

Italian market gardeners oral history project
Interview with Maria Rosa Tormena OH 872/19
recorded by Madeleine Regan at Bellevue Heights, South Australia
on 25th May 2012

OH: This is an interview recorded with Maria Rosa Tormena for the Italian market gardeners oral history project. It's recorded by Madeleine Regan on 25th May 2012 at Maria's home at Bellevue heights, South Australia.

(00:22) Thank you very much Maria for this interview. I'm going to start with asking you questions about your background.

MT: And what would you like to know about my background? Where I was born?

OH: Yeah, that would be a great place to start.

MT: Okay. On the fifth of the sixth 1933, I was born in Bigolino, Treviso, Italia.

OH: And what was your full name?

MT: My name was given to me as Maria Rosa Tormena and back in 1939, my parents decided to migrate to Australia and I was a six year old then and we arrived, left in 1939 and we arrived here in 1940. Bad years, of course, because Italy was at war. I don't know much about that. Anyway I managed to go to my first grade at school here. Can I mention the school? Okay, I started at St Mary's, Dominican Convent, in Franklin Street and we lived a street away which was very handy for me to go to school.

OH: Where did you live?

MT: We lived in Waymouth Street at the time. So all the years I went to school I also lived in Waymouth Street. And it was a walking distance, it's only one street away, main street. And then Mum was also busy trying to scratch a living between us and her and Dad had gone to the mica mines in Alice Springs, outside about 350 kilometres out of Alice Springs so you know we managed as a family okay.

(02:23) And after seven years at school, I had gone to work after school at a nearby factory.

OH: What were you doing in that factory?

MT: Oh they handled mica, I don't know if you're aware what mica is? It's an insulator that they used in electric irons at the time, toasters, and our job was to cut it to the required thickness and also the size that was required and the factory was owned by Massimo Brazzale. And until he got a letter from the Education Department that he was not allowed to hire me because I was under 14.

OH: So you were going there after school and working?

MT: After school, exactly. So when I finished school which was probably a year later, I went there to work because it was a ready-made job for me and stayed there for a couple of years.

OH: (03:25) Maria, I'm going to ask you to go back to your family in Italy...

MT: Yes.

OH: And I'd like to ask you about your parents and what their names were and if you remember when they were born.

MT: I can't remember Dad but he [points to the next room] would know that. And my mother was born on 2nd February, no sorry. Start again, 16th February 1902. And what was her name Severina and originally, Rossetto and he married my father who was Galliano Tormena and after a few years of living there in terrible, you know, they talk about poverty here today but really that was poverty.

OH: What do you remember hearing about that kind of poverty?

MT: Well, unless you've got something to compare it with, I thought that was normal, you know how we lived. And always to find the next meal and Mum also had to very early job, a five-kilometre walk to her job. We were lucky because when I was young Johnny was a bit older than me and he helped out a lot.

OH: Johnny's your brother?

MT: Yes, my brother Johnny, sorry. And he used to virtually look after me and get things ready for Mum who used to walk home, I think, for lunch, and then walk back again. [laughs] Yes, I know, wouldn't bother.

OH: What work was she doing?

MT: It was a silk factory where they had the cocoons in boiling water and they had to get the silk off the cocoons, is it? Yes, that was it.

OH: And your father, what kind of work did he do?

MT: Dad had a horse and a cart which he used to do carrying jobs, you know, it might have been away overnight and slept on the cart with the horse and then come home. So you know, things are a struggle and that's just to survive. None of this new electronic stuff, we're worried if we haven't got today.

OH: And Maria can you tell me the location of where your family lived?

MT: You know Venice? Right, Bigolino is 60 ks inland from Venice and just alongside the river Piave. Our main big town near us would be Valdobbiadene --- and then across the river, you had the likes of Montebelluna and Caerano which was very well known. And we had a lot of people here from Adelaide from around that area. They are dying off now so lucky you are getting in on time. [laughs]

OH: (06:44) And Maria what do you remember of your early years in Bigolino?

MT: Very little, very little. As a matter of fact, even after I went back, I had a picture in my mind of what it would be like but the minute I set foot there that picture went. It was replaced with what was there.

OH: What about people? You know, family members, do you remember any relatives?

MT: Yes, when, because there was no communication over the war years because of the lack of postage and that ...

(07:28) I went back when I was about 34 and went and stayed with my mother's sister-in-law and her brother and Mum's brother which she was a lovely lady. I enjoyed staying with her. But again still very primitive although they were better off than they used to be. Plenty of work available in Italy at the time. As a matter of fact I even decided I was going to go to work there. Mainly because at the time, --- just trying to think of the year... Oh that was 1969. A lot of young migrant fellas were coming here, didn't like the fact that they had to work so they made it like their parents paid their fare here, they were going back because they were homesick and they made it into a holiday. And they said you could live here. And I thought to myself well, I wonder if I could live there with the income that they get over there. Anyway, thank God I only did it for two months and I went to work in a holiday resort in the Dolomites, not far from Cortina d'Ampezzo and it was in a hotel virtually that they only opened for the summer holidays there. Anyway my job was to make up beds and do the laundry and get the, do the washing up afterwards and anyway I was used to coca cola and the boss would offer us a coffee for us in the mornings, a small black, had my coffee and then I would ask for a coca cola and after he'd see I'd have a small coke in the morning and one in the afternoon and he used to say to me ... Can I say it in Italian? Can I say it in Italian what he said to me? *Ma che visiata?* I said, "Listen, I have about five or six cokes in Australia."

OH: Can you translate what that means?

MT: *Ma che visiata?* "How spoilt you are!" And I said, "I have five or six a day in Australia but at the prices they are here, I could not afford them." So that put him in his place. And it was a beautiful spot where this hotel was. I mean the mountains, I love the mountains, I still do. Behind the hotel, in front of the hotel, the side of the hotel. I just loved the area there and I wouldn't have minded living there except the way I was used to here, it was not easy to live over there and work. Anyway can I tell you how much I earned there? I had two months, that was 61 days straight, no days off. I earned and they gave me my keep and sleeping accommodation. I got 310,000 lire which is equivalent to \$310, we'll say, at the time. And it cost me 300 of my dollars to live [laughs] and all I spent on that was a bit of petrol because at night when we finished at 11.00 o'clock at night, I'd get a few of the others that worked in there and we'd go to Cortina to have a pizza. And so it was a bit of petrol, it was postage card and stamps and cigarettes, that was my hobby. And it cost me that much to earn that much. So I thought this is no life for me. Hurry up and go home.

Went back to Bigolino after the two months up there which was a madhouse. The hotel was run by a mad family. The wife should definitely have been committed but the husband didn't want to commit because he had three kids and then they'll have trouble getting jobs although they were

good, well-educated. If the parents had been committed to a mental institution nobody would have hired the. So although I enjoyed the experience, I was glad to come back to Bigolino. And anyway, I had taken a day off from up there to go down to Treviso to make my return journey, to book that. And I stayed there till November and I arrived there in February in Italy.

OH: So that was a really good opportunity to ...

MT: Yeah.

OH: To be with your family and in the area where you had grown up in.

(12:42) Maria, I was going to ask you, do you remember, as a small child any of your relatives in Bigolino?

MT: No, just remember I had a grandmother there. And I think it was on my father's side --- Yes, she would have been on my father's side. But very little. And my other relations, none at all.

OH: (13:06) And Maria do you know why your parents decided to come to Australia in 1939?

MT: Well, Mum was one of nine children. All of her brothers had migrated to Australia except for one who remained there. And they all said come over, come over, to her.

OH: Why had they come to Adelaide?

MT: Oh mainly political reasons, her brothers came out here. One of her sisters had been out earlier than that and had returned to Italy. She ended up marrying Mr Narciso Bernardi and she, one of her daughters was born here in Karoonda in South Australia but had gone over there. In the meantime her husband had come back here and the War broke out so she was left over there -- Yeah, she was left over there and he was, no, no he was also over there but he came back straight after the War, the first ship that he could get to come back here, he came back after the War and eventually he called his son out, who was about 16, I think, at the time and he went to live down in, not Valetta Road, --- in, in, it goes that way, [gestures north-south] gosh, what's the name of that road? You know where Santin lives?

OH: Frogmore?

MT: No, not Frogmore ... yes, it was. Frogmore, Sorry.

OH: Down to the river?

MT: Yeah and actually he was a young migrant boy sleeping in the Tonellato's train that was originally built for one of the kings. Which king was that? Do you remember?

OH: George the sixth, I think.

MT: Eh?

OH: George the sixth, I think.

MT: Right. That's his brush with royalty. Anyway eventually we found accommodation near where we lived which was at Gilberton at this stage.

OH: Okay, we'll come onto Gilberton shortly but...

(15:22) I wanted to ask you about arriving in Adelaide. Do you remember anything of that?

MT: No.

OH: By the time your family arrived, how many of the Rossetto family were living here, of your parents' generation?

MT: One brother who had been before...

OH: What was his name?

MT: Angelo and he went back to Italy and got caught there with the War and eventually migrated here with the whole family after the War. And they eventually because of employment, he was trained to make stockings, nylon stockings so no workshops here, but there was in Melbourne. There was --- oh gosh, terrible memory --- can you remember? Prestige, he went to work for Prestige and he had Lucy, Anita. I think, John was born here and Vivian was born here. And they all still live in Melbourne but the parents are dead. His name was Angelo, that was Mum's brother. And he had another, she had another brother over there who worked for the waterfront. And here there was Domenico Rossetto, Gelindo Rossetto, Beppi Rossetto. Yeah that's it, here. And then she had a sister which was Nana Rebuli, they called her Giovanna Rebuli. And eventually the Bernardi lady came from Italy. They were all here except for the one left in Italy. And that was it. And I got to know him, he was lovely.

OH: As a child growing up, were there many family occasions where the people got together?

MT: Oh, when they started to accumulate a bit of money, then they devoted...

(17:41) But our house was virtually, in Waymouth Street especially, an open house for all young migrant boys that came here, didn't have a family, didn't have anywhere to go, we were about the same age. So they used to come at night and we used to play bingo and things like that. And they appreciated it because they had nobody, you know.

OH: So were you in a house, like a rented house?

MT: Yes, we'd rented that house and that was. Oh, I remember that number, 262 Waymouth Street. Lived there. I don't know how we fitted other people into the house.

OH: How big was that house?

MT: Not very big.

OH: Can you describe it?

MT: There was one, two, three bedrooms...

OH: Upstairs?

MT: No, two upstairs, one downstairs. There was like a dining room and you had to walk out of that dining room into another room as the kitchen. Very primitive.

OH: And what about bathroom, toilet?

MT: And well the bathroom and toilet was also outside that whole area --- We don't know what we were like.

OH: (18:55) And what did your parents do once they arrived in Adelaide?

MT: Well, Mum used to go and help her brother Gelindo, he had a milk round. And she used to go with at least --- would have been --- a 40 litre can on the handle-bars when they delivered milk door-to-door.

OH: And where did they deliver?

MT: To different houses. Every house used to have their milk money out.

OH: And whereabouts are you talking?

MT: All around the city, all around the city. A lot of Italians and whoever else wanted milk. And my brother John used to help her by having a reload for her to carry on her milk round. And Dad eventually went to walk at outside of Alice Springs.

OH: And what was he doing?

MT: He was in the mica mine because Mum's brother, the one that had the milk round also had the mica mine up there. Not bad for a communist, is it? [laughter]

OH: And do you remember the name of the mine?

MT: Spotted Tiger, I think it was.

OH: And is it right that there were a lot of Italians...?

MT: Working up there? Oh, yes there was because when I worked for Rossetto's we used to send groceries up to them like things they couldn't buy up there like coffee, pasta, 'cos Alice Springs at the time it was mainly Aboriginals so things that they were used to eating like pasta and coffee and cheese, we used to send them up to them, oil and ...

OH: (20:51) So when you worked for Rossetto you're talking about the business?

MT: Domenico Rossetto, Mum's brother had a grocery shop. There were two Italian grocery shops, the Greek one, and us, and also Crotti's.

OH: So can you tell me the location of each of those? Like where was the Rossetto?

MT: Rossetto was in Hindley Street ... I think, from memory, 264 Hindley Street. I'm trying not to remember the number in case I'm wrong 'cos it's a long time ago.

OH: Yeah, you're doing really well. Where was it in relation to West Terrace?

MT: Oh, it was on the corner of Gray Street and Hindley Street which was opposite the West End Brewery at the time.

OH: And then the Crotti's?

MT: Crotti's was on the corner of Gray Street and Currie Street, opposite the Remand centre now but used to be Adelaide High.

OH: And the Greek grocery?

MT: Not on the corner, they came there later. They were in Hindley Street which is on the east side of Morphett Street.

OH: And Maria, what was the difference between the two Italian groceries?

MT: Oh, no difference really. We all handled the same things. We used to do deliveries. I don't know if Crotti's did it. But we used to do deliveries, you know, out Lockleys way, a lot of Italians were also in the Unley area and down Rosewater way. So we used to do that. And eventually they even got a wine licence because you know, the Italians liked their wine and we managed to get, I think they were Kaiser Stuhl people, and they used to deliver wine to us and we'd deliver that out to the customer.

OH: (22:57) And Maria, if we go back to your schooling and your years at Saint Mary's in Franklin Street, what do you remember about your years there.

MT: Oh I remember a thrashing I got from one of the nuns ---

OH: What had happened?

MT: Well, a girl sitting behind me, right? And I started to laugh and the more I laughed, the more she laughed. But I was the one that was seen because I was in front of her, from the nun. And we had an outside elocution teacher come in and she wanted me to start laughing and behave myself before this outside teacher came. And I just couldn't stop laughing. She had pulled me out of the desk. Right? And then with her stick, a yardstick. Do you remember them? It was about an inch and a quarter wide and the thickness was about a quarter of an inch or more and it was a yard long. And she'd wack me at the back of the legs. And of course, when it hurt, I put my leg up and then she hit my shoe and broke the stick and she continued with the stick, the splintered end. That's when I put my elbow into her sacred bosy [bosom] [laughs] and ran out of the classroom, upstairs I was. And I thought I was pretty good at sport at the time but she caught me before I got down the bottom, long skirts and all. And her name was ... Want to know her name? Sister Mary Jordan. Naughty girl. [laughs]. Anyway, anyway she tried to drag me back into the classroom because she didn't want me to have a sour face while the outside teacher came and I just sat there and sulked right through that elocution lesson, much as I hated it, anyway. That was one little adventure. And my main reason for going to school was really to play sport. Loved my sport.

OH: (25:18) What kind of sport did you play?

MT: Whatever they had at school which was only netball and tennis at the time. And when I finished school, I managed to play netball for the Church, St Patrick's, and eventually I listen to radio when I was doing my housework at home because we had housework to do as teenagers, cleaning the house. Mum never did any housework, she used to do all the washing and that but

cleaning the house was left up to me and Johnny, at the time [coughs] and I used to listen to radio and I'd hear them broadcasting about the cricket, girls' cricket and I said "I'm going to play that game." Well, I was useless at that game. I was a natural softball player so I took up softball which is equivalent to say, baseball. Anyway I managed to play that for many years. Represented the state with that for a couple of years and then when I was virtually too old to play, I coached, used to coach the Juniors and I had about a couple of clubs and am now a Life Member of Sturt Softball Club which I appreciate very much.

OH: You were obviously very interested in sport at school.

MT: Yes.

OH: (26:49) And Maria, when you started school you wouldn't have spoken English?

MT: No. Yeah, I don't remember that being a problem, at all. Johnny would've because he was older, he'd been to school in Italy. I'd only done Kindy¹ in Italy, don't remember anything about that either. So eventually, as a kid, my age, I would have picked up English a lot quicker than he did. And it's been no hassles at all.

OH: How many years of schooling did you do?

MT: I only went to Grade 7.

OH: Right. And at that time, was your, were your parents still living in Waymouth Street?

MT: Yes.

OH: (27:38) And how long did your father work in the mica mines?

MT: I can't remember. But eventually there was an accident in the mine that frightened him so he came down. He went to cement works and I eventually had left Brazzale's and --- where did I go from? Oh I went to work in a cannery?

OH: Where did you work in the cannery?

MT: It was called 'Mum's Own' or garden of products, they used to call it and it was in St Peters, in Payneham Road, St Peters and I was still working there when my father had--- died. And eventually Mum decided to come ... he didn't want her to go to work. She came to work so we pooled all our money to buy our first house.

OH: (28:28) And we'll talk about that in a moment but I was going to ask you about your father's death. What were the circumstances?

MT: Well, he was not feeling well, he always had a gruff voice, a little bit gruff so we don't know what was wrong. We took him to the doctors and the doctors said, "Oh he'd better come in on Monday and we'll operate on him on his throat." Well, I think Dada was so terrified of it that he took sick on the Saturday and we called the doctor in and the doctor gave him an injection and that was it --- so it's almost euthanasia.

¹ Kindy is short for Kindergarten

OH: How old was your father?

MT: Forty-nine, and we'd been here ten years at that stage.

OH: And had he been working till up to that time?

MT: Yes, he was working up to the Friday.

OH: And what sort of work in the cement?

MT: You know, making cement.

OH: Like who was working for?

MT: Del Fabbro, I think we established, didn't we? Yes, Del Fabbro. He worked, I can't remember how many years he worked there. And that was it.

OH: That must have been a very difficult time for your family?

MT: Well, I was 17 and Johnny would have been 23, 24. --- And by that stage, we had nominated Dad's sister who was a widow in Italy to come out here with her daughter and they were living with us when he died.

OH: And this was still at Waymouth Street?

MT: (30:05) Yes. And that's when we pooled all our money after he died. Johnny went to work. I went to work. I was getting better pay than he was at the time because of the job I was doing. And the job he started at. But we pooled all our money and Mum's money together and I think we managed to pay off the house in a year.

OH: And why did you choose Gilberton?

MT: Well, at the time houses were not easy to buy. Secondly...

OH: What year would this have been, roughly?

MT: 17 --- Oh he's a good one for years, he's good for years, not me. Anyway, I should be able to work that out --- 17, about '33, '43, about '52 or something like that.

OH: Right.

MT: Yeah.

OH: And why Gilberton?

MT: Well, the chappie that lived behind us was a Syrian fella, Abrahams. And he knew an agent. You know, that's how you worked in those days, you didn't go by the paper, the television or the radio and he said he had a friend who was a house agent and we told him we were shopping for a house. First house we saw, we bought it. And the agent made the loan to us and we didn't go to the bank for a loan at that stage. So he couldn't believe that we were paying off so much a week because as we got our money, we took it into him. When we paid it off, he thought we were bank robbers or something.

OH: And what was the house like?

MT: Well, the old style houses with a passage down the middle, we had rooms on either side, and a little kitchen at the aback. We built like a porch at the back and had a garden which we also enjoyed. And we were, Mum's Own, we worked at Mum's Own, Mum and I. And Johnny, I think he'd worked at Foy and Gibson's at that stage.

OH: And did your Auntie move with you?

MT: Oh yes, Auntie and her daughter moved in with us. She was lovely, Auntie. And anyway she was good company for Mum too because Mum was never a reader but Auntie was, so while Mum was doing all the work, she used to sew and that, auntie used to read to her. And that's where Mum got to like here reading herself. Yeah. Not used to understanding television, couldn't understand that. If you saw something on TV now, it could be repeated today, and tomorrow and everyday. I can remember her walking into the room while we were watching TV and there was a commercial about sliding doors and the lady coming through the door with a tray in her hand, full of goodies and the door opening, knocking her tray out. So, in other words, get a sliding door. Well, she happened to walk through the room again the next day and the same commercial was on, and I heard Mum say, "Oh, you stupid thing. Why don't wake up to yourself?" [laughter] "It happened to you yesterday." [laughter]

OH: (33:46) Did your Mum learn English?

MT: She wasn't bad. As far as her age, she was a lot better speaker of English because I brought a lot of Australian friends home and also she went to work in factories where you pick it all up. Whereas I had aunties maybe 20 years longer than she had and still couldn't speak English. So Mum wasn't bad at her English, really for her age.

OH: (34:17) And Maria, I'm going to ask you about your memories of Frogmore Road and the market gardens area in the western suburbs of Adelaide. What did you call that area?

MT: Oh we'd call it Lockleys. And as Mum had, this would have been still from Waymouth Street. Mum's sister lived in Frogmore Road.

OH: And what was her name?

MT: Giovanna Rebuli. Just over the river, Frogmore Road. [coughs] And we'd go down to visit, we had to have permission from the police to leave the city square.

OH: This is during the War years?

MT: Yes.

OH: And how would you get down there?

MT: Well, sometimes we were lucky to go by tram. You'd get off at Henley Beach Road, at least, nearly a kilometre to the other side of the river, to Auntie's place.

OH: What were the Rebuli's doing there?

MT: They were market gardeners. He had three boys and a girl.

OH: And what was his name?

MT: His name was Albino Rebuli² and his sons were Vic, they knew him as Vic, Shorty and Guido and Dorina was the sister.

OH: And what do you remember their place looked like?

MT: Oh, very primitive probably more primitive than our city house, you know, that we lived in.

OH: What do you mean by primitive?

MT: You know just the bare essentials, a kitchen, an area to dine in, and the bedrooms and a bathroom.

OH: And what was it made of, the house?

MT: Oh, I think it was galvanised iron --- or part of it was.

OH: And what about what they were growing? Do you remember much about that?

MT: Tomatoes. They used to rent I think the land. And they had land next to Bob Hank and Ray Hank who used to play football for West Torrens and that was in Frogmore Road. -- or was it?--- I think that Frogmore Road only started after the river, didn't it? And what was this side of the river? Torrens? Torrens.

OH: Yeah.

MT: Yeah. Anyway they had a market garden there.

OH: So the Hanks were on the southern side of the river and the Rebuli's were on the northern side.

MT: The Hanks lived on the southern side of the river and the Rebuli's lived on the Northern side and the market garden was also on the southern side, yeah, the southern side. And of course, the boys used to ride their bikes down there. And we used to visit them when they were market gardeners. They became friendly with the hanks hence they went in the football, the boys, especially Shorty. He was very one-eyed about his football.

OH: And when you say that they grew tomatoes, were they in glasshouses?

MT: Yes, yes, --- And most of the work was done by hand in those days.

OH: And who was working with your uncle?

MT: His sons, yeah. That's it. Then I had another uncle which was Gelindo, the one that had the mica mine and the milk [laughs] deliveries, he had one and that was in --- oh dear, goes straight -- - Findon Road, by the river.

² Giovanna Rebuli nee Rossetto was married to Buno Rebuli

OH: A market garden?

MT: (38:16) Yes, yeah. And also when we visited down the Rebuli's, we would get to know the Canino's next door almost, the Santin's which was in what I think is Valetta Road no and the Tonellato's. My best weddings ever were the Tonellato weddings.

OH: Why is that?

MT: I think it might have been the age I was at, at the time, you know, music, dancing food, choice of food that you probably weren't able to have at home.

OH: Can you describe say, a wedding day that you would have attended?

MT: Oh well, after my netball playing, then it was time to go to the wedding and I remember when they lived --- was that Findon Road, where they had the wagon, the train wagon?

OH: Between Frogmore and Findon.

MT: That's right. Anyway and it was just, you know, just a dirt track down to their place, down there and there was ... I always remember the train wagon was down there, the house was that side of it.

OH: Like facing it, do you mean, the house facing?

MT: Yes, facing it, yeah. And then they had a big shed at the back and after the hall, you know, you got kicked out of the halls in those days at 11.00 o'clock.

OH: So there would have been a Church wedding?

MT: Oh yes, Church wedding.

OH: And which Church would it have been?

MT: --- I... A lot of them got married in Saint Patrick's now I don't know them being down there because I never got to the Church but once you got thrown out of the halls, we all ended up at the big shed and there you'd dance till 4.00 or 5.00 o'clock in the morning. It was beautiful.

OH: And what would that shed have been used for usually?

MT: Oh, packing their tomatoes whenever they, you know, when they had ... but they used to grow a lot of vegetables I can't remember what vegetables they had but mainly concentration of tomatoes. At the time the tomatoes were beautiful, not like today.

OH: So the dancing would go on. What kind of floor would there have been?

MT: Oh, cement or dirt, maybe, but who cares?

OH: And what else in terms of music. Was that somebody playing?

MT: Yeah, there'd be somebody playing. And when they went home, then the people would start singing. Oh I used to love to listen to them singing.

OH: What kind of singing?

MT: Oh, the old fashioned songs, the old Italian songs. La ... ---- Oh, Mum used to love them and I got all the tapes there for her too. --- And I love those songs, and can you believe? I can't remember them.

OH: That's alright. Do they were really great occasions and would there have been big crowds?

MT: Oh, yes, they used to end up, I think, 150 to 200 people at their weddings.

OH: And who would they have been, who would have been invited to those weddings?

MT: Well, all of the people that they knew. Certainly all of Lockleys, the Italians of Lockleys plus the ones that they got to know because [coughs] once they had to take their tomatoes to the market, the East End market and we lived in town, they used to call around and maybe they have a glass of wine or a coffee so you got to know them that way, you know. You visited one friend and they took you to the other one. Which doesn't happen now, does it?

OH: Why do you think it happened then, so much?

MT: Because that was their way of being sociable which they were used to from their home countries.

OH: Are you saying this was the Veneto community or?

MT: Oh no, look, mainly the Veneto region was from West Terrace, that way...

OH: To the...?

MT: To Henley Beach. And the Southerners lived up Campbelltown, mainly up Campbelltown way. So you got to know all those people. As I said in town, when we lived in town we were lucky, we had Italians --- Syrians, Lebanese, Greeks, Aborigines and that's it. A couple of Australians lived in Waymouth Street but that's it. They were nearly all Italians and you got to know their friends and their friends' friends and all that. So that's all I can tell you.

OH: (43:31) And I'm interested to know about when you'd go down to Lockleys,

MT: Yes.

OH: Frogmore Road ...

MT: Nearly every Sunday. Yeah. That was our day out, our outing. Mind you, there were times when we even walked to Lockleys. Yes, I know...

OH: Why was that?

MT: Oh, you'd walk to the next bus stop, tram stop and you'd been in between stops when the tram came along and before you knew it, you were down there.

OH: (44:07) And Maria, did you make your First Communion when you were at school?

MT: Yes.

OH: And what was...?

MT: Wait a minute, did I do that in Italy, no Confirmation in Italy. Yeah, Holy Communion here.

OH: Would there have been a celebration for that?

MT: Yes, but I think that was held at school though, the whole school, the class that got the Communion. That was another reason for dressing up. [laughs]

OH: (44:39) And when your family went down to Frogmore Road to see relatives, did you come back with vegetables?

MT: Oh yes, they always loaded you up with whatever they had. They were terrific. Like Lina Raimondi, is it that you mentioned before?

OH: Rismondo.

MT: Rismondo. Yeah her mother was also a market gardener and they shared....

OH: That was Margherita Marchioro?

MT: Her mother. There was a Marchioro, which was Lina's mother and Marchioretta because she was smaller [laughs] which was Eleonora's mother-in-law.³ Yes.

OH: (45:27) And you mentioned about having to get permits to leave the city during the War...

MT: Yeah.

OH: Do you remember any other things about the War years?

MT: Not really, because in those days we didn't even have a radio. As a matter of fact, even the house in Wymouth Street didn't have lights upstairs. We brought them up by plugging it in where the globe, a line went up the stairs and brought it up ourselves.

OH: So no electricity upstairs?

MT: None so, until we took it up ourselves.

OH: (46:07) So when you went to Gilberton it must have been...

MT: Oh, it was like luxury compared ... Hey, we straight away, it had a galvanised iron bathroom there that we got a friend of ours, decided ... he said I can build you one bathroom. But we didn't know we needed permission to build. It had an outside toilet which was almost leaning like this and we could see into the butcher's shop across the road [laughs] from the toilet. And uncle decided, he said Yeah, I can help, you know. He starts digging the hole for the pipes to bring it closer to the home, to the house. And then we got stopped because we didn't have Council permission.

OH: And what happened?

³ Eleonora nee Ottanelli married Johnny Marchioro in 1965

MT: We had to go looking somewhere, one of the neighbour's toilets. Yeah. Bathroom especially when we were building, we were lucky we had one of Mum's brothers the other side of the river out at Gliberton... what was that called College Park, there. And we used to go there to bathe. It wasn't daily, I can tell you. We had to live without it. And in the meantime, this young fella on his days off from work, he used to build our present one which was indoors which was good. What we should have done was also put the toilet in there. But yeah ...

OH: (47:38) Maria, what about your other jobs? So you began in the mica factory and then you also worked for Rossetto grocery...

MT: Yeah, I went to work at Mum's Own. When Mum went overseas for a while because if I had said I was going to leave there, she wouldn't let me. She would have had me stay there forever and not have a job after that because they went out of business. Anyway I went to work for Myers for a while.

OH: What were you doing there?

MT: Oh in a little cafe area. They served sandwiches, rolls, coffee, tea. The day I gave notice there, Anna, from the grocery shop, she asked me if I wanted to go and work for them which was marvellous because the wages they were man's wages.

OH: At Rossetto's

MT: Yes.

OH: What were you doing there?

MT: Just serving 'cos it was not like self-serve like it is today. You had to serve everything, you wanted two pounds of pasta, we had to weigh it up. You wanted a piece of cheese, we had to go and cut it. And then make up the orders for the delivery. I tell you what they had a cellar there, they used to bring their cheese from Tailem Bend and put it in the cellar to mature it. We had people coming from all parts of Adelaide just for that matured cheese. It was beautiful. Can't get it like that today.

OH: Who was making it in Tailem Bend?

MT: Oh ---- the co-op. They had a co-op there making cheese. Farmers Union. Farmers Union had a big factory, cheese-making factory. We used to get ... they used to have maybe 20 pound forms they were, so ten kilo forms, round like that and we'd put them in the cellar to dry out and turn them over. And tell you what, when you cut that cheese form, the juice used to run out. It was just beautiful. People came just for the cheese.

OH: How long did you work there?

MT: Six years. They went, they built from the corner of Gray Street and Hindley Street, they then bought some land across the road and they built the shop in the front and the accommodation up the top there. It stayed there until they eventually couldn't run the shop. I think Oscar bought it off them.

OH: Oscar?

MT: Mattiazzo. Yeah.

OH: And how did you like that job, Maria?

MT: Oh I enjoyed it because you get to meet with people and joke with them and that. That was good and the biggest problem was the atmosphere, the family atmosphere wasn't good. Yes.

OH: And what did you do after that?

MT: Just trying to think. Never had trouble getting jobs.

OH: So what sort of jobs have you had that you've really enjoyed?

MT: I enjoyed most of them. I enjoyed most of them because I'm not that could learn from a book but I found that I learned something from every job I went to. --- I can't remember where I went to from there.

OH: You told me you had a job as a courier at some stage?

MT: No, I had, it was a bread ... Let me tell you the jobs I've had. I was the first Mrs Whippy in South Australia. I was one of the first female bread deliveries, Opies Bread in South Australia. I liked that, running around. I built the round up the reason they gave that round was that they had a deli that they used to deliver to and the previous delivery bloke, went and raided their till while he was on deliveries [laughs] so being Italian, they virtually wanted me to sweeten them up but I had doubled the round by the time I had finished. I think the fact that I'd bend over backwards to oblige a customer, you know. And just trying to think ... It didn't last long. And that was Opies' fault because I told them before I took the job that I had already planned my holidays for next year. I said I was going to Tasmania, is that okay. And he said, "Oh yes", because they were having trouble getting drivers. "Oh yes", he said. 'Course when the time came, --- he said no, he said no, you've only been here 11 months I said, but you said I could have the time off. And he said well, we can't and I said, "Well I'm going." I left --- I never liked giving notice at my jobs. I worked at the market for years.

OH: The Central Market?

MT: Yeah, yeah, for a Greek fella.

OH: And what did you do there?

MT: In ... That was groceries again, smallgoods, groceries and coffee and ...

OH: What was the name of that business?

MT: He was a Savvas. Called him Savvas but there were three, four brothers running those groceries. That was good fun too. Because that was only Tuesdays, Thursday mornings, all day Friday from 5:00 in the morning till 10:00 at night, Saturday mornings. And of course, I didn't want things that interfered with my playing my sport. But as I said I was never unemployed. --- And I suppose I was in the lucky era that jobs were ... You never ... I mostly I had people come and ask me if I would go and work for them.

OH: A great position to be in.

MT: Yes.

OH: And Maria, I think that we will leave the interview there at this point because I think we've got more to explore in a further interview. So thank you very much for your time.

MT: That's quite alright. Thank you for asking me all those things that bugged my memory.

OH: Thank you.

MT: You're welcome.

Second interview With Maria Tormena recorded on 15 June 2012

OH: This is an interview, a second interview recorded with Maria Rosa Tormena by Madeleine Regan for the Italian market gardeners oral history project. It's recorded on 15th June 2012 at Maria's home in Bellevue Heights. Thanks, Maria for agreeing to a second interview and I'm going to follow up a few things from the previous interview.

The first one was about Mr Whippy. I wonder if you can tell me about your role with Mr Whippy?

MT: I remember Mr Whippy when he came out in the 1960s and

OH: What was Mr Whippy?

MT: Sorry it was a soft-serve ice cream delivery And --- I just assumed you were old enough to know Mr Whippy, Madeleine. [laughs] Anyway they advertised for a driver which was also a salesman and a server of ice cream. So I applied and I got the job and I happened to be the first woman to apply and the first woman to drive a Whippy van to the envy of a lot of people, I might add. And I found that interesting and you had a different round every day and some days I might have to go to the Gawler races and serve there. And Victor Harbor races, serve there. And then, other days, I would do the rounds around Adelaide, different suburbs. You were given a round to do, you know, certain stops to make. I can remember that I had another training lady there and she was --- a German and I had to train her. We happened to go down to Elizabeth that day. She wasn't feeling well and she wanted to go back to Adelaide so we were looking at a way to get her back to Adelaide. Was it a train? Was it a bus? Couldn't get a way out. So I did happen to say something to locals when we were asked, "How could she possibly go back to Adelaide because she's not feeling well?" He said, "Oh, well, you can't." And I said, "Oh well that's how you live here." I said, "You can't get out of the place, and therefore you fill up Elizabeth." Anyway we eventually got her somehow back to Adelaide. And I went on with my daily round. But the round was fairly long, it started at 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night. But I enjoyed it because it was

not monotonous, you know, one day here, one day there. And I enjoyed it and the money was very good, I might add.

OH: Where was the soft serve actually made?

MT: It was made on the van. You did it, the machine was on the van.

OH: And you'd load it up in the morning?

MT: Yeah, you'd load up liquid stuff in the machine then as you turned it on, the soft serve would come out and you'd have to curl it onto the cone and off they'd go. But the kids used to love it, they'd come from every direction. Not too many kids either, a lot of adults waited for that ice cream, that was their sweets for the night.

OH: Was that a full-time job?

MT: Oh yeah, full-time, at that time I could have worked five days a week, seven days a week if I wanted to. But the money was very good because you got paid commission on each ice cream and it depended on --- the way they got was so many cones from a gallon of liquid that went in the machine. And if you could operate your machine very well, therefore you got more ice creams from the one gallon. And I was not very good at adjusting my machine properly but we had some fellas there that used to come from England and Ireland who were very good at operating the machine and they were making good money. On top of that they used to tickle the till in some way.

OH: Maria, how long did you have that job for?

MT: Oh, not very long because I didn't believe in staying [laughs] in jobs too long.

OH: Why not?

MT: I don't know --- I used to be very involved in sport then so if that job interfered with the sport, I'd go off doing my sport, you know, interstate. It'd be every year around March, we'd go interstate, a different state every year. And if I couldn't get the time off, I'd say, well I'd leave and hope for the best. But I never, ever had trouble getting jobs.

OH: And one other job that you've talked about last time was the Opies bread delivery.

MT: Exactly.

OH: And I'm wondering if you could talk a little more about that?

MT: Not only did they make the best bread in Adelaide, but Tip Top just put them out of business. But Opies was definitely the best bread. [coughs] And again, I was the first woman driver there and --- they had a round that consisted of --- an Italian deli and the previous driver that did that round had tickled the till. So they were trying to be, remain sweet with that particular deli so they hoped me being Italian that you know, I could coax them back into it. But all you needed really was to give them service. I know that I built up the round by the time I left which, I was only there for 11 months, I'd built it up to an extra 100 customers, a day.

OH: How did you do that?

MT: Just by giving them service. If they wanted what they call a 'tank loaf', I'd run around and buy one for you which took up my time. The male drivers usually wanted to be back by 11:00 o'clock because they had another job to go to. And I didn't care if I came back at 3:00 o'clock because that was my job. So you know, I had good rapport with the customers and the money was good also. I was lucky enough to have good paying jobs.

OH: How old would you have been at this time?

MT: Oh, gee, maybe 30, 35, something like that.

OH: (07:02) Maria, what about your sport? Can you tell me about you know, how you first got interested in sport and what the sports were?

MT: Well, I just went to primary school and that was it. My purpose in going to school was to play sport, not to learn but to play. Therefore when I left school, I continued with sport, the more the merrier. I went into basketball and netball and tennis and cricket --- and that was it.

OH: All of them?

MT: Oh, took them on, all of them.

OH: Where did you join up?

MT: I joined up, first of all --- and softball, but softball was my main one. And anyway I played netball for the church which was run from virtually near the school that I had gone to. Tennis, I had to let go because I didn't know how to play --- outside the school. You know, I didn't have the parents that would run me off to this club and that club. As a matter of fact, you were struggling to find out what the sports were and where they were. But I was lucky enough to win at the school, as a junior, to win the senior tournament for that year that I left school. Much to the --- upsetting the other senior girl, I was in Grade 7 and she was in Intermediate and she had just had come back from Perth and had had private lessons. I didn't have that. I didn't even own a tennis racquet, as a matter of fact. I used to hope that you wasn't using yours, and out I'd go with that. Eventually when it came towards the end of the year, my father bought me a tennis racquet which I think I was lucky because we just didn't have the money at the time. Anyway --- and once I left there, I went into netball, then I was listening to the radio and they were describing women's cricket. Oh, I had to be into the women's cricket and that was not my *forte*, I'm afraid. But then --- on another job, I met someone who was playing softball, and I went out and played softball and I stuck to that for about 30 years. First as a player which I was lucky enough to represent the state for two years and then once my playing days, then I concentrated on coaching juniors. And we were lucky, the first, first team to win a premiership for the club as the junior team. And --- after that I thought I'm getting too old for this [laughs] and I was getting sick of being committed, you know. It's Tuesday, you got to go to practice and Thursday you got to go to practice. And then I was also tried to maintain two jobs, too. I was lucky I never had much housework to do at the time because Mum was here. But, you know, I enjoyed all my jobs that I did. I ended up in a service station --- serving not petrol but mainly spare parts and that, I'll tell you what, you got to know your job there to understand about the car you're talking about, what part you wanted and that was --- As I said, I enjoyed every job I had because I was learning on the job.

OH: And jobs were plentiful?

MT: Oh. As I said, you know, it was usually that people come and see me if I wanted to work there. I think they were good days.

OH: Maria, as you were becoming a young independent adult, who were your friends?

MT: Well, when you play sport, the friends are the people you play with. And we still have a

reunion now with people I went to school with. We have two or three reunions there. Then I have reunions with the people I played with. Then you have a reunion with the people you were playing interstate sport with. So you know, I'm pretty full with reunions, I tell you. It's a bit hard to maintain your way.

[laughter]

OH: Maria, what about your contact with the Italian community at this time?

MT: Well, I had that through work. I worked at the Central Market which was a Greek chappie that owned it.

OH: That was?

MT: Toppel Savvas, they called him, the Savvas brothers. It was funny there because I used to enjoy imitating the Greek language and --- the boss's wife was doing very well was doing very well imitating the Italian language and we would have customers and she'd come along and say to me, "Maria, that lady wants *you*." And I'd look at her and I'd say, "She's Greek." "Yes, but she wants you." And I'd have Italian people that would want the Greek girl because she thought she was Italian so we used to make a joke of it and enjoyed that. And I'm glad that I did it because it maintained my Italian, into the language otherwise I think my Italian would be worse than it is today.

OH: At that time, you were living your mother?

MT: Still.

OH: And your brother?

MT: Still living with my mother and my brother.

OH: When did you move to Bellevue Heights?

MT: Oh, gee 48 years ago. About 1968 --- '67, '68. Johnny would know those dates better than me.

OH: And why did you, your mother and brother decide to move here?

MT: Well, where I was working, in my lunch hours, I used to have a motor scooter, the first Italian motorist, by the way, driving a motor scooter then. And in my lunch hours I used to go for rides and I used to love the hills and I always came up here. I saw that this block was for sale. And I said, "Oh Mum's got a bit of money. I'll get her to buy the block as an investment." Which she did. And, eventually she said to Johnny, "If you don't hurry up and build on that block..." She said, "I'm going to sell it. I'm sick of the rates and taxes that I've got to pay on the thing, just staying here." So that's when he got pressurised into building the house.

OH: Because you were still living at...?

MT: At Gilberton, at that stage.

OH: So the house was built especially?

MT: Yes, we got a friend that I used to play with, her husband was an architect. He designed the house for us that we wanted. And we managed to get a Polish fella that built it. And he was very good, he was treating Johnny like his young son, you know, in other words, helping him apart from doing the building. He had him under the wing sort of, as a helper which is very good to have when you're inexperienced.

OH: It seems an unusual area for Italians?

MT: For Italians? Yes, it is very unusual. [laughs] And I wished that I'd lived here instead of going to Waymouth Street because you mix better.

MT: (15:13) In Waymouth Street, I tell you, you did not feel like --- an Australian because there, your neighbours were Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Syrians, Aborigines. But mostly Italian, so

therefore you virtually never thought of yourself as being in another country.

OH: (15:43) What about when you went to Gilberton?

MT: Oh yeah, well, there --- we were not many Italians, there either, I might say.

OH: But you had some family there, close?

MT: No. The chappie that lived behind us in Waymouth Street, he was a Syrian fella ---- I believe he's --- related to Matthew Abraham that's on the ABC at the moment, I think he might have been an uncle. Anyway we knew he knew people that was in housing, so he --- we asked him could we find a house when Dad died, we asked him could he help us find a house because houses were very hard to come by at this stage.

OH: And that was in...?

MT: In, around, just after the War, 1950, I think it was. Anyway, and he came along and he said, "Oh look, I've got a house out at Gilberton." He said, "If you want a look at." And we went and had a look at it. Well, we didn't need any pushing or sales talk, we just took it.

[sound of a phone ringing]

MT: Hello, there's the phone. Anyway, and --- so we lived there, I can't... I think 14 years, I think.

OH: (17:06) What was it like to come up here to Bellevue Heights at that time?

MT: Oh, it was beautiful because I loved the view. I mean a lot of the view is blocked out now because of the trees of the neighbours. If I had my way, I would have bought the house and cut the trees down and then sold the house next door. [laughs] But anyway you need money for that.

OH: What about your mother when you moved up here? Was she still working?

MT: No, no. Mum only worked for a while until we paid off the house at Gilberton. Then she was virtually babysitting. We had a friend of ours from Italy who lived in North Adelaide. She used to work, she had two kids and she used to drop them off at Mum's place and Mum grew up loving the kids and so did we. We used to communicate with those kids, they now live in Italy. --- And lovely kids and well-behaved kids, you know. It was perfect, especially the little boy, at that time, he was so cute, so nice that we would do them a favour on the weekends, pick them up because Mum would be busy house-working and that, and therefore the kids never went anywhere and we loved taking them with us. And we had two boys down the other end of the street, would come over and they'd say, "Oh, can we have Maurice for a while?" And I said, "Listen, he's not a wheelbarrow, he's a little boy." But they loved having him with them.

OH: When you moved to Bellevue Heights, what did your mother do?

MT: Nothing. Housework. Sorry, no housework, Johnny and I did the housework here. But Mum was forever sewing and mending and doing alterations for people with shirts and in the days when things were altered, not thrown out like they are, today.

OH: So there was still a strong network of the Italian community?

MT: That used to communicate here, yeah. Because their kids who eventually when they went into cars, you know this was like, like in the days today that you say, "Let's go to Victor [Harbor] for the day." Coming up here was like driving to Victor. [laughs] Anyway.

OH: Did your mother drive?

MT: No, only drove me crazy, a little bit. [laughs]

OH: (19:44) I'd like to ask you about you know, going back to Italy. I know last time we talked about you staying there for nearly a year.

MT: Yeah.

OH: But do you remember what the feeling was like when you first went to Bigolino again?

MT: Well, it's funny because I was only six when I came here. My thoughts of what Bigolino was like, you know you get a mental picture but the minute I stepped foot in that town, on my return journey three, those pictures had gone out and were replaced with what was actually there. But I didn't remember many people from there but I enjoyed my stay. I hated it when I first got there because I got there just when the snows had melted so all the trees were bare, the soil had nothing growing on it but as I stayed and things got green and the trees grew, it was really beautiful. And I decided to, as an experiment, to go to work there.

OH: Yeah, and you spoke about that last time.

OH: (20:58) I'm wondering about your Mum. How many times would she have she returned?

MT: Oh, she went in --- 1953, the first time, I think. She stayed 11 months and I think she went a few years later. And stayed again because by that stage, Mum was getting an Italian pension so what she saved her fare from here and then she went over there, she had spending money. So she enjoyed it and I'm glad that she did because --- although, mind you, when we, Johnny and I got close to retirement age, we said to Mum, thinking to please her, "Would you like to go back and live in Bigolino?" She said, "You two go where you like but I'm staying here." I thought it would be good for her because she'd have her friends there and everything. And she said we could go because that brought back bad memories for her, you know. She lived like a queen here, she thought.

OH: (22:09) Who were her friends and her community here?

MT: Well, she had a sister who lived down on Frogmore Road --- and then she had a lot of friends there, the Ballestrin's who was in Hartley Street, I think, are they? Hartley Street? Down there? And the Tonellato's, all from the Frogmore Road area. And the Santin's. But mainly the Tonellato's and Ballestrin because she also went overseas at one stage with Mrs Ballestrin and her family. Her husband, the daughter, Norma and the --- I forget the name of the young boy and had a medical problem and they had to satisfy the Captain that he could cope with whatever was wrong with the boy.

OH: When you moved up here, how would your mother have kept in touch with the people on Frogmore Road?

MT: Oh, the telephone! That was a new discovery for her. And we were glad because, you know, it wouldn't be nice being home on your own all the time. But --- especially it started off in Gilberton. We put the phone on there and she --- I'd be going home and there she's lying down in the passage with the phone up to her ear. Thank God she wasn't around when the mobiles turned up. [laughs] But she was good in communicating with all her friends with the phone.

OH: And did people get together, you know, people in her generation?

MT: Oh, when we came up here, then she, all her friends that were around here in Marion, --- they were forever having parties. If it wasn't in one house, it was another one. And every weekend she was down there. There was one lady who was very good, she used to go down there because on Saturdays she'd be ironing and Mum would be folding and doing mending for her. And it was an out, for her it was an outing and it required working as well.

OH: Were they Italian?

MT: Yes.

OH: From the same region?

MT: Yeah, same region but not Bigolino but maybe 20, 30 kilometres away and there was --- she had about five different people down here. And as I said, from one family having the party this weekend, the next one would be at somebody's house. And next one. And she had more

parties than what I had at that age.

OH: What were the names of some of those families?

MT: Oh, there was one, I called her Mrs Flag, because her name is Bandiera. Another one is Billibio who lived next door. The Lorenzin's, well-known Italian family here. --- Who else was there? And then there's all the other friends of theirs that came in and I can't place their names. --- Wait a minute, Malta, Melta.

OH: How would your mother have made friends with those families?

MT: Oh, one person brings them into contact with another person. Also Mrs Brazzalotto, she went overseas with her, another time. So, oh yeah, she had a good life which I'm glad because when she was in Italy, she did not have a very good life.

OH: It's interesting that when you and Johnny gave her the opportunity to go back and live there, her choice was to stay ---

MT: Stay here because that was bad memories. Oh I know a few people like that here. We know a friend of ours who never goes anywhere, won't take his wife anywhere, she's allowed to go where she likes but he won't go anywhere, and I say: "Why don't you go to Italy for a visit?" "No." Because he remembers the War years there so he doesn't want to go back.

OH: And was that Second World War or the First World War?

MT: It would have been the Second World War because he came out here after that War. And we were lucky we missed out on that one. Mmnn.

OH: (26:47) Maria, how many times have you been back to Italy? Roughly?

MT: I've really lost track but I would say, even when I used to go as a supporter of softball to watch a World Series which is held every four years, I would go as a supporter because there was about 30 of us used to go and watch. And if ever the opportunity came up I would then go to Italy, like for instance one time we had about 27 different flights. We ended up in England for four days, in London, and then we were going to go to Holland for another four days and I thought, well, in between there I'll go, instead of England, I'd go to Italy and then meet them up in Holland, the whole group. Which was terrific. And then you had the Asian countries to stop at, beautiful way to travel, you know. I thought it was better than a guided tour because with the guided tour, you know, you're limited with the friends you've got. Whereas we went with 30 people and you stayed with them and on top of that and even got to know the Italian softball team which was in El Salvador. They treated me like one of their people, so you know, I had no trouble when I was travelling like that. And I preferred that way to travel than going with a friend, we'll say.

OH: And you'd often go to Italy as part of the trip?

MT: If it could be fitted in, I'd fit it in. Or else another time when the group came back, I'd go to Italy and I'd continue on the journey. You can see why I had to have a lot of jobs? [laughs]

OH: Maria, when you went to Italy, would you always go back to Bigolino?

MT: Yes, yes.

OH: How many relatives would you have had?

MT: We didn't have many. I didn't get to know my father's side of the family because he died when I was still a teenager. But certainly was in touch with my mother's side. And she had only one brother there, left there, out of nine in the family and therefore he had three kids, that's three cousins, their wives --- And then, it's only of late, I've got to know one of my father's side of the family which she was lovely and she has died since and I'm sorry I didn't get to know here beforehand.

OH: How did you get to know here?

MT: The one time I went over with Johnny, he had kept contact with her and then therefore we went and made contact with her.

OH: How important was it for you to return to Bigolino?

MT: It's like having a home base somewhere, you know. I've got a friend who loves her travels and she often wonders why I always go there. I said, "Well, I said, "If you have an aunt and an uncle in England", like she was originally from England, like, she was originally from England. I said, "You'd want to pay them a visit." She's curious of the world and she prefers to go to a different place every time. As a matter of fact, when she went on her travels, she was going to Italy. And of course, Mum would say to her, "You have to go to Padova, Padua." "Oh yes, okay", she'd say. [laughs]

OH: And why would your Mum say that?

MT: Oh because that's where Saint Anthony was, I think. And you know, that was the only one little place that Mum was able to visit before coming here.

OH: Why was Saint Anthony a special saint?

MT: Because I think he was a patron saint for kids who had polio back in the '30s, the late '30s which we had two relations that had polio, at that time. And therefore you had to dedicate, dress them up like Saint Anthony, little kids like this. [indicates short stature] I remember I had a cousin who's still there now and he had curvature of the spine and the other cousin who's now living in Melbourne, he only --- effect she got is her eyebrow doesn't lift up. She was lucky. So they dedicate the... for a year, I think you got to dress them up like Saint Anthony.

OH: Interesting.

MT: Yeah, it is. Eh, these religious people!

OH: Maria, have you got relatives living now you mention one cousin but any others living in Bigolino?

MT: yes, I still got three cousins there and two of them married and the other one, I think I was telling you earlier, he's in a nursing home, he was a little bit mentally, handicapped.

OH: (32:18) How do you keep in contact now with your cousins?

MT: Oh, the phone is a wonderful tool --- which is better. I've never been a good letter writer so I prefer the instant contact you have with the phone because you can ask them question, and you get an answer. Whereas, by the time you get it by letter, you forget the question was. [laughs]

OH: What about the cousins in Melbourne?

MT: Oh, we visit regularly and --- yes, got how many in Melbourne? [counts] Four cousins in Melbourne, left. Another one in Ballarat who was born here, I might add. That's from another branch of Mum's family. And then I've got quite a few here, in Adelaide.

OH: So family contacts are important?

MT: Oh yes, I think so.

OH: (33:19) What about the wider Italian community? Did you, for example, join the Veneto Club?

MT: Oh, Mum was a member of the Veneto Club, we made sure she got into that.

OH: Why did you make sure?

MT: Oh, well we thought it was her way of belonging and giving back to the region. --- I'm disappointed that the Veneto Club is now up for sale --- because it took a lot of work, of volunteer work and --- in the days there wasn't the money around there is today so it was volunteer money as well, to build it. And now to think that it can't be run at a, not a profit but just

survive, is disappointing.

OH: Why did you not join?

MT: Well, I thought Mum was enough. [laughs]

OH: Did you go to functions at the Veneto Club?

MT: We go, we still go, once a month, it's a charity function. The last Thursday of the month, they have a dinner there, and the money raised at that dinner, it's done by volunteers, it goes to charities, different charities like Cancer Council or the Children's Fund and things like that which I approve of.

OH: In your mother's generation...?

MT: Mmmn.

OH: Are you saying that an organisation like the Veneto Club was more important for her generation than yours?

MT: Well, I thought it was a home base for them to go to if they had a function which she used to go sometimes, you probably have heard of that church on Grange Road --- Help me!

OH: Mater Christi?

MT: Mater Christi. They used to have a luncheon every month, she always went to that because it was a way of making contact with her old friends ---

OH: And when you go to the function every month at the Veneto Club, who are the people who join in there?

MT: Well, most of them are *veneti* with a few ring-ins from other regions [laughs] of Italy. But you get to know them because they're there every month, the regulars and it's good. The only thing I hate is that the music's so loud that I keep threatening to cut the wires off the speakers. [laughs] Yes.

OH: (36:08) Maria, is it important, or how important is it, to you to have the contact with other *veneti*?

MT: I don't think it's important but it's people you have known over the years and therefore you can't sort of give them the brush off. You do still like to keep contact with them. And it'd be like you making a friend or a school friend that you don't want to see them any more. I wish I had more contact with more school friends but my memory's not good enough. If I was to meet them today, I would not recognise them. Terrible, isn't it?

OH: It's a while since you were at school?

MT: A long time. [laughs]

OH: When you have your reunions for St Mary's...?

MT: Yes.

OH: How many people go?

MT: Oh, we've got a group of 13 that go nearly all the time. Yes. And I think a friend of yours, Linda, is there with her sister, the Head Prefect, Nives.

OH: And their family name was?

MT: Cescato. And then there was Pisani's, very good, she owns a few hotels now. They're our luxury ones. [laughs]

OH: At your reunions, are they mainly Italo Australians?

MT: Oh yes, there's a couple of Australians at the time that went to school mainly with Nives but a lot of them were in my class and because we all lived in the same area, too, that makes a difference. Only one good Catholic in that lot, she had nine kids.

OH: (37:58) I'd like to ask you about your retirement, Maria. When did you retire?

MT: Oh, I can't remember. Let me try and work it back. --- I was 60, so 18 years ago [whispers] Oh God.

OH: What have you enjoyed doing since you retired?

MT: Nothing. Love that the best.

OH: What do you mean nothing?

MT: I like not having any commitments which I always had because as I said, a lot of the times I had two jobs which I enjoyed. --- And therefore there was that commitment all the time, you know. "Oh I got to be there Tuesday, got to be there Friday." And that got, to tie me down. And I rarely had sickies --- so as to get a day off. But, anyway, as I said, I was lucky that Mum did everything in the house that required, the cleaning was left up to my days off or Johnny's, he was very good and still is.

OH: Did your mother die after you retired?

MT: Yes, she died in '99. She'd been about four years in the nursing home because really, dementia is a nasty thing. I don't know how we're going to eliminate it but, it's there. And one good thing is, that when you do have dementia, you don't know that's happening to you and that's it. But she was home here for at least two years with dementia and I tell you, it's very hard, and all I can advise people when they've got family with dementia, you got to see the joke in it, the fun in it, otherwise you won't survive it. You know, in other words, if they do something funny, you got to laugh about it.

OH: (40:06) Tell me what else you have one in retirement.

MT: [sighs] I think I have tried to enjoy my home life and I can remember when I was working, if I didn't have one night to go out, in other words, I used to be out nearly every night, I'd think something was wrong with me. And now I'm almost annoyed if I have to have, do something. So, I think that's a sign of old age, don't you? You wouldn't know, you're too busy.

OH: Or, contentment?

MT: [laughs] Yes, very.

OH: I think you listen a lot to the radio?

MT: Love it. ABC freak. And that's where I learn, you know because I'm not, I don't read very much since I've started to wear glasses, I could never concentrate on reading properly so therefore I pick up everything from radio. --- Hopeless on new television, by the way, there's nothing on. I wish we could go back to our four channels and that's it.

OH: (41:23) And what about sport? Where is sport in your life?

MT: Oh! Don't ever... The Crows, I hope you go before tonight because the Crows are playing tonight. --- And God help you, if I'm invited out, I said, "I've got to check if the Crows are playing first."

OH: Are you a member of the Club?

MT: No, no. I just, I love watching it on TV. I went one match, the Crows lost, in their good days and I'm not, my sight is obviously not very good, I was in one quarter of the oval, the ball came down there twice, therefore I missed most of the match. But I love my football. Mark my words! They're going to be in the finals, I'm not saying they're going to win, but they'll be there.

OH: This is for 2012?

MT: Thank you. [laughs]

OH: What about other sport? Do watch other sport?

MT: If it's on TV, love it. Love the tennis, mostly tennis and the football. I'll watch any sport,

actually, and the cricket. But, cricket you devote too much to having to watch, so you're better off listening to it, and they describe it a lot better.

OH: (42:53) Maria, can you tell me any traditions that were in your family that were in your family, that you've maintained?

MT: --- Not really. We were not a traditional family. I mean, when Mum was around, she'd love to have people here for Christmas lunch and all that. Now, we've become like an orphan family to somebody else --- Do you know Anna Santin?

OH: [Nods]

MT: Right. Well her younger sister invites us every year, it's a standard till we die. Christmas lunch, I don't know how she does it. Twenty-four people, she'll have and the spread that she and Giorgio Maser put on together, is unbelievable.

OH: I was also wondering about your family traditions and things like, for example, cooking and ...

MT: I still like the old traditional dinners which I'm going to feed you today, polenta and *funghi*.⁴ And I like the polenta *toccio*, I'll have to say it to you in dialect which is like a stew.

OH: And has that got meat in it?

MT: Oh yes.

OH: The polenta *toccio*?

MT: Yes, that's why I didn't do it today because you're vegetarian.

OH: And other foods that are important in terms of carrying on a tradition?

MT: Yeah, I'm not mad on pasta dishes which is traditionally Italian. --- I'm turning towards fish, now. But I was disappointed when I went to Italy and I found that what I considered traditional meals, they weren't having them there. But as time went by, they brought it back too.

OH: (44:54) Do you remember any items that came out with your family when you left Italy?

MT: --- No, well when I was young, I didn't take any notice of it. But I remember Mum was always a stickler for roasting her own coffee beans. And she bought like a ball with long handles cut in halves, you fill it up and then she got herself a little gas, little gas burner and she'd go in the back yard and keep turning it and turning it and she roasted green coffee beans herself. And you'd have the people around the place come and ask her what she's cooking because it smells so good. I said, "Yes, it's a pity that it doesn't smell like that when you're drinking the coffee." [laughs]

OH: Where would she have got the beans from?

MT: That was very hard. San Remo pasta used to import the green beans --- and that was very hard to find then.

OH: It was interesting that it was so important to your mother?

MT: Oh yes, well at the time, she loved the coffee when she was in Italy but was never able to buy it because first of all, it was expensive, secondly, it was hard to get because of the War years as well and so that was her luxury. Mind you, coffee wasn't coffee unless she had grappa with it - I don't know which she had most of, coffee or the *grappa*.

OH: And someone would have given her the *grappa*?

MT: Oh, yes, we had an auntie that lived with us, made her own. Couldn't believe it. She was about 70. [laughs] And we'd be working until about 2:00 in the morning because Johnny had a coffee lounge and we'd be coming home and we'd see her in the laundry, you know, reading a book, keeping tab of her distiller which she had made which wasn't legal, I might add. But I think

⁴ *Funghi* is the Italian word for mushrooms.

the police would close an eye unless you were selling it.

OH: Can you explain what grappa is?

MT: That's... you boil the wine, old wine, if you like and then you have --- you imagine a pressure cooker when you let the steam out of the pressure cooker, you have a little hose and it comes out crystal clear and that's the steam off the wine that you're cooking.

OH: And can you explain why it was important, for your auntie?

MT: There's your tradition --- That's probably the only traditional thing she liked.

OH: How would she have it?

MT: She'd have a little drop in her coffee. Virtually what a person puts milk in the tea, Mum would have that much *grappa* in her coffee.

OH: Is that a particular custom for your region?

MT: Yes, yes, definitely. And because they all made their own wine over there, the left over was converted to *grappa*. --- And a lot of people made their *grappa* here but now I have people that say to me: "Do you know anybody's making *grappa*, I can't find it." So we sort of trained Mum to go into brandy because we were having too much trouble. And I thought there was too much risk involved with making *grappa* because I did hear of a family here that got burnt because they sealed up the lid so that, eh, and it exploded and it virtually burnt them.

OH: And now it's possible to buy?

MT: *Grappa*? Oh, yeah, the imported one. But that's not the same, is it?

OH: (49:09) What are your reflections, just building on that, of the changes in the community of, say Italians, in the time that you've been here in Adelaide?

MT: Well, let me tell you, some of these pensioner dinners I go to. We've been going to this one for two years, and all we sit at the same table.

OH: Where is this?

MT: This was out at Reid Avenue Campbelltown. And it is a pensioner, run by the pensioners.

OH: Italian?

MT: Italian, yeah. Anyway, and the lady opposite me, very smart lady, older than me --- she was talking about when she arrived in Australia, where she went to live. And I said to her, "And after that, where did you go?" Because she would have been boarding in this house. And she said, "Oh, I went to Newmarket Street." "Where's that? In Adelaide?" And she said, "Yes." And I said: "What year was it?" She said: "Oh, in 1950." And I said: "Oh, did you go to Rossetto for your shopping, your grocery shopping?" "Oh, yes." I said: "Oh." I said, "Do you remember anybody there?" She said, "Oh, I only knew Maria Rosa there." And I said, "Well that was me." I didn't recognise her. Oh, she jumped across the table, hugged me and she said, "You used to take me to the doctor with my kids and interpret for me." Because my Auntie who ran the grocery shop, if there was anybody who needed help with interpreters, it was always me that went out with these people, you know.

Anyway, I couldn't believe that I didn't recognise her either, you see. And I remember even --- going to the doctor with her, stupid things I remember but not important things. Anyway the doctor said, "What does the lady think is wrong with her baby?" So I would ask her. She said: "I think he's got worms." He said, "She wouldn't have worms, he wouldn't have worms here in Australia." I said to the doctor, "How come they've got worms in Italy but not here because I remember I had worms." He said, "Because." He said, "Because we have pasteurised milk here." And then it rang a bell because everybody's got a cow there, you milk the cow, you feed your kids the milk and therefore you got the worms. And that's the only thing I remembered about that

lady with her baby. It's terrible isn't it? But anyway, certain things stay in your mind, and that's it.

OH: (52:05) Maria we're coming close to the end of the interview

MT: Yes.

OH: And I'd like to ask if you see yourself as Italian or Italian Australian or Australian? How would you describe yourself?

MT: Well, I mainly speak English. Right? And I see myself as 50:50. But much as I love Italy as a tourist place, don't ask me to live there. And everybody says to me, and most Italians living here now would tell you the same thing because they get used to the Australian attitude, they go into a shop, they're treated humanely and in Italy, you don't. They're always rude to you. I can remember one trip I went to Italy, I went to buy, and I wasn't fat as I am now, I was fairly reasonable for my age, I wanted a pair of corduroy jeans. I went to this shop and kept saying, "Navy blue, bottle green or black." She brought me out, yellow, mauve jeans and I kept repeating those colours. Eventually I said, "Have you got any bottle green, navy blue or black?" And she said, "You don't think you're going to get jeans that will fit you, do you?" Now --- I've never been spoken to like that in Australia in any shop. And I love, I love joking with all the cash registers [cashiers] when I go to the shop anyway. But no way, they're rude and they keep you waiting and look, I just, even when I went back, I was not used to this and I was glad to come back to people that treated you civilly. It's changing though because they're travelling better and they see how other people treat them.

OH: So, it's interesting that you fell the 50:50.

MT: Yes. You have to, if you have friends in both categories --- you have to feel the same, yeah.

OH: And that's a sense of belonging?

MT: Yes.

OH: A home base?

MT: Yes, yes. I think hadn't we come out here... Mind you, the people that went to live in the country that migrated here, they've got a different outlook. Firstly, they speak English better. But here, like Mum, for ten years here, we lived, everybody was Italian around us. It was only after she went to work for a little while, that she learned a bit of English. And she wasn't bad for her age compared to her other friends.

OH: Well, thank you very much Maria Rosa for the interview and for your reflections, I appreciate that.

MT: I'm sorry that I couldn't make it more colourful for you. My *forte* is telling jokes and I'm not going to tell them while you're recording them.

[laughter]

OH: Well, thank you very much for your reflections. It has been great.

MT: And thank you very much, it's been great.