

Italian market gardeners oral history project
Interview OH872/6 with Assunta Giovannini nee Tonellato
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recorded by Madeleine Regan at Kidman Park, South Australia
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Well, thank you, Assunta, for agreeing to this interview.

You're welcome.

And we're going to start with your background and some information about your parents.

Right.

And then your Aunt and Uncle.

Right.

So you might like to tell me first of all about your parents.

Well my parents ...

They were born in?

Right, yes, my parents were born in Italy and now I was adopted by the Tonellato's when I was three months old and I was born a Panazzolo and when I was born my mother died and my Uncle adopted me and I was raised with the Tonellato family.

Right.

So, mm.

So your mother's name, if you can ...?

Yes, my mother's name was Tonellato.

Yeah.

And she came here in 1936, '35, '36, and was married here and went to Broken Hill. She married my father, or they married here in Adelaide I think.

And how old would your mother have been when she ...?

She would have been about 35, between 33 and 35, I'm not sure of the exact date, how old she was when she got married, but she came over here and she brought over

my two step-brothers as, what would you call it, as, she was like a carer for them when they came over on the boat. And when she got here, then she married my father and when I was born she died in Broken Hill. At that time there was no, you know like medical ... had she been here in Adelaide she would have been probably still alive but ... and it was just a big country town, so when she died then my Uncle decided he would keep me. He had five children of his own and ...

And your Uncle's name was?

Tonellato.

And his name was Secondo?

Yes, that's right.

And your Auntie was?

Elisabetta, yes.

Yeah! And just going back to your mother, what was her name?

Assunta.

Assunta?

Yes, Tonellato.

And she married?

Well she married Vittorio Panazzolo.

Right.

And that was my birth name, when I was born, but then later on in the years I changed my name to Tonellato.

Right. So I think that you told me that your Uncle went to collect you ...

Yes.

... from Broken Hill.

Yes, he went to collect me from Broken Hill because at the time, children, babies, weren't allowed to travel on the train until they were three months old, so he told my father "Well it's no good adopting her out", because my father had two teenage sons and he couldn't, you know, worry about a baby. What was he going to do, so my Uncle said "We'll keep her, we've got five children of our own and we'll keep her", so he had to wait three months to go to Broken Hill to collect me, but then in the

meantime a family in Broken Hill took me for three months, Carmela Torresan, and she got very friendly with my Uncle, and then we always kept in touch. She looked after me for three months, and then my Uncle came and collected me with the train, because babies weren't allowed to travel until they were a certain age, I suppose in those days, I don't know why, and then I was raised with the Tonellato family.

So this, the year that we're talking about, the year of your birth, was 193-?

Seven.

And what date were you born?

The 20th April 1937, and I think my mother died ... it was complication from a caesarean section and I think at that time like, you know, they wouldn't, hadn't too many medical ... in Broken Hill it was just a big country town, so that's all I know about that, and that's it, and then I came to Adelaide to live. ...As a baby.

And, can you just tell me a little bit about the Tonellato family?

Well, the Tonellato family, well, I go back when I was four or five, I remember, you know this, we're a big family and next door to us that we were all living together was the Piovesan's, and we sort of all grew up together with Nino, Dino and Bruno. We were like all brothers and sisters.

This was on the land at?

This was on the land at, well now it's Kidman Park, but I think then it was St James Park or ... and the road that we were staying, we were between, it was then River Road and Frogmore Road, but Frogmore Road, at that time there was really no access to get to Frogmore Road so we lived in a dirt track from River Road in the middle between River Road, which is now Findon Road and Frogmore Road.

And there was something interesting about the house, wasn't there?

Well the house, well we lived in a train and this, it was actually just wasn't a train, this was, it belonged to the King, the King George V, I think it was his brother. In 1935¹ he came here and they had this carriage that they'd brought him and his wife here, and my Uncle decided he was going to buy it when his family arrived, and it was really fitted out, beautiful, it wasn't just a train and the early years of that I don't

¹ Prince Albert, Duke of York and wife, Elizabeth visited Australia in 1927, including six days in S.A.

remember, but I was told that we, Mum used to cook in the train and my Uncle, and we all slept, we all had our little compartments, and, and then eventually, just not very far from the train my Uncle built, they were really cowsheds they were at the time, and they came available, so my Uncle decided that he's going to use them as a, like a kitchen where my Auntie could cook, and we'd eat there, and then just sleep in the train, which was all very nice, we were all, had our bunks and our own little rooms and the corridor was all on the side, you know, so it was quite good really, I remember that and no, that was good that.

And inside can you remember what it looked like, the carriage?

Yes, the carriage inside had these little pull-down seats so as you walked on the corridor they had these little seats that you could pull down and you'd sit outside your room. At the time we only had a ... like Mum, (my Auntie), put up a curtain, but it was beautiful inside, they had all these embossed mirrors, and it was really, it was, you know, really a beautiful carriage, and we used to cook in the ... at the beginning, the first room was a very big room and my Auntie would cook there, and then the other rooms we had a bathroom and all these little rooms that we'd all, the boys would sleep, and I'd sleep with my sister Rosina, and then eventually we got that. We used to eat in this other department and just cross the courtyard more or less, and we'd go there to sleep.

And in the carriage when your mother was cooking, was there a stove?

Yes, yes, they had that, they had a wooden stove there and my Uncle built the chimney, and it was decked out really like a proper little home, you know, it was decked out really ...

And you called the Tonellato boys and girl your brothers and sister?

And sisters, yes.

And how much younger were you?

Well the youngest was Orlando and he was ten years different in age than me. He was born in '27 and I was born in '37, and the others were all out, and Louis and Albert was, well Louis was ... Rosina was about fourteen years different, Louis would have been about fifteen, but the youngest one, Orlando, he was ten years difference from me.

And you also grew up, as you said, with the Piovesan family?

That's right.

Were they more your age?

Yes. Bruno and I were born the same year, '37, and Dino and Nilo was just one year and two years older, and we all grew up, we all grew up like brothers and sisters, you know, we used to ... actually it was a milking shed, but after that Dino and Bruno's father converted it into a kitchen and a bedroom and, and my Uncle did, on his side, he just did that we had the cooking and the eating section, you know, in that part, but that was quite interesting too, and the boys, we grew up, we all used to go to school together and that was very interesting.

Where did you go to school, Assunta?

Well at the time, now it's called Flinders Park but it was called Underdale in this days. It was on Holbrooks Road and we used ...

And how did you get there?

By bike, we used to ... I remember Dino and Nilo used to ... we used to what they called donkey on the bike, you know, and Bruno, we used to go to the school and we'd cross all market gardens, like from where we were in between Frogmore Road and Findon Road, we used to go to this, go down the dirt track and then we'd cross over the Ballestrin's land and they all had their land there, they were all market gardeners, the Zerella's and the Berno's, they were all there, and the school was actually situated on Holbrooks Road.

So that would have been quite a trip?

Well yes it was, we would take about fifteen, twenty minutes by bike. You'd cross all through ... there's a shortcut really crossing through the market gardens, all dirt tracks and that, but everybody knew everybody and then it was quite good, all the Ballestrin's would wave out when we'd go past on bike, and then with Frankie's sister, Santina I was very friendly with her too, and we'd all go to the same school. That was about the only school that was closest to here you know.

And so you would have started in year, in a reception or?

Well I think then you had to be five, five or six, I'm not quite sure. No, I think it was five, yes, yeah, they didn't have, yeah, yeah, grade 1, we used to call it grade 1 that's

Did you do all your primary school there?

Yes, yes, right to grade 7, and then from there I went to St Joseph's at Hindmarsh.

Right, and how would you have got to school?

St Joseph we used to catch the tram. There was a tram that used to ... we'd catch the tram, actually I can't remember if I ... the tram used to stop at Flinders Park, well on the corner of Crittenden Road, and I think we used to ride our bikes, well I did because that was only a girls' school. No, it wasn't, it was a boy and girl school. Dino and Nilo I don't remember where they went to school, but I know I went to St Joseph's and I used to ride my bike to, to Crittenden Road, leave the bike there, then catch the tram to Hindmarsh. That's how we ... because even when we went into the city in those days, we'd ride our bikes to Henley Beach Road, and we'd just put the bikes up against the fence and catch the tram it was in those days, and then we'd come back, the bike'd be still there even after two weeks (laughs), and then you'd just get your bike and come home, and that's how we did, we travelled everywhere with our bikes.

And would you have gone into the city very often?

Um, well yes, in the city I think if I remember with my Uncle and Auntie, we used to go visiting because then, in those days, everyone went visiting, and we used to have a horse and a buggy and I remember the Sundays, Sunday afternoons, when they didn't have much work in the garden, we would visit, we'd go to Hindley Street that my Uncle and Auntie had all their *paesani* there, and I had my Uncle and Auntie Bailetti that lived in Hindley Street, so we'd be on the horse and buggy and off we'd go, and that was our Sunday outing, so as the ... as far as anything else, I can't remember too much about the shopping part, but as I got a bit older I remember that my sister then – I had a lot of problems with ears, with my ears at the time, and I had to go to the doctor a lot, and I remember that was in North Terrace, so we'd go to this family reunion in Hindley Street, and then my sister would take me to the doctor, and then on the way back we'd stop at this family's place and my Uncle would pick us up. At that stage there he had a truck that he used to go to market with, so that was our outings to the city, but I remember the city in those years, you know, that we did ...

And what did it look like, do you remember?

Well yes, yes, I remember that Hindley Street, I remember was where the Bailetti's had their shop. My Uncle had a, he was a gunsmith and he used to repair guns, and he had a bike shop and he had bikes and fixed things up, and my Auntie Bailetti they would live at the back of the shop.

And these were your aunt and Uncle related to your father?

To my father, yes, yes, my aunt, Mrs Bailetti, was my father's sister And then Hindley Street at that stage, the west end, there would be all little houses there, all little townhouses, or not really townhouses but they were all inner city living, and a lot of my Uncle and Auntie's paesani would be all living in Hindley Street, most of them, at the time, and then there was the corner of Morphett Street where there was a big grocery shop. At that time it was called the Star Grocer, and at the other end of Hindley Street towards West Terrace there was another big grocery shop called Rossetto, and they used to, all the Italian families, all the market gardeners here, would do all their shopping at this little Rossetto family on their way home from market, and I remember that they'd stop there and pick up all their groceries because there wasn't supermarkets or anything like that in those ...

Mm, yeah.

So that was good (laughs).

Yeah.

Yeah, I remember that. We used to have a Violet Crumble on the way home (laughs). They were very hard to get, they were very precious.

Because you would have grown up in the war years?

Yes, yes.

And do you remember anything from that time about the war?

No, no, I don't. All I remember is that my Uncle and Auntie and my whole family, when the war broke out, they had to go to Woodville to, to report to the police station, to ... I don't know what ... there were ... I don't know if they were naturalised at the time or not, maybe ... I'm not sure, but I know that every week they'd get on their horse and buggy, and the whole family would go to the Woodville Police Station and they all had to report to the Woodville Police Station because of the war, you know, with the Italians and the, and the English at that time.

Assunta, going back to the information that you gave about your father and your mother, and your father agreeing for your mother's brother's ...

Yes.

... family to raise you, was there any kind of consequences for that later on?

Yes, there was. I remember when I was about seven, at that time my father had just ... when I was born at that time my father just said "Well", to my Uncle, "you can take her, you know, she's your sister's daughter and we'll look after her", and at that time there my Uncle, my father went to Alice Springs because a lot of the Italians were working in the mica fields, and when he came back he lived with his sister, with Mrs Bailetti in Hindley Street, and he decided he wanted his daughter back.

And how old would his sons have been at that time?

They would have been, well I think one of them was about twelve years older than me, and the other one would have been about fifteen, Oscar and ... Oreste was his name, they used to call him Oscar, and Attilio. I think it was about a twelve-year and fifteen-year difference, something like that, I'm not quite sure, and he decided, he said to my Uncle "Well now" he said "I'll have my daughter back", and my Uncle said "Well where are you going to put her?" and he said "Well" he said, you know "We've got a place there in North Terrace" because most of the Italians lived there, and he was in a boarding house at the time.

And how old did you say?

Yeah, I was, I think I was seven, if I remember rightly, seven or eight. I could have been, yep, say around seven or eight, I'm not sure, six, seven, eight, something. No, I wasn't even eight, seven, six or seven, so they asked me if I want to go to live with my father and I said no, I didn't want to go, I said "He was just a man that came down on Sundays to visit", like he did keep in touch every now and then on Sundays. He would come down to my Uncle and Auntie's and visit, and I knew he was my father, but he was just a stranger more or less, and a lot of times I would see him when we visited the Bailetti's and he'd take me to the zoo, and I remember that, but as far as living with him, you know, that was ... so I said no, I wasn't going to go, so my father at the time decided that he's going to take my Uncle to court, and all I remember about the court, because there was no legal adoption in those days, they didn't do anything like that then, my Uncle just assumed that he was going to look

after me and that was it, and what happened was they went to court and all I remember in the court was this big confusion, and I was out the front, and I just started to cry and then I said I didn't want to go and live with him, and this and that. So apparently the lawyer that we had at the time told my Uncle and Auntie, would she have this woman that lived, there was an Australian woman that lived on Frogmore Road, her name was Rene and she did a lot of the interpreting for all the Italians. She was a very nice lady, she married this Italian and they were living on Frogmore Road, and he said "Look", he said, "don't go home tonight, don't go, come home, stay in the city because" he said, "your father is going to ... they ... he's going to go down to pick up his daughter", so we stayed in the city and at that time there my father came down with his lawyer, which was an Italian, was an Italian man that lived near the Bailetti's, and he came down to pick me up, and I remember there was a Nilo and Dino, his name was Angelo Piovesan, Nilo, Dino and Bruno's father which, you know, with my Uncle they lived next door, and he said to my father, he said, he said, "Oh", he said "Secondo is not here", he said, "and what are you doing here coming to pick up your daughter?" and he said "Aren't you ashamed of yourself", he said, "the Tonellato's have looked after her up 'til now, you come back from Alice Springs and what do you do, want to take her away to live where, in a boarding house?" and I think my father, I think Angelo said at that time, he said "If you don't get off this land I'll shoot you" (*inaudible*) just a figure of speech sort of thing, and I think my father at the time felt embarrassed, and the, and the lawyer that he had with him, which was someone like the whole family knew who this ... everyone knew everyone at the time, and they just ticked off and that was it, and from then on I never really kept in contact with my father or my brothers, you know, and I think the next time that I did see my father was when my brother got married, that I got an invitation with my Uncle and Auntie, and I went to the wedding with my Uncle and Auntie, and that was quite a few years later. I remember I was about twelve or thirteen at the time, but ... and then when I grew up and I had my 21st birthday, I invited my father to come to my 21st birthday. I had a party, my Uncle and Auntie gave me a party, but I, I just got no recollection much of him, you know, and then I just remembered that my brother's wife one day rang, you know, "Your father is very sick and he's dying in hospital", and I did go and visit, but it was just to go

and see this poor old man, you know, that's the only, that's the only feeling that I had towards him, you know.

Because you really had felt like that Secondo and Elisabetta ...

That's right.

... were your parents?

That's right, that's right, yes, but I did keep in touch with my Auntie Bailetti. She would ... I had the feeling that my father, because my Auntie Bailetti had all boys, she didn't have a girl, I think what she wanted to do was she probably said to her brother "Go and get your daughter and I'll raise her as my own" but, you know, when you're seven or eight, to get taken away from one family to a family which they were really in a way strangers because it was something, it was like someone that you'd see once a week, once a month or, you know, that's how it was at the time.

So life then went on for you ...

Yes, so life went on.

... in the Tonellato family?

Yes, yes, so I think that was the last time I ... I think the last time I saw my father was when I had my 21st ... because when I got married I asked him to my wedding and he didn't come, so that was the end of that episode, but I did keep in contact with one of my step-brothers, (*inaudible*), which he lived not very far from here and the last few years we sort of kept in touch, you know, and there was quite a few things that before he died he, like we had a very long conversation and there was a lot of things that he didn't know what was going on with his father at the time, how there was a court case, because he was away in the ... it was during the war, and he was away in the army and he didn't know all of this, you know.

Mm.

But that was a, that was the end of that (laughs), that episode, so I grew up a Tonellato really, you know.

Yeah, and the child, obviously loved child, in a family where ...

That's right.

... the market gardening was the main –

Yes, yes, yes.

... work.

And my Uncle, I would call him 'Uncle', and my Auntie I would call her 'Mum', and a lot of people thought it was strange. You know, they probably thought that my Uncle had remarried or, or my mother remarried or something to that extent, you know, because I knew I had a father and though I don't ever recall, remember calling him 'Dad' or anything like that, but I've always called my Uncle, 'my uncle', but because I never knew my mother, I always used to call my Auntie 'Mum', you know, so that was a little bit confusing there.

And, what do you remember about the market gardening, you know, being a little girl growing up on the market gardens?

Well, the market garden at the time, I remember that well they used to, my brothers and sister, (*inaudible*) didn't ... yeah, worked in the garden too. Well they worked very hard, they had all these glasshouses, and I remember they used to get up early in the morning and then go to market, and Mum would be busy cooking, you know, cook for lunch and cook on the old wooden stove – there was no turning on the gas or the electric stove or anything like that – and, and it was just, you know, it was work, and our Sundays we used to, like I said, go visiting, and then as I grew a little bit older I did, I think I did about a year in the market garden, picked tomato, beans, and everything like that.

Were they the main crops that were grown?

Well tomato, they mainly had glasshouses, I think they would have had about twenty-five glasshouses, something like that. They used to grow tomatoes and beans in the glasshouse, and then they'd grow vegetables, we used to grow potatoes, and I don't remember, maybe cauliflower, some cabbages, I'm not very sure about that, you know, but I know the main crop was the tomatoes and the beans that were grown in the glasshouses, and the potatoes – when the potato season was on they used to plant the potatoes outside – and this was all virtually, mainly it was all along Frogmore Road that they had the glasshouses. But like I said before, there was no way from where we lived that was closer for us to get out to the Findon Road because we'd have a dirt track that was, my Uncle sealed with gravel so that he could

go up and down, you know, with the truck and that when they'd go to market, and the Frogmore Road. It was all just dirt tracks that belonged to the garden.

And what did the land look like, you know, as you were growing up, what do you remember around you?

Well, all I remember is there was all these dirt roads that would lead into the glasshouses, and all boxthorn hedges, plenty of boxthorn hedges, and bamboo fences. They used to build these ... they used to grow these bamboo hedges to block off the wind a lot of times, you know, when they'd grow like beans or, or vegetable crops outside, and they'd have these all, fences of bamboos, but it was just very bare, you know, only where we were living and there was maybe one or two houses that I remember on Findon Road, Frogmore Road I don't remember. I remember Rene's house.

What was Rene's surname?

Destro, yeah, so Rene Destro.

So she married an Italian man?

Yes, yes.

Would that have been unusual in those days?

I suppose it would have been. I just remember her there, and I remember she was the only one that had the phone, and any phone calls ... everyone went to her place for a phone call, you know, I mean I don't really know that much about her. All I know is that she had two daughters and that they had these beautiful dolls with a pram, and eventually she gave one to me, a doll, and I think she gave one to Connie when her daughters grew up.

Connie Marchioro?

Yes, that's right. I think she did, I'm not even sure but I know that I got the doll and the pram that I treated like it was, you know, gold in those days, but no, I can't, I can't remember too much about Rene.

And do you, did you say to me that she spoke Italian?

I'm not sure.

Did she do some interpreting, did you say?

Yes, but I don't know if she spoke, I can't remember that, but my Uncle knew a bit of English, and then I suppose, you know, the boys and Rosina knew English because they went to school here. So they would all communicate with her, you know.

Did you speak English when you went to school?

Yes, that's right, we all spoke, but no, now that I recall I did speak English. I didn't have trouble speaking English when I went to school, I didn't have that problem, and all the friends that were ... I don't think, I'm not even sure, I think I spoke a little bit, I think that – let me think now – yes, I think I did because with Mum we always spoke Italian, the dialect that is, and with Nino and Nano we also used to speak in English. Yes, I did speak English, yes I did, I remember speaking English when we went to school, and not with Mum, with Mum it was always the dialect, you know, she didn't learn much English. My Uncle knew a little bit speaking, I think by going to the market and, you know, dealing with that sort of thing.

And the dialect was ... Trevisano?

Yes, that's right, we all spoke, but no, now that I recall I did speak English. I didn't have trouble speaking English when I went to school, like I didn't have that problem. And all the friends that were around, we all spoke the dialect, and then we spoke English between us, like because some of them were a little bit older, some of our friends, and they were going to school, so they were speaking English and ... so that was the younger days anyway (laughs).

And you would have been quite young when your brothers and sister got married?

Yes, yes, yeah.

Can you remember ...?

Yes, I remember Rosina was the first one to get married, and it was just on my eighth birthday I think, and she got married that, I think the war had just finished. No, she got married in 19, yeah, she got married in 1945, and I was a little flower girl, and in those days when they got ... when she, when anyone got married, they used to – maybe everyone got married at Hindmarsh, Sacred Heart Church – and they didn't have a permit to drink beer in the, in what they called 'the hall' so they'd got to the Hindmarsh Town Hall then and they'd just have soft drinks and lemonade and sandwiches, and then they'd all come back to the house, which is a shed really, we

called it 'the shed', where they used to grade tomatoes, and they'd have the keg of beer, and that was the wedding, you know. And Rosina got married in '45 and I think I was eight then, and Albert, Louis and Albert got married in '47, they got married two years later, so they were really young when, I was still young when they got married, and then we were left with Nino and Nano.

And was the family still living in the carriage, or as people called it 'the vagon'?

Yeah, yes, we were, we were until, oh, I think until the '60s, early '60s, or maybe ... yes, because when, when Nino got, Nano got married, I think they were still living in, yes they were still, Mum and my Uncle were still living in the *vagon* and when Nino got married he started to build a house here on the land, and then I think afterwards there was only my Mum and Uncle and me left, but we weren't living in the *vagone* then. The *vagon* was still there but we were living in ... the Piovesan's moved out so my Uncle and Auntie occupied their section of, they were really milking sheds, and we all lived ... like he turned it into a kitchen and a bedroom, and I had my bedroom. It was quite nice, you know, it was ... but we didn't have much to do with the *vagon* anymore.

And what was the *vagon* used for?

Well then afterwards my Uncle put ... it was just there and then at that time you got a lot of these Italian migrants that used to come over, and they all used to live in there 'til they found places that they wanted to live. And so my Uncle used to rent it out and he built onto it ... that they'd have like a little kitchenette, and they would sleep in the actual carriage, and, and added on was like a little veranda type of thing and they'd do their own cooking, so they had all these single men living there, and they were all like boarders, you know, living, cooking their own meals and everything, and then we'd be living, we occ..., my Uncle occupied all the, the, what do you call it, the shed where the Piovesan's lived, and turned that into a bedroom and a laundry, and that was quite nice, it was quite liveable, and I think my Uncle and Auntie lived there 'til 1960-something. And then he built the house on Frogmore Road.

And in the *vagon* how many, you know, single men could be there at one time?

Oh, I think it was, yes, there was all up about four, five maybe, but then there was another couple that came from Italy, and they just needed a room and a place to cook, and it was husband and wife, and they had a son, and then there was another family with a husband and wife and a son, and then at the ... and then it just got destroyed somehow because when there was nobody living there just destroyed by vandals really, and it was a pity really, it should have been kept, you know, because it was really a beautiful carriage that should have been looked after. But, you know, in those times you just didn't worry about these sort of things, you know.

I was interested in asking you a little bit more about your schooling, because we talked about that, how you went to St Joseph's ...

Joseph's.

... at Hindmarsh ...

Yes.

... and then how many years would you have had there, Assunta?

Well there they used to go, then it was First Year, Second Year, and then Intermediate I think it was in those years, and I did up to Intermediate but I didn't finish Intermediate, and I liked school while I was at Flinders Park (at Underdale then), but once I went, changed school, I was, I was never really happy there, you know. Maybe I didn't have my friends there or whatever, but then I just left there and Mum said "Oh, you have to be a dressmaker", because in those years, you know, all the girls had to be dressmakers. And I think I went to learn dressmaking when I left school, but I wasn't interested in that either.

Where would you have gone to do that?

I think there was, North Terrace or Grenfell Street that they used to teach you how to draft patterns, and I wasn't interested at all, and I remember I only went for about two or three months, was it?

What would your Mum have said about that?

She wasn't very happy about it, you know, "Everyone has to learn how to sew and, no, I wasn't interested in it, and what happened then, what was it? I stayed home for a little while and then I went to work in a grocery shop, which at the time it was one of the ... a Virginia Santin, she married Oscar Mattiazzato that had a grocery shop at Croydon, and we used to go to work there, it was like a ... in those days grocery

shops used to make deliveries. The owner of the shop or the employees would go around to the houses, pick up all their orders for their groceries, and then they'd made the delivery, and it was quite a big shop, they had a grocery, and a deli, and a fruit and veg all in one.

Where was it in Croydon?

At Croydon, at Torrens Road.

Oh! And who was the people, who was the family who had that ...?

Well, Oscar Mattiazzato had it, and his Auntie was the one that had this grocery shop in Hindley Street, and when he married one of the Santin girls, which is where Rosina married into, she married the Lui Santin, and she, they had this shop so I was only young then, I was about 16, maybe seven..., 16 I think, 17, they asked me if I wanted to work in this, which is sort of like a super, a mini-mart these days, you know, only there was no self-service, everyone had to be served. Everything had to be weighed up, sugar, flour, you know, there was none of this packet stuff, and I worked there for quite a few years.

And would the customers have been mainly Italian?

No, no, there was no Italian customers – maybe one or two that I remember on Torrens Road there – and at that time there though a lot of Italians that lived around here and Nillo Piovesan at the time, he was working there too, so he would come around here and pick up all the grocery orders for most of the Italian families, and then the following day, or the day after, he would deliver it. But as far as customers coming into the shop, they were mainly Australians.

Oh! And how would you have got from Frogmore Road to ...?

Bike, we used to ride our bikes, we used to ride our bikes down Grange Road, down East Avenue, and then down Rosetta Street, we used to go down the subway road there, and then onto Torrens Road, and then afterwards I think somehow, Romildo and Clara Santin went into the business and they had a little utility, and then they would pick me up because we all lived close by. But the first few years we all used to ride our bike, come wind and rain, you know, it was all bike riding then.

And how many people would have worked there?

Oh, I think at one stage he had about six people, if I remember. It was a fairly big business then, you know, it was him and his wife and two or three in the grocery shop, and then the delicatessen which was all one and, yeah, it was quite a big shop and they catered for quite a few people there.

Mm! And what would you have done in your social life at that time?

Well social life was going down the beach weekends, and we'd go to the beach. We wouldn't go in the water because we would have our hair done and we couldn't get it wet, so ...

Is this with your friends?

Yes, that's a friend, we used to go with Connie, Connie Marchioro we used to go to the beach, and then Sunday nights we'd go dancing at St Patrick's or the cathedral. St Patrick's Church, at the time, had a little hall next to it and so did the cathedral, so one Sunday they'd have a dance at St Patrick's, and then the next Sunday there's one at the cathedral. Ten o'clock was closing time so everyone was home by 10.30 (laughs).

And how would you have got there?

Well I used to have either, Nino or Nano used to take me, used to pick Connie up, or when I started to go with Tina, another friend of mine, so we'd go, they'd pick us up. They'd take us there and then they'd come and pick us up.

And this is when they're married?

Yes, this is when they married because then they'd go ... I think Nino at the time would go and see his wife's family, and then on the way back they'd stop and pick us up.

Because they wouldn't have wanted you to have been out and about by yourself?

No, no, no, 10.30, you know, that was really late in those days (laughs).

And (laughs) ...

And that was our social life and we used to go to the, yeah, beach, our beach. We used to go, when I was little I remember every summer, because it's school holidays, we'd go down the beach, Henley Beach it was in those days, and Mum would pack a roast chicken and we'd all sit under the jetty. And this is like when I was a teenager and was still going to school, and we'd spend the whole day at the beach because in

those days there was no air, we didn't have air-conditioning, and my Uncle and the boys, they'd work in the garden and then at night they'd come down to the beach and we'd all sit with a blanket eating our roast chickens, and a whole lot of the families would meet under this jetty because that's where all the ladies would go with their children when it was hot, you know. And then the men when they'd finished work would just come there and, you know, at night and have their supper, and I remember that Henley Beach was, under the jetty, was all Italians in those days.

A real community.

Yeah, real community (laughs).

So you were working in the grocery for a couple of years, or?

I think I was about, yeah it would have been I suppose about 24, 25, something like that, because then I remember my Uncle said he was going to Italy, the first time that he went back since he arrived here and that was ...

What year would that have been?

That would have been 1960, '61, something like that. I remember that at the time there they shot President Kennedy, so what year was that?

I can't remember exactly but ...

It was '61.

... early 60s?

Yeah, I think it was the beginning of 60, 61, and we went to Italy and I visited my Auntie in Italy.

And you went with your Uncle?

Yes.

Just you?

Yes, just me and my Uncle. My Auntie didn't want to come, Mum didn't want to come.

And was it a really big thing for your Uncle to be going back for the first time?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

So he'd arrived in?

'27 and went back in 19, I think it was '61, the year, if I remember rightly.

What were your impressions?

Well ...

Sorry, could you say where you went in Italy to the family?

Yes, we went to, we went to see my Auntie that lived, the Caselle. Well she lived at Fossalunga at the time and ...

And this is in the Veneto?

This is in the Veneto, this is not very far from Castelfranco because her son ... I only had the one Auntie there in Italy, most of my Uncle and Aunties were ... one other Auntie was in Canada, and the other two Uncles were in Canada, but I only had the one Auntie there, and my Uncle caught up with his sister. She was a little bit older than him, so she would have been ... he came back, he went there, he was seventy I think, and she was a little bit older and she was living with her son in, not very far from Castelfranco – her husband had died years earlier – and so we went to visit. We went to see the Fossalunga where, you know, my family came from, and we went to, and we went to Treviso, Castelfranco, and I quite enjoyed it because my Uncle there bought a car, and I could drive so, you know, we got around to see all the little places around the Veneto region, and then we went, we went to another place, we went to ... while we were there I said to my Uncle “Well we’ll travel around” and we went to see my sister-in-law’s [Mary Tonellato) family that lived in the Trento and that was quite an experience, the mountains, you know, in the Trento, nothing compared to Mt Lofty here, you know, the high mountains, and then from there we did a bit of a tour around the Italian Riviera. That was beautiful, the Riviera there, and the Italian, like it was quite good there, and we just had a look around and then we came back and ...

And what do you remember about meeting your relatives?

Well my Auntie said “Oh, you look just like your mother” (laughs) and she said “You might be a little bit taller”, and it was quite interesting. My Auntie was little, I didn’t imagine her like that, she weighed about six stones and she was little but she was very active for her age, she was always on the go, and she was very glad to see my Uncle because she hadn’t seen him since he came to Australia. But they kept in contact with letters but, you know, letters in those days used to take months to arrive

and ... but she was very happy to see us. Then I met my Uncle, my cousins there, and there was three girls, I think, and one boy, and we stayed with my cousin and his wife, and she had three daughters and a son at the time, and we stayed there.

And did you meet any of your father's relatives?

No, we went there to Italy for, we went there to their town for some reason, I can't remember what it was but no, I don't think that we met actually the relatives of my father but someone that knew my Auntie Bailetti and her husband and ... but not, no brothers or sisters or anything on my father's side. I don't remember that we went to any of that.

And how long would you have been away for?

I think we left – at that time we travelled by ship – we left in February and I think we come back September/October, it was quite a while, yeah, it was quite a while because don't forget it was a month going over and a month coming back, you know.

And what was that experience like...

Oh, I loved it, it's beautiful.

... the first time away from ...

Yes, yes.

... home?

Yes, yes. I loved the boat, sea travel I love it, you know, that would be my ideal holiday, you know, not planes, I'd rather get, you know, not the QE2 anymore but if that's, if I won a lottery that's what I'd go, on one of these beautiful big boats. No, I liked that, it was really good, and that was quite an experience because the boat used to stop in the ports on the way to Italy, you know, and, and then I met a cousin of mine that lived at Genova, and when we arrived in the port there, and she lived in the city in Genova, I think we stayed a week with her because her husband was a tailor and he made me this beautiful coat, you know, real tailor-made, you know. Well he said "What I'll do, I'll measure you up and when you go back to Australia I'll have the coat ready", because he had all my measurements, it was going to take a while to make, and my cousin there took me around Genova, I saw the, you know, the touristy place there. I rather liked that. It was very old but it was something different to the, like the little *paesi* where we went to stay after.

How interesting.

Yeah, that was interesting.

And when you came back do you remember what it was like, say for your Uncle and you to be telling your, you know, your mother and brothers and sister?

Yes, oh yeah. My Mum, well she was very interested, you know, how was everyone over there, and I always used to keep my Auntie in Italy that my mother used to wear make-up and have her hair done, and she just couldn't believe, you know, she said "Oh no", she said "your Auntie would never ...", you know, like modern up, you know, but no, it was very interesting, and then what happened after that? We came back and then I think my Uncle built this house on, yeah, that's right he built the house on Frogmore Road then, and then we went to live there.

And did you continue working at the grocers?

No, no, I left there, oh, I think they sold the business even before I went away, the business was sold. I can't actually remember that part but I left there a couple of years I think before we went to Italy, and I think I worked in the glasshouses then. Maybe six months or a year I worked, I helped Nino and Nano, we used to pick tomatoes, pick beans, and ... because they weren't married at the time. Oh no, yes, Nino was married and so was Nano, yeah, he must have been married, yes, before we went, yes, he was married before we went to Italy, they were both married.

And were they living here on Frogmore Road also?

Yes, yes, they built a house on Frogmore Road, and they used to make their own bricks, they were cement bricks, and weekends when they knew they were getting married, they'd make these bricks, cement bricks, and they built the house which one of Nano's sons still has that house now. And it's all been modernised up, you know, but no, they, they, yeah, they were married, yeah, they built the house and they lived together in that house, one had one half of the house and the other one had the other half, so ...

And they had glasshouses together?

Yes, yes, they used to work together, like Nino and Orlando and Nano, they used to work together with my Uncle at the time, and then I think Nino, he left and he went

to Two Wells because he couldn't work the glasshouses anymore, he had a bad back, and it was just my Uncle with Nano working, like when we went to Italy, at that stage. No, I left the shop, grocery shop there, it would have been a year, a year or two maybe before, maybe a year, I'm not quite sure but I did work in the glasshouses for a year helping them, and then we ...

Did you go to market?

Yes, I did when I was little. When I was little, school holidays, when I was about ten or twelve, I used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and go with the truck, and I remember we'd go with the truck, then we'd go to the East End Market there and sell all the produce there, and then we'd go to the, the other end of Rundle Street which is today, yeah, it's still called Rundle Street isn't it, yeah, Rundle Street. And when it was about 7 or 8 o'clock we'd go and have a, my Uncle would have a pasty and that was a big deal for me to eat, you know, early in the morning, a pasty or chips or bacon and eggs, you know, and all the, all the growers there used to, after a certain time, they used to all go and have their breakfast in these, the same places and they would communicate, but I used to go quite a few times to the market. Maybe sometimes I'd just sleep in the truck and I'd get a bit bored, but I used to go just because I knew afterwards we'd go for breakfast, you know, and that was a big deal then (laughs).

Returning to when you came back from Italy and you worked in the glasshouse, and you continued on with your social life going to the dances on Sundays?

Yeah, I think that the glass..., when we came back from Italy I don't think I worked too long in the glasshouses then. Then I got a job at the airport. A friend of mine said that his wife was working there at the time and if I was interested in going, so I went there and applied for a job, and I worked there at the airport. Yes, at that time there, now I had another friend and we used to – Norma [Ballestrin] and Pam [Zerella] and Joyce – our big outings were Saturday night to go to the pictures in the city then, and we'd go out for tea, then we'd go to the, I think it was the Shoppers' Session they used to have. They used to have it about 5 o'clock or something and we'd go to the pictures first, or we'd go for tea first and then go the pictures. That was our outing, you know, on the ... that was when we were a little bit older then and ... but still,

you know, you had to be in early, you know, none of this 11 o'clock, midnight was the latest.

And, in the airport it must have been the early days of the Adelaide Airport?

Oh yes, it was very early days.

And what were you doing?

That was in, it was a kiosk, and at that time there was like a type of a snack bar, and I think the airport at the time was open not very long ago, here, the West Beach Airport, and, and I worked there for years until I retired. But then I saw big changes there, you know, when they remodelled the airport and ... I never actually worked in the new airport, it was still always the old airport, and yeah, that's where I stayed, like I said, 'til I retired.

Mm. And in, in a particular time you met Angelo Giovannini?

Yes, yes.

Can you tell me about that?

Yes, that was, now where did I meet him? Oh yes, it was at a ... they used to have sometimes these church functions and they used to raise money to build the new church at Gleneagles [Seaton], or something to that do, and, and I used to know Angelo from when we used to go to the beach. I used to see him, like everybody sort of knew one another but we never really were that friendly, you know, you'd say "Hello, how are you?" and that was it, and then one day Connie, she saw – she was married at the time – and she saw Angelo in Hindley Street, and he asked her about ... because Connie and I were always together at the dance, we used, I used to see him at the dance at St Patrick's, the Cathedral. And he said "Oh, is that little friend of yours married?" and she said "No", and she said "I'll introduce you", and so Connie said, "Oh", she said "I've got someone that, you know, is quite interested". I said "Oh no, forget about, I don't want these introductions", you know, but anyway then I met Angelo at one of these church functions and we started to talk and I said "Oh", you know, at that time St Patrick's wasn't going anymore, the Cathedral, the dance there, and then we started going out, and I think within a year we were married.

And what year was that?

'68, 1968.

And where did you live when you first married?

Well, when we first married I lived with my Mum and Uncle because they'd just built the new house there on Frogmore Road, and then I lived there for a couple of years, and then this house where I'm living now, came available. Like where we are living here was all market gardens, then a builder brought up and built all these spec homes, and so I think "Well, this is a chance, you know, to buy a house in the area", and this is where we've been since living ...

And it's interesting that you have, um, you know, that you were raised not terribly far from here.

No, no, just ... well really I remember this, going down the next street, that would have been the dirt track that used to come to our place, you know, that was ... we used to have these bamboo tracks that used to come straight through where ... which would be the end of the street, but this street's got a dead end, but then if I go a bit further on the right there, that would have been the actual dirt track that came to our place, and as children, that's where we'd come down the Sturt track from the Findon Road, you know, to get to home.

Mm. And the road that you live on is called Carlo Avenue?

Yeah, Carlo Street, yeah.

Carlo Street, yeah. And Assunta, if you can think of the ways that this area has changed, what would be the most significant things for you?

I think the housing so, so many houses in such a short time, you know, because I always remember that when we visit people you'd be always crossing over market gardens, you know, you'd be ... it's just the, the, the housing how they just sprung up so quickly and so much where there's just none of these blocks that, you know, everyone used to have their own chicken and their own little veggie patch, and now it's the, you know, the traditional quarter-acre block and ... And once it wasn't like that, once it was just the, you know, your neighbour wasn't next door, your neighbour was, you know, a couple of acres down the road sort of thing. That's what I find, you know, that's a big change. Frogmore Road, I mean it's just, when you think of it years ago it was just a, as far as I know there was only two houses. I mean they're still there and it was just a, a dirt track with, with bamboo hedges and

boxthorn hedges. I don't think any trucks used to go down that road, or maybe when they had trucks that go to market or something they might have done.

So very big changes and ...

Very big changes.

... in your lifetime?

Yes, very big changes, mm.

Yeah, yeah. Well thank you very much for the interview and for sharing your story with me.

That's quite alright.

Thank you.

End of interview