's what they used to do in those years. They'd say go to ....., which means 'housekeeping'. They were housekeepers to the more affluent-type people over there. And a lot of them – I remember Johnny's mother, she went when she was 15 or 16. And she went a long way away from home.

G.P: To Milano she went.

B.P: To Milano, at the age of fifteen, housekeeping.

**Young girl.**

B.P: Oh, very young girl.

**And so for your mum to return must have been wonderful.**

B.P: Oh, yes. Yes, that was very nice for her. She enjoyed it, I think, very much.

G.P: She had her brothers there, three brothers.

B.P: Oh, yes. My mother had her brothers over there still, you know, three brothers were still alive. One was working looking after a building in Venice; another one was a policeman at Rome in the Carabinieri, we stayed with him for about three weeks. And the other one was in the village. She had still three surviving brothers. One of her brothers at a young age of twenty-one, twenty-two, was in the Second World War, he got sent to Russia. Just went to war and no-one heard whatever happened to him. They were tough years, they were tough years.

**And your mum, you came back to live in Adelaide, and your mum.**

B.P: Yes, yes. We went with a ship called the *Guglielmo Marconi*, which was only new at the time, it was about a year old – a pretty big ship for those years, twenty-eight thousand ton; we come back with the same ship, and that's where I met my wife, on the boat. (laughs) On the way back.

**In 1965?**

G.P: '65. We met in November.

B.P: In 1965. That was just coincidence, I suppose. Because I went over there with the intention of driving around seeing Europe, which was the big thing in those years, travelling around, and 1965 I went with a friend of mine called Vic Zerella.

G.P: ..... stay there.

B.P: We bought a car over there and we did thirty-four thousand kilometres, went from Spain to Sweden. We went everywhere. And we were in France when they were inaugurating the Mont Blanc Tunnel. That was in 1965, I forget [the exact date]. The date would have been, I suppose, roughly guessing, about August, September, something like that. And we couldn't go through it at the time because it was for dignitaries only and workers, we had to wait another day, so I said, 'Ah, well, we'll tick off'. Went to Germany, went to Berlin, went across through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin, which was very hazardous at the time. Went to the British Consul at Frankfurt and they give us about four pages why we should not drive to Berlin, but we still did. That was an experience.

But that was a great trip. Then we went up as far as Sweden, through Denmark, Sweden and England. And then from London my friend went back to America and I drove the car from London back to Treviso. And I just slept one night – (laughs) but I didn't make any mistakes on the road. With the RAR or whatever they're called over there they give me the itinerary, the red line through the towns you had to go through. There wasn't much traffic, not like now. I mean I drove there about two years ago, three years ago, and it was unbelievable, the amount of traffic now.

**The *autostrade*. Ugh!**

G.P: A nightmare.

B.P: Oh! The traffic is horrendous. You could drive with your eyes closed here compared to traffic over there, but in those years there were no vehicles on the road. Of course, the roads weren't that good, but they were all right.

**How long did you go for, that trip?**

B.P: The first time?

**Yes.**

B.P: Well, the boat trip was about 22 days – about eight months all up.

**And did your mother stay in Treviso while you were travelling?**

B.P: Yes, she stayed in the towns there in Treviso while I drove round for about two or three months with my friend. (laughs) And when I come back she said, 'I've already booked the boat to come back to Australia'. I got upset, I said, 'What did you book for?' Anyway, that's what happened, that's how I met my wife on the boat. (laughter)

**What a nice story.**

B.P: Ah, yes.

**So you met Graziella on the boat?**

B.P: Yes, on the boat, after about two or three days on the boat. I think she got on at Messina. And just – I don't know, I've always had some funny feeling about girls smoking, and she used to smoke sometimes, and I thought, 'Gee whiz, I don't like that'. But anyway, I don't know what happened. (laughs) I asked her for a dance, and that was it. And at the end, I suppose, I only used to see her at the night-time, always there'd be some social activity on, dancing or something on, on the boat; and then I thought, 'Oh, look', asked her for her address so I could write to her. And at the last moment she said, 'Here you are, here's my address'. So I thought, 'Oh, well, fair enough'. And after I was back in Adelaide for about a week, this friend of mine, Gus Torresan, a good friend, he said, 'You written to Graziella yet?' I said, 'No'. He said, 'What are you waiting for, you silly bugger?' I said, 'Oh, well, I don't know how to write Italian'. (laughs) So I went and bought a dictionary – I've still got it – Italian/English dictionary, and it took me about a week to write a letter. Don't know what it sounded like, but it worked.

G.P: ..... ..

**Because you'd spoken with your mum in dialect.**

B.P: Oh, complete – only dialect. Actually, I was that good in dialect that when I went to Venice in those years I was speaking to the gondoliers and they could not believe that I was born in Australia. They said, 'You speak perfect dialect'. And I said, 'Well, I learnt now, virtually'. But being there quite a few months you learn that pretty quick. And even now that's all I really speak, I can't really speak the Italian. Would sound funny if I tried to speak Italian. But the dialects are very similar and they all understand you – well, basically they do – and in Venice that's all they speak. In Venice they only speak the Venetian dialect.

**And, Bruno, was it unusual in your day to be a young man at twenty-seven not married?**

B.P: Well, everyone used to get married at twenty-three, twenty-four in those years, that's a fact. Everyone used to get married younger, you know. But I had this always strange feeling that I wanted to go overseas, and that was it. But of course it was very hard to get the money to go overseas. I think the boat trip cost me about ninety-six pounds one way and a hundred and eight pounds the other way. It was still a fair bit of money. And I think the money I spent overseas I probably could have bought half a house in those years, but who cares? (laughs) Still say it's the best money I spent.

**Did you resign from General Motors to go?**

B.P: Oh, yes, yes. I resigned from General Motors in '65, and then when I came back my friend said, 'Oh, look, when are you going to start working at Holden's again?' I said, 'What for?' I'd sort of become independent. And before I left I always thought, 'Well, where's my next bit of money coming from?' You know, you had to rely on that weekly wage and that. And being away for eight months and not having a wage every week, type of thing, you become a little bit more daring. I thought, 'Why do I want to go to work for a boss for? I'm going to start working at home'. 'What are you going to do?' I said, 'I don't know, but I'll do something'.

And we had an old garden shed, and in those years, in '66, a law come out that every home site had to have their own privy, like a toilet. So this law come out, and I thought, 'Oh, well, I'll start making them things', and started making these little toilet things. And then builders would come around and say, 'What else do you do?' I said, 'Oh, I'll do anything'.

**What kind of toilets do you mean?**

B.P: You might see them on sites even now, but they're plumbed up to sewers now.

**Oh, like a little house.**

B.P: Yes, little 'privy', they call them, little privies. Toilet – well, call them toilets, they were virtually, that's what they were.

**Made of?**

B.P: Iron, just iron, with an iron door. Just corrugated iron, that's it. One sheet wide, about one and a half sheets of iron deep, type of thing. That's it. And about six

and a half foot high and that was it. Bit of ventilation around the top and that's all they were.

G.P: It was a proper toilet.

B.P: Yes. \$49, we used to sell them for. (laughs)

**So who did you sell them to?**

B.P: The builders. Every builder had to have one on-site. Before that, people used to go to next-door neighbours if they had to go to toilets and that. So that wasn't on, so every building site, every house building site, had to have one of these toilets. And other firms started making them and hiring them out, but builders used to virtually have their own because they never cost much, and they'd have it – these builders, they'd keep building, they'd have them all the time. And that's what I started doing.

And then builders would say, 'What do you do?' I said, 'Look, anything'. Started doing lintel bars, arch bars for windows and doors and that, any steelwork.

G.P: Staircase.

B.P: Staircases, balustrades, gates.

**And this is all from your shed?**

B.P: All old garden shed. And in between time there was a bit of a demand for a reversible plough, that was a Ferguson reversible plough, and you couldn't buy them anymore because they stopped making them in England in those years and that. So I thought, 'Oh, well, I'll try making these things'. People said, 'Ah, you can't do that'. And I virtually did. I made about 60 of them, these reversible ploughs. And in those years a friend of mine said, 'Oh, look, there's this government wants to export products made from South Australia. You could export these to [Iran]'.

G.P: Iran.

B.P: Iran, Iraq and these places, there was a demand for these type of things there, small implements like only three-point-linkage implements. And I thought, 'Well, a bit hard. I don't really want to employ people; I'd sooner work by myself'. And then this chap said, 'Well, get these other people to handle it for you'. Horwood Bagshaw's, they were down at Mile End, and they come to my workshop one day,

about six or seven of them in the hierarchy because I asked them if they wanted to export these implements for me. For whatever reason they just shook their head and they couldn't believe I could make that type of thing in the place I was [using], that old garden shed. I was making this implement which was virtually better quality than what they were making at Mile End.

**And how long would it take you to make one?**

B.P: About a week. But I used to make them about half a dozen at a time, like all the parts, the machine parts I had to do. I had to get the foundry parts made from Mason and Cox and they'd be steel castings, not malleable steel which [is of lower] quality. Certain things you couldn't get, the quality of shafting that you required from the original ones, because they weren't available. But they come out all right and I did very well with them.

**And what did Horwood Bagshaw say?**

B.P: Well, I didn't go on with the [export] project, but the name got around. They reckoned, 'Oh, you're spoken about in Melbourne [about these ploughs]'. But I was too busy to worry about things like that, and so I just sold them locally. I sold a few up at Port Hedland and Geraldton in Western Australia and around the place, and Campbelltown – there was a lot of market gardens still around the place.

G.P: What about the discs?

B.P: And then I made disc cultivators, I designed my own disc cultivator in those years and sold quite a lot of them. That kept me busy. And with the building [of three-point-linkage scoops]. Oh, scoops, anything, I'd do anything. I virtually wanted to work from a set spot, not go out and do maintenance work here, there and everywhere.

**So what years are we talking about?**

B.P: This would be late '60s, because early '70s I thought, 'If I started employing people – – –.' First you had to make three hundred dollars for them, then you had to make three hundred dollars for yourself. But I used to work a bit too quick for them. I had a few people come there and tried a few people, but too slow, they'd hold me up and I had to redo their work sometimes and that and I said, 'No, this is not on'. So I'd do twice as much by myself as I would with someone else.

But in the early '70s, and there was only about two other people doing it [building warehouses], I built a big warehouse. The understanding was that I'd go into it myself. The Woodville Council said I was working in a residential area, and people couldn't really complain because there was five acres around the workshop, type of thing; but course if I'd work late at night it'd make their TVs go funny with the welding, (laughs) and they didn't like that too much. So I built this big warehouse, about twelve hundred square metres, and then I thought, 'Well, look, I might as well lease it because that's money coming in without working', so I leased it to – first it was Chrysler, that's back when Chrysler was around, and they had their airconditioning department in half; and then Shell Australia, they took the other half, then eventually they took the lot of it and I had to deal with them, and they were very good tenants for about 14 years.

G.P: Fifteen.

B.P: Fifteen years. And after that I thought, 'Well, this sounds all right', so I kept building a few of these warehouses – *physically* building them, did the lot myself, being a steelworker. And I had my own little crane, I bought this little crane – I've still got it; it only lifts about a ton and a half but it's lifted more than that. It was a bomb-hoisting crane from Portsmouth Aviation in England. It was brought out to Australia by Wilkins & Burnside, I think, or one of those people, they bought half a dozen of these small – they were virtually wartime cranes. It's a full-slewing – it's 360 degrees, will do a 360-degree circle and that. Magic little thing. And it was described on [the tag] – the tag's still on there – it's called 'Bomb-hoisting crane, 1953, Portsmouth Aviation'.

And then I used to work with that around the place and a friend – well, he was a chap that I used to work for at the time, he was the Mayor of Woodville, John Dyer, did a fair bit of steelwork for him, he was a good builder in those years – and he said, 'I've got something to take down at Port Adelaide. Beaufort Tyres are in the place at the moment. Can you come there with the crane and take this big beam down?' So I said, 'All right'. So I went there, took this beam down with the crane – it was very heavy, it was a bit too much for the machine, but anyway I got it down. The next day I get a knock on the door, the Department of Labour and Industry come to see me. And they said, 'What do you do with this machine?' I said, 'Oh, it's just a yard crane for myself'. 'No, no, no,' he said, 'this machine was

seen at Port Adelaide yesterday'. I said, 'Oh, blimey, now I'm in trouble', (laughs) and they've given me the rundown: 'Don't you ever let this machine go out of this property.' I said, 'Okay, mate, no worries, I wouldn't'. And I used it when I built property here at Beverley, and Lysagt's supplied the iron in those years, and I said, 'Look, no more than quarter-ton packs because my machine won't lift it'. Course, they supplied half-ton packs. And these sheets were about 40-foot long, 12 metres type of thing, and I had to unload them with this crane. I don't know where I'd be now if they'd caught me. But anyway, the power lines were about three foot from the top of the jib and the back wheels were about two foot off the ground and I was swinging around with these things. Oh, tell you what! (laughs) I wouldn't do it now anymore.

**No. Dramatic.**

B.P: Dramatic, very dramatic.

**Bruno, if we go back to 1965 when you met Graziella, when did you marry?**

B.P: '66.

G.P: Six months and three days later.

B.P: Six months and three days. I'd known her on the boat – I met you when, about two days out of Messina?

G.P: Yes.

B.P: And only there for a couple of times.

G.P: We only saw each other 30 times – no days, just nights.

**Wow.**

B.P: How many?

G.P: Thirty times.

B.P: Thirty times.

**And when you married where did you live?**

B.P: With my mother, in the original house [at 24 Frogmore Road]. We lived there till we came here.

G.P: Thirteen years.

B.P: Thirteen years.

**So you lived there thirteen years –**

B.P: Yes.

**– and that’s where you had your workshop in the garage?**

B.P: That’s right, adjoining this, yes. The workshop is there, that’s the old workshop there.

**Oh, right. I see it on the right-hand side.**

B.P: That’s an old garden shed.

**I’m interested to –**

B.P: I’ve got other photographs of that.

**– that would be great to see them.**

B.P: Yes, I’ve got other photographs of where I was working there, too. Where would they be, Graziella?

G.P: We’ll have to find them – – –.

B.P: We’ll have to look for it by next time.

**Yes.**

B.P: I’ve got things I used to make and that, photographs of the implements I made and stuff like that.

G.P: You know, these machines for the workshop as well.

**Great, that’s terrific. So you and Graziella had four children?**

B.P: Four children, yes.

**And you’re a grandfather of?**

B.P: Four.

**Of four, now.**

B.P: Sara and Ruby, and Zach and Zsa Zsa. She’s wonderful. They’re all wonderful, but they’re cheeky. When they go to school they become cheeky.

**And I’m interested to know why do you think you had this streak of independence? You know, you told me that you didn’t want to work [for a boss].**

B.P: Well, if I never left Australia I’d still be working wages. And when we were overseas, and we met – probably had a bit of a phobia, not a phobia, but you felt a little bit like you’re of Italian background and you go to Australian dances and that. Never bothered me, but there’s always a little bit of suss there, you know?

**From other people?**

B.P: Yes, yes, from other people – especially from parents of Australian girls, of course. They'd always have a bit of a doubt. I don't know. Anyway. Because they grouped Italian as [all the same]. I mean, in those years, I remember young lads, migrants, coming from Italy. Of course, they were always by themselves. They used to wear these dark shirts and that and probably never had too many means of washing. They wouldn't let them in dances. I'd never, ever been refused because we were virtually like Australians, you know, I mean never been refused, never been discriminated against whatsoever, all my life. And the independence came was that when we were over there and we met these [four Aussie girls]. This car we had was a 1500 Fiat and of course at the back we had written 'Australia' [on the bumper bar] – in those years you could do these things. They'd stop you and have a chat. I bought this car in Rome through my uncle that was in the Carabinieri, through his friend that was the mechanic for the Carabinieri. He said, 'This is a good car, you won't have trouble'. I said, 'Very good'. He was right. It was a good car.

These girls would stop us when we were driving through France, wherever we were. And they saw 'Australia' and 'Rome' and that – gee, Rome's a beautiful place, you know – and I used to say to these girls, 'Look, what do you think of Italians now?' 'Oh, terrific, they are terrific.'

I always thought that this country would be better off – I don't know how you would do it – but it would be a fantastic country if it was possible in the education system – I'm talking about the '60s, not now, but back in the '60s – if they could have like exchange students for six months of a year [in year eight], that this would have been a far different way of thinking country. Because it was very narrow thinking in those years, you know? But if they went overseas and saw the difference, ah, when they came back [they would realise] this is magic compared to what was over there. It was nice, but you wouldn't swap it, not even now, for any money, with any other country you'd go to.

I mean we went to America three years ago. I wouldn't swap this for that anywhere, no way in the world. This is by far the best country, it's the best-kept secret all right. But I thought it would be a wonderful thing if in the education system they could do that, exchange students for six months and get them to go

overseas and see how it was and then see how lucky they are when they came back here. You know, that's what the difference would have been. Ah, well.

**You've obviously had a very strong sense of being an independent person –**

B.P: Yes.

**– in terms of work and living.**

B.P: Yes, I suppose because I lost my father at a young age, and I was always by my brother a bit discriminated against because they were older than me, of course, and I used to have to be told what to do. And I said, 'Well, look, one day I'm going to do what I want to do and not be *told* what to do', and that's what probably drove me a bit more to be able to just be independent. And never looked back, virtually. I wouldn't even consider going back to work when I came back from Italy. I didn't have any money in my pocket.

**And was your mother concerned that you weren't going to be earning wages?**

B.P: Well, not really, but I still had a few dollars left when I came back. But when we got married I remember having to borrow about \$6,000 (laughs) to get married with, and she thought I was rich but that was far from it.

**And who did you borrow from?**

B.P: The bank. Virtually borrowed – the bank give me some money.

G.P: On the land.

B.P: On the land, borrowed some money.

G.P: It was in his name by then.

B.P: Yes. But did okay since, did okay since. But only through very hard work and, like I say, on Saturdays and virtually Sundays too. I didn't look at the rest days and that.

G.P: For 16 hours a day.

B.P: Yes, we used to work ---.

**So you've had a very strong driving force.**

B.P: Yes, I'd say that was so, yes. More so than a lot of friends of mine; they were happy to just plod along and that. And they say, 'Oh, gee, you were lucky'. And I said, 'Yes, I know, but the harder you work the luckier you get, you know that?' (laughs) Which was very true in my case.

**And, Bruno, when did your mother die?**

B.P: Actually, we were going to go overseas in 1985, we were booked to go overseas. I wanted to take the children on the *Canberra*, it was coming into Adelaide. This was in March. And we'd booked a trip with the *Canberra*.

G.P: And your mamma died in March and we postponed [the trip].

B.P: Yes. The trip was going to leave in March, the boat was going to leave in March, but my mum got sick and that, of course we had to cancel it, couldn't go in the *Canberra*.

G.P: She died 28<sup>th</sup> March 1985.

B.P: Yes, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1985. She was seventy-seven years old. So then we had to cancel that trip, so we had to rebook later on, after a couple of months I rebooked again this trip. So rebooking this trip I'm ready to go again with Johnny Marchioro's father, because he was going at the time, and then it was one of the rare times I got sick, touch wood, and we're pouring these footings I did for a warehouse I built at Beverley, and I come home – and my eldest daughter had to go to Perth, or she was going to go to Perth to see her cousin – and that night I was that sick and I couldn't [sleep], tossing and turning in bed, I couldn't sleep and that, and I took her to the airport in slippers, I was that crook. On the way back I stopped at a doctor's surgery where the reserve is, virtually, there's a house this side of the reserve on Frogmore Road. I said, 'Look, I think I'm a bit crook'.

G.P: On Valetta Road.

B.P: On Valetta Road. So I stopped there and he said, 'You'd better book in for the hospital, you're going to have a check-up'. I had kidney stones, and they were so painful I'd hate to go through that feeling again. So that was another cancellation of a trip, so we had to postpone again this trip to Italy in '85.

And so this other cousin of mine, he said, 'You're not going to go again, are you?' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'Third time. You're going to really go again?' 'Listen, mate, I'm not superstitious, that's it'. We did go.

**And you did.**

B.P: Yes.

**Oh, that's great.**

B.P: Yes, and it was all okay. So we took the four children with us overseas and I was a bit worried because the eldest one was 16, the youngest one was nine.

G.P: Vivian 18 Daren 16.

B.P: Daren, 16. Vivian, 18. Daren 16 and Belinda and Laura nine and eleven.

**And it was a good trip?**

B.P: Yes, a very good trip. No-one was sick.

**Well, that was great.**

B.P: Yes. (laughs)

**Well, thank you very much for the interview.**

B.P: Yes, okay.

**That's really good. Thank you, Bruno.**

**End of interview**