

Italian market gardeners oral history project
Interview #1 with Melbourne Recchi OH872/31
recorded on 18 June 2014 by Madeleine Regan
at Flinders Park, South Australia

OH: – Oral historian (Madeleine Regan)

MR: – Mel Recchi

OH: This is an interview recorded for the Italian market gardens project. I'm Madeleine Regan and I'm recording the interview with Mel Recchi on 18th June 2014 in Mel's home at Flinders Park. Thank you, Mel for agreeing to be part of the project.

MR: You're very welcome.

OH: Mel, we're going to start with some of your family background. First of all, what is your full name?

MR: My full name is Melbourne Joseph Recchi. Melbourne is the same as the city of Melbourne and I have a twin sister called Adelaide. The reason having those funny names because people quite often ask me, when my father came out here in 1927 and he was here for ten years and then my mother came out in 1937, they were married by proxy and when we were born my father did not like the idea of us having names after our grandparents. And he said that Australia had been very kind to him and he decided to give us Australian names and they called us Melbourne and Adelaide.

OH: That's lovely. What about your parents? What was your father's name?

MR: My father? His name was Giovanni Recchi. And he arrived here in Australia in 1927 and he worked on the Adelaide to Alice Springs railway line for a short time and came back to Adelaide and went to work in a market garden at Paradise. And at Paradise, he worked for ten years and built his own home in Ramsay Avenue and then he met Mum through proxy and they married, and Mum came out in 1937.

OH: And what part of Italy did your father come from?

MR: Dad came from the Marche region and from a town called Offida.¹

OH: Just to explain where the Marche region is?

MR: The Marche is near the Abruzzi, it's on the Adriatic coast on the... I'm not sure if it is north or south [laughs] or east or west. But it's on the Adriatic coast, near the Abruzzi region.

OH: And your mother, what was her name?

MR: Her name? She came out here Antonia de Ionno was her maiden name. And she arrived here in 1937 and she came from San Giorgio La Molara which is a province of Benevento.

OH: how did they come to marry by proxy?

MR: Well, [laughs] Dad asked one of Mum's relatives or one of Mum's relations whether she knew of any girl that would like to get married. And it was Auntie Rita, also a De Ionno, and she said: "I've got a niece in Italy and she's not married." So they started writing letters but being illiterate, they had to get other people to write letters for them. And eventually they got married by proxy and my father's brother, he stood in for my father when they got married in Italy and then she came out here in 1937. She still tells the story that when she came here that it was very hard to

¹ Offida is the province of Ascoli Piceno in the region of le Marche

a man that she'd never seen.

OH: It must have been a really big challenge?

MR: Oh, I'm sure it would have been a massive challenge.

OH: And they were from different parts of Italy?

MR: They were from different parts of Italy but Dad, he got to know Mum's brothers, two, three brothers that were out here at the time and he got very friendly with them and they just supported him all the way through.²

OH: Mel, you've said that you were born here in Adelaide, what year were you born?

MR: I was born in 1938.

OH: What were your parents doing around the time of your birth?

MR: [laughs] I knew you'd ask me. As far as I know, we were living at Paradise at the time when we were born, we were out at Paradise and Dad was working for a market gardener and it was at the start of the War, he was asked to go and join the services there for as far as the War went, but he signed and his boss at the time told him that they that he couldn't take Dad because he was his best worker and that he needed him to work in the garden to keep supplies and food up to the reinforcements.

OH: Mel, we're going to take a break for a minute because I'm just checking something in the equipment so we'll resume in a moment.

MR: Okay.

OH: We're resuming the interview. Mel, I was just going to ask you about brothers and sisters. You have a twin sister, Adelaide?

MR: That is correct, a twin sister, Adelaide, the same age as I am, of course. I had a brother, he died at four weeks of age and another brother who was stillborn. So there was only two of us in the family, my sister and myself.

OH: And your own family?

MR: My own family? I have a daughter and a son of my own family. And I remarried a second time and I married a lovely woman called Marlene and she had four children and I treat them just the same as my own children and they treat me like their own father. And at present we've got 22 great grandchildren and they're still growing.

[laughter]

OH: That's fantastic. Well, thank you for giving that family background.

OH: (01:02) I'm now just going to focus a little bit more on your parents and you've spoken about their separate arrivals and I wanted to ask you, were there relatives in Adelaide on both sides of the family?

MR: --- No, the only relative that Dad had, he had a cousin, he had a nephew, two nephews³ come out here. One was Vincenzo Recchi, he came out in 1949, I believe, and Emidio Spinozzi, he also came out about the same time. They were the only relatives that Dad had out here. But Mum had three brothers and two sisters that, two sisters came out after she arrived but her three brothers were here before she arrived. They came out around about the same time that my father came out from Italy.

OH: What were they doing here?

² Mel explained in the process of editing that his parents spoke Italian although their dialects may have been a bit different.

³ The nephews were the sons of Mel's auntie, his father's sister

MR: Oh, at the time, I remember one uncle, he was a woodcutter, he was working in the forest cutting wood, chopping down wood for in those days, was wood stoves and I remember him being out at Blanchetown, cutting wood down there. We went there for a load of wood one day. And another brother, they lived down at Athelstone and I remember him coming and he'd always come down in a horse and a cart or a horse and sulky. And another brother, Dominic, he was also very friendly with Dad at the time but he left Adelaide about 1948 or '49 and went over to live in Victoria.

OH: You grew up in a home in Paradise? What language was spoken at home?

MR: Mostly, I think, mainly in Italian, our language was mainly spoken in Italian so I think learned Italian before I learned English. And I think it's fair to say, I remember Mum tells us many, many stories of when she arrived here, not knowing the words, not knowing how to speak. But luckily we lived next door to a grocer and they had a shop at Paradise and every time Mum went into his shop, he would not ask her what she wanted but he would give her bags, paper bags that she would walk around the shop and she would pick up whatever she needed and she would take it to the counter, he would weigh it and he would charge it. And that's how believe that self-service started because people could not understand what other people wanted in the shops.

OH: It would have been much easier, wouldn't it?

MR: Everything was on display and that's why it's so much easier today.

OH: What about your parents learning English? How was that?

MR: Well both my parents were illiterate, they did not know how to read or write. But if I gave Mum a column of figures of 20 figures in pounds shillings and pence, she would add it up to the last penny. And even though she did not know the pound, shillings and pence which was 12 pennies to a shilling and 20 shillings to a pound and so forth, and guineas came into it but she would add it up without making a mistake. But, Dad, he spoke broken English, Mum also spoke broken English but she could speak better than what Dad did ... as far as English went. But she would never, I remember her saying many, many times, even from Paradise, she used to hop on a pushbike and ride to the Adelaide Central Market and buy her fruit and veg and ride back to Paradise.

OH: That's quite a trip?

MR: Quite a trip and I also remember we used to go on the pushbikes up to Uraidla, I'd be on Dad's bike and my sister would be on Mum's bike and they would ride up to Uraidla and the hills were that steep, they would have to get off and walk, you know, most of the way. But coming home was beautiful because it was all down-hill.

OH: What was at Uraidla?

MR: Oh, we had friends up there by the name of Mercorella. And Dad used to go up there, they were market gardeners at Uraidla and Dad was always very friendly with them and we just had, just went up for the visits, especially in June when the pork season was on and they'd kill their pork and we'd go up there and they'd have sausage and salamis but every time we came back home, we'd have a bag full of onions or a bag full of potatoes also on the pushbikes. [laughs]

OH: That would have been quite a trip too?

MR: It was, it was a trip.

OH: (06:03) Just a couple of other questions about your family... What sorts of occasions were important to your family?

MR: Oh, mainly Easter was very, very important and Christmas time like Christmas was always a big family get together. It wasn't just Mum and Dad, and my sister and myself. It was nephews,

nieces, anybody that was involved in the family always used to come around to Mum and Dad's place because Dad agreed to bring quite a few people out from Italy even from Mum's town, from San Giorgio La Molara and they all come out and he helped many people to buy land with interest-free money and he also loaned quite a few of them, gave them a plot of land that they could plant and whatever they could get out of it they put it in their own pocket. And he was very generous in that respect.

OH: Do you think that by the time you and Adelaide were born that he had done fairly well?

MR: When he was in Paradise in the first ten years, he'd done very, very well. That's why he said Australia had been good to him when we were born. In ten years he had a block at Paradise, he built his own home, had it completely built so when Mum arrived from Italy, she had a brand new home to go into, and after ten years of work. And of course, not knowing the language, he was prepared to work but he didn't work eight hours a day, he probably would have worked 14 to 16 hours a day.

OH: What was he growing in Paradise?

MR: I think mainly they used to grow root vegetables which is parsnips, carrots, beetroots and all that sort of thing at the time.

OH: Did he have any glasshouses up there?

MR: No, at Paradise there was no glasshouse at Paradise.

OH: Where did he sell?

MR: Well, everything was sold at the Adelaide market in the East End markets, at the time. They used to take all their produce down to the East End market, and that was where the produce was sold.

MR: (08:22) Of course, we left Paradise in 1946 and moved to Lockleys.

OH: Why did your parents decide to move?

MR: Well, I think they decided to move, the thought that there was better prospects of him getting his own garden and making his own work and getting the profits from his own work.

OH: Because up until then, he was working for someone else?

MR: Up until then, he was working on wages but he said, I'm quite sure that Dad told me that when he started work, I think he was getting one pound, five shillings a week. You know, [laughs] back in 1937 that was probably a great wage about on today's market but back in 1946 when we moved to Lockleys and we leased some land and Dad leased some land, it was nine acres. Well we leased it from Britten-Jones⁴. It was actually on River Road Lockleys, at that time but now it have been changed to Findon Road, Flinders Park and it was part of Section 411.

OH: What do you remember this area looked like when you came? You would have been --- eight?

MR: Well, I was eight years old, no just seven years old. We moved here in February 1946, I was just over seven years old and it was very hot and I know the tram used to go down Henley Beach Road and we had to walk from home to Henley Beach Road to catch the tram which was just not quite a mile away, and the road in those days was just a small strip of bitumen in them middle of the road. And we used to walk down there and there'd be a lot of boxthorn bushes, artichokes, it used to take us 20 minutes to walk down to the tram stop.

OH: How high were the boxthorns?

MR: Oh, they were on an average they'd be eight to ten foot high and they were all over the

⁴ Misses N.M & E.J. Jones were registered as proprietors of River Road, east side from River Torrens in the Sands & McDougall South Australian Directory p 433

place but there were a lot of gardens. I'd only just started then but walking from home to Henley Beach Road, I used to pass five houses, that's all that there was between me and Henley Beach Road at the time and they were all down near Henley Beach Road and if you had one car go past you, you would be lucky to have two cars go past you on your walk. Nine times out of ten, the car that went past would stop, and take you down to the tram stop.

OH: These would be strangers?

MR: Oh, not really strangers, they'd be people that lived in the area, you know.

OH: Oh right.

MR: They would know who you were and they would pick you up and take you to the tram stop and you'd get off there and get on the tram and go to school.

OH: Going back to the decision about why your parents decided to move here, was there no available land around the eastern part of Adelaide in those suburbs?

MR: I'm not sure, you know I can't go back that far about what the reason was but I believe --- that this western side of town became well known for its produce and for its fertile soil. The Campbelltown area was very Bay Biscay, and in the winter months it was very hard to work because it was very sticky and in the summer months it would crack open because it was so dry. So this became the food bowl of Adelaide here on the western side of town as far as market gardening went and that's one of the reasons that they moved out here because when they moved here, they leased land, like I said before and that's how they started their gardening experiences.

OH: And when they moved, you told me earlier, that there were other relatives who came as well?

MR: Yes, when we moved down here, we had Mum's two brothers also came and joined Dad. One brother stayed for 12 months and then he left and went to Melbourne and the other brother they worked together for four years and my other uncle, he went and got another lot of land, next door and he worked that land on his own and Dad worked this land on his own.

OH: (12:54) What do you remember about the house that you moved into?

[laughter]

MR: Well, compared to the house that we had at Paradise, the house that we moved into was like almost like living in a tin shed. It was very, very small. It had three bedrooms but the bedrooms only had one bed in them and except for the main bedroom, that had a double bed and I think my sister, she used to sleep in the lounge and I had one bedroom and then there was a kitchen. The laundry was outside, the bathroom was outside in a little shanty, the toilet was out the back, there was no sewerage in those days. It was very hard but I think it was hard for everyone in that era.

OH: But a contrast obviously from what the family had been used to?

MR: From what we were used to at Paradise, it was a major contrast. I still remember still the day of the earthquake that we had in Adelaide and we were inside this little house and we had this kitchen sideboard and the cups were all rattling. And I can still remember Dad calling out: "Get outside, get outside. Everybody outside." That was because of the earthquake and the cups just rattled and the plates were scattering [laughs] all over the floor.

OH: (14:17) What were your parents growing at that time when you were here?

MR: When we moved here, our first crop, we had tomatoes and beans. We only had six glasshouses to start with, and tomatoes and beans and then we started growing celery and potatoes. So that was our main crop.

OH: The glasshouses that you first had, were they already on the land?

MR: They were on the land from the previous tenants that were on the land. Yes, when we first moved here, there were five glasshouses, we had, they were from the previous tenants.

OH: And the house would have been [for] the previous tenants?

MR: And the house was the previous tenants, as well.

OH: Who did you lease the land from?

MR: From the Britten-Jones. [consulting the aerial photo] They had a whole, a fairly large holding, all of this area basically from the river down to Grange Road, going back to, past Jarman Terrace, I think, even down past Gaskin Avenue. I think that was nearly all Britten-Jones, and they had the whole parcel of land from the river right down to Grange Road and they had it all done up in allotments and all leased out to different gardeners at the time.

OH: (15:33) In 1946, you were only leasing, weren't you?

MR: In 1946, we were only leasing then Dad acquired the land in 1953, he bought the land and it was 670 pound an acre, for nine acres which in those days, was fairly big money about at the same time, sometimes in hindsight, if Dad --- if we had have moved to West Beach, Dad could have bought with that 670 pound an acre, he could have bought six acres of land at West Beach. But in hindsight who was to know? West Beach was only sand and you couldn't grow anything but land, at the time, was only 100 dollars [pound] an acre at West Beach and we paid 670 dollars [pounds] an acre here.

OH: I was thinking it would have been a considerable amount of money?

MR: Yes, it was. In those days, it was, you know, like you're going back, 1953, it's quite a few years ago.

OH: Yeah.

OH: (16:41) When you first moved here at the age of seven, where did you go to school?

MR: I spent a year at Lockleys primary school and then after I went to Marist Brothers at Thebarton.

OH: And is that what the trip was to Henley Beach Road?

MR: Yes, to go to the school was the other side of Henley Beach Road at Lockleys and we you had to walk, and then when we went to Marist Brothers at Thebarton, we'd walk down to Henley Beach Road, catch a tram, get off at South Road to go to school and reverse and come back at night.

OH: So you know why your parents would have made the change for you to go to Marist Brothers?

MR: Oh, I think just being a Catholic, and they decided to send us to a Catholic school, I think that 's about the only reason.

OH: (17:32) Did your parents go to church?

MR: Mum was a very big church-goer. Dad, he was too busy in the garden. You know, I still remember working in the garden with him, and if it was Christmas day and it was 40 degrees, hot, he'd be out working, Christmas Day. If it was Easter time, Easter Sunday, if the crops needed to be watered, he'd be out watering his crops. So he couldn't afford to, it was the same with anybody with glasshouses, and you had a crop to pick that day, you had to work that day.

OH: (18:10) What about you, did you have a role in the garden?

MR: I had a good role in the garden, yes. [laughs] I remember many nights when we were growing celery and that, I'd be in the packing shed up till 10:00, 11:00, o'clock at night, helping pack celery, nail the boxes because all our celery, 95% of our celery all went interstate.

OH: Did your father have to take it down to Mile End?

MR: Ah, at the time we had to take it to Mile End, yeah, put it on the truck and take it to Mile End and put it on the railway carriages and if it went to Sydney it had to go into cold storage. So you'd go to cold storage at Mile End and three days later, they'd put it on a train and send it to Sydney. Mmmn.

OH: Your father had quite, or your parents had quite a lot of different varieties? So in the glasshouses, you would have had the tomatoes and beans?

MR: Tomatoes and beans.

OH: Outside, you had the celery and potatoes?

MR: Potatoes, right. Now celery, was nearly all sent over, we did sell a bit at the East End market, our tomatoes all went to the East End Market and our beans, and sometimes we'd grow a few other vegetables, I can't quite remember, peas, we'd have peas growing now and again, cauliflowers, water melons and that'd all go to the Adelaide East End market.

OH: (19:36) What about your Mum's role? Was she also in the garden?

MR: She was a big worker in the garden, she would work alongside Dad, day after day, hour after hour.

OH: And in the kitchen?

MR: And in the kitchen, as well. No, she was a magnificent worker. And then Dad had a couple of employees, this was later on in his life, of course, which were very good to us and they worked side by side with Dad for many, many years.

OH: (20:07) You would have gone to school with other Italian or Italo Australian boys at Marist Brothers?

MR: Well, I think at the time, Marist Brothers school was about 70% English, 30% Italian And maybe a few Greeks thrown in as well. [laughs]

OH: You told me before the interview that you had quite a role with your father assisting with the books.

MR: I did. I remember being eight or nine years of age and I always had to write cheques for Dad out and I had to go and do his banking for him because they could not read or write and he used to give the cheques, any cheque he'd get from interstate through the celery payments and I'd have to write the cheques, you know, get the cheques all bagged up and take them to the bank, and if I had to pay any accounts, I'd have to write the cheques out. So I became quite adaptable to writing out cheques and adding up.

OH: Where was the bank?

MR: The bank was at The East End market, the ANZ bank at the East End Market.

OH: Did you go with your Dad to market?

MR: Quite often, quite often.

OH: In the mornings?

MR: In the morning, we used to leave home and well, mainly, my uncle used to go to market, and not my Dad. In the morning, we would leave home at about half past three in the morning, with the horse and cart. Go to market, and [laughs] I definitely remember we were coming, you know, we'd get up to market, freezing cold and Uncle would take me into the Crown and Anchor hotel and he'd have a rum and coffee, and I'd have a cold glass of water or a glass of lemonade, the early hours of the morning, you know, the pub was there, it would open about 5:00 o'clock in the morning for the market gardeners in the East End market. And coming home from East End market, once, I think I was about 14 at the time, and we were coming home, and Uncle stopped at Mile End and he said go in and buy a flagon of beer. In those days, you could take a flagon and

get a flagon of beer filled up. Of course, I went into the hotel with a flagon to get a flagon of beer but they wouldn't serve me. [laughs] So I had to go back and tell my Uncle so he had to go and get it.

[laughter]

OH: And would you go to school after going to market with your Uncle?

MR: No, the only time I went to market with my uncle was mainly during the holidays. No, I didn't go to market on school days, it was only on holidays that we used to go to market and that was at Christmas time when your tomatoes were in full bloom and your root vegetables were in abundance in those days and your beans and peas. But no, it was only during the school holidays when I used to go to market with my Uncle.

OH: So when you were signing the cheques and doing that side of things, you didn't have to do it at market? You could do that...

MR: No, I did that all the time, that was always done at home, and I had to fill out the cheques and write them in the book and quite often I'd go to the bank and go on my own and at the time I would have been 12 or 14 at the time. And then, we had the house at Paradise, Dad had that rented out and I used to go out there once a month to pick up the rent after school. I used to catch a tram, go out to Paradise, catch a tram back and get home about 6:00 o'clock. [laughs]

OH: You must have been a very organised young boy?

MR: Oh, well, I think I was told, [laughs] told what to do. And I think, in those days, you did what you were told, you did what you were told and you didn't know no difference. If you were told to do something you did something and I think that brings the best out of the person. You know when you are basically forced to do something you learn all, everyday.

OH: Well, I think that's really true.

OH: (24:19) How long did you stay at school, Mel?

MR: I was at school until I was 16.

OH: What had you thought that you might do when you left school?

MR: Well. [laughs]

OH: You know, after school?

MR: After school? Well, of course, your parents don't want you to do what they're doing. They don't want you to work in the garden because it was hard work, and they want you to become an office clerk or something. They wanted you to work in an office where you had coat and a tie all day and you were nice and clean.⁵ I went to work, my first job in the city was working at Clarkson's, they were the glass people, they were doing supplies and all that, so I went there to work at Clarkson's.

OH: Where were Clarkson's?

MR: They used to be in Rundle Street, on the corner of Twin Street and Rundle Street at the time. And then they also opened another shop at the back of Hindmarsh Square when they opened a shop there. And they also had a warehouse down at Beverley and I worked there for two years and then I got drafted in the Army for National Service.

OH: (25:24) At the same time, would you have been helping out on the market gardens with your parents?

MR: No, at the time we were packing celery, I'd still be helping out, packing celery and doing menial tasks and on weekends, I'd still be out there, you know, hoeing a row of celery or

⁵ In the editing process, Mel stated that it was the dream of every market gardener parent for their children to become doctors or lawyers and not labourers like themselves

something. Yeah, you'd always be doing something.

OH: How many glasshouses did your parents get up to?

MR: Oh no, we only had five.

OH: Oh, all the time?

MR: No, only five.

OH: Oh okay.

MR: yeah, we didn't, once we had the five glasshouses, that was only as a side line that they used them. But then we started growing, we had nine acres here, and out of that nine acres, there were probably, about seven acres would have been arable because of the housing situation, the sheds and the water pump and the fowl house and the duck yard, and the ducks [laughs] we had ducks and chickens.

OH: Were they raised for eating?

MR: Mainly for eating, yes.

OH: And fruit trees and other things like that?

MR: We had fruit trees, yeah we had apricots, nectarines, peaches. Most of the food that we ate was virtually home-grown. And we had the grocer, Mum would put an order in for the grocer, virtually a week in advance, and the grocer would deliver the goods.

OH: And which grocer did you use?

MR: Crotti's, on the corner of Gray Street and Currie Street. Yeah, Crotti's they used to come down. And I remember --- Oh I was brought up on YoYo biscuits and Mum and Dad, they would buy a tin of YoYo biscuits every week.

OH: Like a big tin?

MR: Yes, the square tin, square tin of biscuits and I'd have biscuits with milk in the morning for breakfast. I remember when I married Marlene, I had two of her grandchildren out here, one was two and one was four, and I gave them YoYo biscuits and milk for breakfast one morning. And their mother told me off, she said: "You can't do that." I said: "Well, they loved it." And they still do love it.

[laughter]

OH: So you introduced them?

MR: I introduced them to YoYo biscuits and milk.

OH: A Recchi tradition?

[laughter]

MR: Oh.

OH: We were talking about your working life at Clarkson's before, and you were saying you worked in the city and also at Beverley?

MR: I worked at Beverly, yeah I worked at Beverly for about six months, and that was mainly in the building materials side, so gyproc, canite, laminex, and all, mainly building materials.

OH: (28:14) And at that time who would your friends have been and what would you have done for social life?

MR: Oh, at that time, we had a great social life. Like I said, when we moved here, we lived right opposite the Ballestrins, and one of my best friends was Egido Ballestrin and Mum's best friend was his mother, Maria Ballestrin. And you know, they just got together so well, they learned how to cook different dishes from different regions. And Egidio Ballestrin is still one of my best, best-ever mates. But then there's also others, there's Guido Rebuli, there's Bruno Piovesan, may he rest in peace. He was one of my best mates, I worked with him many, many

days and we spent many, many hours together, crabbing, fishing and we just had a ball. And then we just got, as got older, about the age of 17 or 18, the dances were in vogue and we all loved dancing and I think there were about 12 of us in the gang. I could probably, I could name them all: there'd be Egidio, Guido Rebuli, Bruno, Frankie Ballestrin, Johnny Marchioro, Tony Panuccio, Frank Condo --- Oh, of course there was myself and then a few others, the names just don't come to me at present. But we'd always go the dances, the Bay Town Hall, there was the Burnside Town Hall, the Railways Institute there on North Terrace, the Palais on North Terrace, opposite the hospital. We used go to these dances all the time, we'd go dancing at least two times a weeks and sometimes three times a week on a Sunday.

OH: Had you learned how to dance?

MR: Well...

OH: Formally?

MR: No, not formally, but --- I'd say I'm an average dancer but not the way they dance today. We used to do the Modern Waltz, the Foxtrot, the Tango and the Quickstep and all that sort of thing and the Barn Dance of course, because the Barn Dance was our favourite dance. If you couldn't get a dance, you'd always ask somebody up for the Barn Dance and then you'd change partners. [laughs]

OH: What would you wear when you went out?

MR: We always wore suits and tie, always in a suit and tie.

OH: Did you have a custom-made suit?

MR: Yeah, many of them. In my lifetime, I had three, I had one made for my first wedding and I had another two made after that which were custom-made. But nowadays, you buy a suit off the hook.

OH: As a younger person, you would have known, or your family, would have known tailors and Italian people?

MR: Yeah, my three suits I had made, I had them made by Amando Bami. He was a tailor up in Waymouth Street and I got very friendly with him and I think he made suits for nearly all of our mob which was very good.

OH: In those days, like you're talking 17, 18 and a bit older, did you have a car?

MR: Yes, well, I had a car which was Dad's car, a Humber Hawk, a vintage car. I started driving that at 17 and quite often, Dad wanted me to take it to school, I think I took it to school about three times because he didn't want to stake me to school, [laughs] it was raining or something. But that was before, just after I was 16, I got my licence because I was 16 and a half when I left school. But then I used to drive around in Dad's car and used to go to the dances in the car. And there'd be three or four cars, Bruno had a car. I had a car, Guido had a car, I think, Jimmy, Egidio Ballestrin he had a car, he had a Zephyr. So we'd all pile in say, three or four cars, and off we'd all go to the dance.

OH: Your parents weren't worried about you?

MR: Well, I think parents always get worried, you know, even me being a parent, I remember when my son would go out of a night time. He'd go out of a night-time and you'd go to bed but you would not sleep. And you'd hear him come in the drive, and before he walked in the door, you'd be asleep. You know, it's got to be on your mind all the time. But I think every parent was the same.

OH: What about your sister? Did she have as much freedom as you had?

MR: Probably not as much. My sister, she was married at 18 years of age. It wasn't any forced

marriage or anything like that. No, her reception, she had nearly 700 people at the Centennial Hall⁶ at her marriage. And when I got married, I think I had about 240.

OH: A small wedding?

MR: Well, I married an Australian girl and, you know, [laughs] there was a bit against the old Italian tradition at the time.⁷ But then I thank the first wife I married, I got two lovely children, a daughter, she's just gone nearly 52, she'll be 52 in August and the son will be 50 in October so they're at an age now where I've been.

OH: They certainly have. Back to your working life... How, what happened at Clarkson's? you didn't stay?

MR: No, well, I got called up in the Army, National Service. I was one of the first in the marble drops.

OH: What year would that have been?

MR: 1957, yeah 1957, I was in the army. That's when I was just over 19. I went in the Army in July and I was not quite 19 years of age. So I was only there for three months up at Woodside. Then we had to do three years of CMF⁸ training after that. But I tell you what, the Army life to me was excellent. It was a lot of discipline in there but I tell what, it made you are today.

OH: How did your parents feel about you doing that?

MR: Well, of course, they didn't like it very much being in the Army, they thought I would have had to go war or something like that. But it was only National Service at the time and everything was peaceful.

MR: (35:10) Then when I came out of the Army, that's when I joined Dad in the garden, and I worked alongside him for five years in the garden.

OH: And what was that like?

MR: That, actually was good work, it was --- it was working outside, it was long hours, it was early in the morning to sometimes late at night. But, you knew you were working for a reason, you knew whatever work you were putting in, that's what you were getting paid for.

OH: Did you have any other friends working in market gardens

MR: Oh yes, there were quite a few. There was Marchioro, Johnny Marchioro, he worked alongside his father ever since he left school. Bruno Piovesan, they had a block of land down where his home was on Frogmore and he was living with his mother at the time, he was looking after his mother and he used to grow a crop of potatoes every year. And Frankie Ballestrin, he was in the market garden from the time he left school, helping his father. And that's about all I know of my mates. Oh, Tony Panuccio, he was in the market garden for a little while. That's about all I know, oh, Robert Zerella, the Zerella boys, they became fairly big gardeners at the time.

OH: You talked about your Dad working very long hours, was there ever an issue about you being a young man wanting to go off and have your freedom?

MR: Oh, sometimes. But Dad was fairly flexible. If we got out early and did our work and finished our work at the time, you know, it wasn't too bad and of course, as Dad got on a bit later in life, he slowed down, well actually we didn't slow down, we leased more land.

OH: Where did you lease it?

MR: It was on Frogmore Road, oh sorry, on Valetta Road, alongside the West boys.

⁶ Centennial Hall was in the Adelaide Show grounds

⁷ In the editing process, Mel explained that the old tradition was that the son of the family was expected to stay in the family home to look after the parents but times have changed.

⁸ Citizen Military Forces – was the Reserve Army in Australia at the time. Conscription was introduced in 1951.

OH: On the eastern or the western side of the West's?
MR: No, it was on the western side of Findon Road.
OH: Yes, but I'm thinking of where the West's property is.
MR: No, we were on the eastern side of West's.
OH: Oh okay.
MR: You know, where Yick Kee and Ah Sam were.
OH: Okay.
MR: Yes, we leased that land there for a few years.
OH: Who did you lease it from? Would it have been the Keele's?
MR: I think it was the Keele's. Yes, Mrs Keele.
OH: How much land did you have there?
MR: That was about ten acres.
OH: So altogether, you had 19 acres?
MR: Nineteen acres, yes that's when we had two workers working with us full-time.⁹
OH: Oh. And what were you growing over there?
MR: Celery and potatoes, celery and potatoes and I think we used to grow a few watermelons up the top, mmmn.
OH: Did your land there go right to the river?
MR: It used to go right to the river and we used to get our water from the river. We had a bore but we also had a pump in the river, and we used to pump it out of the river. And in those days, the river in the summer months would be virtually completely dry and all we'd had was these waterholes and to keep the market gardeners going, they'd open the Kangaroo Creek dam and they let the river flow and fill up the waterholes and we used to have many, as young kids, probably eight, nine, ten years old, we used to have time and time down the river galore. And I remember being with Johnny Marchioro, we'd go down the river, and there'd be this hole and then we'd get buckets and we'd empty out the pool of water and get the fish in the bottom.
OH: [laughs] What sort of fish were they?
MR: They were only perch, yeah. They were only perch. We used to do that quite often. And we'd be there slaving for an hour just baling water [laughs] out of the hole.
OH: Very persistent?
MR: Oh, we were, we were.
OH: What was it like having two areas that you were working on? Like, one near your house and your home and the other, not so far away but...?
MR: No it wasn't too far, it was only about 200 yards away. We used to cut across Ballestrin's property there if we were walking over there, we'd just cut across the Ballestrin's property. There'd be a path and you'd walk across and it'd only take two minutes to get over there anyway.
OH: And what about equipment and stuff like that?
MR: Oh, in those days when tractors became available, you'd just drive them down the road and in those days you could just drive from one property to another without having a registered tractor or a registered trailer. But nowadays things have changed.
OH: how long did you have the land on Valetta Road, then?
MR: We had that probably six years.

⁹ Mel explained during the editing process that his parents had one full-time worker and a few men who worked part-time and who were mainly GMH shift workers.

OH: When would that have been between?

MR: Oh that would have been --- [Mel thinks aloud counting the years] About '57 to '62, '63.

OH: That's interesting.

MR: I was married in '61 and I left the garden in '64 and that's when we got out of that land there, in '64.

OH: And by that time, the housing developments would have been starting around that area, wouldn't they?

MR: Yes.

OH: And the school?

MR: Yes, Ballantyne's land, they sold their land while we were still working there. And that's when they built Associated Grocery store, they started building, and they just expanded and expanded and then they bought the land that we were leasing at the time. Then they bought Ballestrin's lane, they bought Keele's land, Mrs Keele's land, Daminato's, where Daminato's house was, they bought that as well. So they bought the whole section virtually from the river through to Valetta Road going back to West's property was. West's property became all housing. And the property that we were on, part of it became building for the Grocery chain¹⁰ [IGA] and part has been left as a reserve.

OH: When you and your father went on the, starting leasing that land, what was on that land in terms of buildings or structures?

MR: Not too much there was only two little shacks was where Yick Kee and Ah Sam used to live. Where Yick Kee was, there was like the average house on those days plus a shed. And Ah Sam's property was just basically a house, it was just a little tin, galvanised iron house.

OH: Do you know where they had gone?

MR: Don't know about Ah Sam, he would have been passed on now but I know that Yick Kee, they moved from here, they moved to Torrensville when he got out of his garden. They used to grow a lot of spinach and stuff and parsley and that sort of gear. They only had a small section of that land. They only had a front section, they would have only grown on about a care of land. And the other nine acres was just left as fallow, it hadn't been worked for years.

OH: Were they older men by the time they had left?

MR: Yes, Yick Kee was. I remember Yick Kee, I know that Ah Sam when I first met him, he would have been in his 70s or 80s there and that's going back in the '50s. He would have been 70 or 80 at that time. The same as Hop Sing, I know Hop Sing was still going to market, he was in his 90s and still driving to market.

OH: And in our next interview, we'll talk more about the people, the other market gardens in this area because you have great knowledge of those and I'd really like to be able to ask you about that.

MR: Yes, that will be fine.

OH: (43:41) I was going to finish off this interview by asking about whether you've ever been Italy?

MR: Only once and that was only last year. Yes, I only went to Italy last year. We went over there, we went on a boat cruise, a Mediterranean boat cruise. We got off at Venice and arrived at Venice, hopped on a boat and did a few ports around Greece, Croatia, Turkey and did a few ports in Italy, Naples, Rome. Where else did we go? Venice, of course --- What's the other one?

Genova? Then, did Monte Carlo, France and then came back home. So my only trip around Italy,

¹⁰ Independent Grocers of Australia

I've done a few a few of the capital cities, and that's all, a few tours around the cities. I still remember Dad, he went back to Italy, I think it was about 45 years after he was out here, I remember it was 45, and I remember him going over there, and when he came back, I said: "Well, Dad, what did you think of Italy?" And he said to me in Italian: "Son, don't bother going over there. What they were doing 45 years ago, they're still doing it today. If they want water, you go back to the river with a bucket." Of course, that's where they come from in these small villages, and he said they're still doing the same today as what they did 45 years ago. He said: "We live in a country of gold."

OH: Isn't that interesting. Did your mother go with him?

MR: Yes. Oh my word.

OH: What did your mother think?

MR: Well, she went to her hometown. When my mother was alive, she could tell you many, many stories. Like they had a school in their own building but she could not go to school. And she regrets that her mother and father did not send her to school. For what Mum knew and for what she did, she would have been magic if she'd going to school.

OH: And obviously would have relished that education?

MR: Mmnn ... she would have relished education. She was, you know, even to her last dying day, she was still cross with her mother for not sending her to school.

OH: When did your parents die?

MR: Dad died in '91 and Mum died in 2002.

OH: So they both had quite long lives?

MR: Yeah, Dad was 89 and Mum was just on her 90th. Yeah.

OH: Did your father ever tell you why he came to Australia?

MR: Well, he came to Australia because his father died when Dad was only very young and there was Dad, a sister and two other brothers and the mother which was my grandmother, she passed on at the age of 98 so she was quite ... but Dad always told me that when he was over there, they used to work because he was a share farmer and they'd be on this property and all they could virtually get out of the farm, was the food to eat. And Dad had no money at the time and his brother had married his, his brother had got married and his Dad's sister-in-law, like his brother's wife, said: "Jack", well, they used to call him Jack. But over, she said: "Giovanni, this is no life for you." And she gave him 100 pound and the equivalent of 100 pound in money for him to get to Adelaide. When he died I went through a lot of his papers and he had these promissory notes and he paid off that 100 pounds in nine months.

OH: Wow, what a committed worker?

MR: He was, of course, when you consider, he was only earning about a pound a week, and he paid that 100 pound off in nine months. But he would have lived on virtually nothing and then when he arrived here, he only had a suitcase with one pair of pants, two shirts, couple of underpants and probably two pair of socks and one pair of boots.

OH: A really hard way to start life again?

MR: It would have been, you come in to a country where you know nobody and you didn't know the language but everybody said that I know my uncle came out here probably five years earlier and he probably wrote back and said this is the land of opportunity and that's when people started coming up here. Of course, life over in Italy in those villages was next to nothing. Probably in those days, it was almost a third world country.

OH: And the poverty that was obviously that forced away?

MR: It did, it forced people to come out and find a new life, you know, find a new life.
OH: Well, Mel, I think that's a good place to complete this first interview. So thank you very much.
MR: Thank you Madeleine.
OH: Thank you for contributing. And I look forward to interviewing you again.
MR: Okay, you'll have to get a few more questions ready.
OH: I will.
[laughter]
MR: Okay.
OH: Thank you.

Interview No: 2 recorded on 31 July 2014

During the interview, Mel and Madeleine consult an aerial photo and map of the area.

OH: This is an interview recorded with Mel Recchi for the Italian market gardeners oral history project. I'm Madeleine Regan and I'm interviewing Mel on 31st July 2014 in his home at Flinders Park. South Australia. Thanks very much, Mel, for the second interview.

MR: You're welcome, Madeleine.

OH: And we're going to just start with a little overview of your family moving to this area. What year did you move here?

MR: Yeah, Mum and Dad, we moved here in 1946. We moved from Paradise to Lockleys which it was called in those days. But which is now Flinders Park and that was in 1946, in the February of 1946, and in those days, it was called River Road, Lockleys, and not Findon Road, Flinders Park.

OH: How old were you and your sister?

MR: My sister and I, we were both twins, we were just over seven years of age. We were born in 1938, so we would have just been on seven years of age.

OH: Can you remind me how many acres your parents had?

MR: Well, I know that Dad had nine acres of land which was leased from Britten-Jones and they worked together, Dad, he worked together with his brother-in-law, Donato De Ionno and Dominic De Ionno. And they worked the land together for a short time but Dominic De Ionno, he left after 12 months and Donato, he left after about three years and it was left to Dad.

OH: What was he growing?

MR: The main crop was celery. But in the early days, we had five glasshouses and we used to grow legumes, beans, beans and peas but then we concentrated mainly on celery.

OH: Right. Your memories of what the land looked like when you came here?

MR: Well, the gardening land was all tilled so that was fairly clean but then there were a lot of paddocks from around the area, and if we wanted transport, we had to walk to Henley Beach Road and the area up there was a lot of boxthorn bushes and thistle bushes, fennel bushes, quite a few fennel bushes everywhere. But things have changed but in those days you'd be lucky to pass two cars when you were walking down to Henley Beach Road. But now [laughs] you have hundreds of cars go past you if you have to walk that distance.

OH: Around where your parents were, on the eastern side of Findon Road, what would it have looked like in 1946?

MR: Well, in 1946, we had a whole row of pine trees and gum trees along Findon Road itself and on our boundary, on the eastern side of Dad's property, it was all bamboos. There was a whole row of bamboos, the whole length of the property going down to what is called Hartley Road or there used to be a channel down there, a water channel. There used to...

OH: Can you say a little bit more about the water channel?

MR: Well, the water channel was on the end of Hartley Road and it used to run, turn, used to come down Hartley Road, turn at right angles, turn at right angles to the right, then right angles to the left and stopped at Findon Road. And it was just an open culvert, just an open channel.

OH: Where was its source?

MR: Well, from Hartley Road, most of the rain. Most of the water that came down Hartley Road was sourced into that channel. The houses, there were very few houses in those days. Most of them were market gardens and any rain that came down was virtually just seeped into the vacant land. But there was very little run-off so anywhere there was a road, there used to be a certain amount of run-off and a lot of that water did come down Hartley Road.

OH: Was that concreted?

MR: No just open, just dirt, just dirt and quite often, it had quite a few fennel bushes in there.¹¹

OH: And did any of the market gardeners use it for watering?

MR: No, no. A lot of our watering, if you were lucky enough to be on river frontage, we could get water off the river, you know, we had water, there were quite few pumps on most gardens. Most of the gardeners had pumps situated on the river Torrens and if the Torrens ran low, they would apply to the Government and the Government would open up the weir and let the water flow down and fill up the waterholes where the pumps were.

OH: And if people weren't on the river frontage, how did they water?

MR: They, most of them had bore water. Yeah, there were bores, bores were quite easy to find around the area. There was, you'd probably get water, I think the water table is only down about 15 or 20 feet until you struck water. But you might put a pump down, might go down to 40, 50 feet, maybe 60 feet, at the most.

OH: Did your father have a bore?

MR: We had a bore, as well. Yes.

OH: Was it there when you came?

MR: It was there when we came, yes, the bore was here when we came. And the pump was virtually, approximately 20 feet underground so we dug down, well when they put it down, they would have dug down and shored it up with timber and the pump was about 20 feet below ground level with a pipe going in another 25, 30 feet to get to the water, to get to the water basin.

OH: And that was pretty common in this area?

MR: That was very common, that was very, very common.

OH: When you arrived here, can you just remind me about where you lived. What was your accommodation?

MR: When we left Paradise, I can recall that, Dad had this house built when his first ten years that he was here and it was a solid brick home of three bedrooms and then [laughs] we moved from there, we came to Flinders Park or where we talking from now and it was only galvanised

¹¹ Mel explained in the editing process that the channel would have been covered in after the land was sold and sub-divided about 1967/1968.

house, fairly rambly but they still managed to live there and do everything they needed.

OH: How long was it that you lived in that house?

MR: In that house, we lived there for a total years before Dad a new home in --- the mid '50s, about '53, I think he built the new home.

OH: Where was the new home located?

MR: The new home was located about 200 metres north of the old home. [laughs] So it was located on the property.

OH: How far from Findon Road?

MR: It was on Findon Road, it was almost, the house that Dad that built, was almost opposite Valetta Road, as you're coming in from down Valetta Road towards Findon Road, it's a house on the right hand side. And that was Dad's house that he built back in the early '50s.

OH: What strikes me about that house is the beautiful brickwork.

MR: It is, it's made out of textured bricks, which were only two-inch bricks, not the four-inch bricks out on the whole frontage. Then another thing about it, when they put the terrazzo out on the verandah, Dad decided to put a plane in it. So he [laughs] they put an emblem of a plane in the verandah with six motors on it.

OH: Why did he do that?

MR: Oh, just for something different to do.

OH: So who would have done the terrazzo?

MR: Ah, the terrazzo was done by a chap, Fantasia, Biagi Fantasia. He was a concrete worker at the time and he did the terrazzo.

OH: So the design of including the plane with the six engines...

MR: Yeah, six engines, it's still in the terrazzo, still there today. [laughs]

OH: That's wonderful.

MR: Yeah.

OH: Well, thank you for giving that sort of context, Mel.

OH: (08:29) We've got a map in front of us. It's an aerial map which was provided by the City of Charles Sturt, and it was taken in 1949 and we're going to use that to talk about the market gardens in that area. And we've identified where some of them lived. But I'm thinking if we started at the River Torrens, Keele bridge and we look north along Findon Road, I wonder if you could tell me first about the land that you see there. Who was the first person [from Mel's memory] living on the northern side?

MR: Well, the first person living on the northern side was Hop Sing. And I still remember to this day that at 92 years of age, he was still driving his truck to the market. He had this little truck for driving to the market and his main produce was mainly spinach, spinach and parsley and that's mostly what he had and then he'd have a few spring onions or something but he'd always drive off to market. I believe his son is here now.

OH: Still living in the area?

MR: Still living in the area, yes.

OH: Would Hop Sing have been born in Australia?

MR: I don't know, I don't think so. No, I'm sure he would have been born in China.

OH: Right. How big would his land have been?

MR: Eh, well, I'm sure his land would have only been five or six acres at the most but when they've done the River Torrens scheme with the walkways and that, they took quite a bit of his land away from him and I think his son has been left with about two or three acres, I'm not exactly

sure. But that's what it would have been but he would have lost a lot of land on the River Torrens side when they did the River Torrens scheme.

OH: Would people have mixed with Hop Sing and the family? Or you know, how were they considered in the community?

MR: Oh, they were considered very friendly --- but then again, Chinese food [laughs] didn't suit the Italian food and I don't think the Italian food suited the Chinese food. But no, they were always very friendly and always very, very polite. That was one, Hop Sing but there were other Chinese in the area, as well.

OH: Then if we move forward a bit, what can you tell me about the next land?

MR: Well, the next one, there was a house there, I'm not sure who that belonged to, well I think it still belonged to Britten-Jones, but I know that it was leased out to a family called Rositano's that I can remember. But now they came from northern Italy and they moved, there was a house right along Hop Sing's property and that's where they moved in.

OH: Were they market gardeners?

MR: No, no. They just lived there and I think the father worked at Holden's, I'm not sure.

OH: Just going back to Hop Sing, for a minute... Did they own that land?

MR: No, I think most of that land was all leased from Britten-Jones, and that was at that time and I think that Britten-Jones, they sold it, they mainly sub-divided it all and had it sold roughly in the early '50s sometime. I'm not exactly sure of the dates but sometime in the early '50s is when most of that land was sold and purchased by different people.

OH: What did you know about the Britten-Jones?

MR: Not a great deal. Britten-Jones, you know they were fairly private in their own work but all I know is that the house was a fairly well established house and it was well off the main road and they used to do a lot of --- they had paddocks there suitable for horses and I suppose in those days, horses were quite common, and there was a driveway with massive gum trees that left Findon Road right up to the homestead.

OH: And it's possible to see that on the map?

MR: And it's possible to see that there. Yeah, there was a big, big road and a roadway right in, and they were massive gum trees. And we had...

OH: Mel, just one...

MR: Go on, yes.

OH: Little thing about the Britten-Jones. I think you told me that you understood that they owned land basically from the river up to Grange Road?

MR: I believe that originally that Britten-Jones owned land from the river right through to Findon Road, right through to Grange Road. But I'm not sure how exactly far they went East.

OH: Right.

MR: But probably that would probably be the line marking there. [indicating a line on the aerial photo]

OH: Right. Yeah. So, sorry I interrupted you, you were going to say about your family's land?

MR: Yeah, well we had nine acres, Dad had nine acres and that was part Section of 411 and there was opposite Valetta Road where the house is now and we had probably a couple of hundred metres to the left and a couple of hundred metres to the right.

OH: What else was on the land apart from, when you first went there in '46, the house?

MR: There was a house and then there was an old shed, an old packing shed which was something like a lean-to, basically. We had five glasshouses, that was all that was there. And other

than that, it was all vacant land.

OH: And when we look at this aerial photo, you can see a house.

MR: Yes.

OH: And that looks like the packing shed, maybe?

MR: Yeah, not sure, when was this aerial photo taken?

OH: '49.

MR: '49, no, see that would have been the old house. That would have probably been the chicken house, the old house and the packing shed. And then there were pine trees, and there were a few gum trees there.

OH: Who were your neighbours if you went East of your land?

MR: Well, I can only remember the Monteleone's, they were in the property next to us.

OH: And you were telling me about the Monteleone's house?

MR: Well, the Monteleone's house that was partly built on the edge of, they had a big shed there, like a packing shed and their house was virtually built on the side of the packing shed. It was only made out of galvanised iron and that's where they used to live. I'm not sure if it was under the same roof as the packing shed or whether it was a separate roof. But I know it was part of the packing shed which was that one.

OH: And you told me that you used to walk past that house?

MR: Yes, well, my Uncle Dom, Mum's brother, they had a property further to the East and we used to cut across and walk past Monteleone's going to my Uncle's place.

OH: And did your Uncle have, like, there's a very large strip of land?

MR: Yes, he had all that land there and that was his house here.

OH: Right.

MR: And then this is the Ballestrin's household there.

OH: So those two strips of land go from the river to what we'd call Hartley Road.

MR: Hartley Road. They go right from the river right through to Hartley Road. Most of the properties in those days, were all virtually from Hartley Road straight back to the river. And they were all virtually owned by the one family. I know we had the Jarman's, we had the Gaskin's, we had the Richardson's. They all had properties going right down Hartley Road.

OH: Would they all have had a combination of open land and glasshouses?

MR: Most of them were all market gardeners. Some had glasshouses, some concentrated on potatoes, some concentrated on celery and a lot of them, you know, they just grew whatever they could.

OH: What about your uncle, what did he grow?

MR: Yeah, he mainly had celery and potatoes, same as, but mainly that are became a very big celery growing area, and the celery growing area in those days, was probably five per cent might have been sold in Adelaide, the other 95% was all sold, sent interstate. Melbourne and Sydney were the biggest buyers for celery because they didn't grow celery in Melbourne, they didn't grow celery in Sydney so we sent it from Adelaide to Sydney and Melbourne.

OH: Why do you think that this area north of the river was such a good area for celery?

MR: Oh, it was such a good area because going back many, many years ago, I hadn't seen it, but the line on the soil on that side as it came down the Torrens, when the Torrens flooded, it was all flood zones and just built up with the soil and silt and just became very productive soil because originally the River Torrens didn't go anywhere, just went out to a breakout creek which used to run down to Port Adelaide until they opened it up and took it out to West Beach but before that, it

was only just a very small minute creek and it used to flood quite often, I believe. I'm not exactly sure how many times it did flood but most of this soil here is very rich.

OH: With the celery, what was the season of growing?

MR: Oh, the season of growing? You used to plant your seed, probably round about October and November. And you'd probably plant December, you'd be planting November, December and your first crop would come off and you'd go from March until September.

OH: A long season?

MR: Yeah, about a nine-month season, a nine-month season for celery. By the time you put your seedlings, you plant your seedbeds, till you get your seedlings up, plant your seedlings and until you crop them, it's about nine months.

OH: Did your father produce his own seed?

MR: Yes, we produced our own seed, yes.

OH: Why would that have been?

MR: Oh, well, if you had a good stick of celery, you thought that was nice and strong, so you let it go to seed and that's where you got your seed from. And that's where we got our seed from but I think the varieties nowadays are certainly different from what it used to be. Eh, celery in our day, had to be bleached and I think they still bleach it nowadays; they board it up or cover it in so it bleaches. But then you get --- stringless and well in our day, I don't think stringless was invented in our day. But you do get stringless celery now.

OH: Mmnn.

MR: And then you had the potatoes and we used to grow potatoes as a sideline which was sometimes quite lucrative.

OH: Did you grow particular varieties of potatoes?

MR: Oh, no, well, back in those days most of them, I think, were probably --- Sebago's or Kennebec's. You know, that's what we mainly used to grow.

OH: And did you grow them from the eye?

MR: From the eye, yes. You'd get them and get the seed and cut them into four or five pieces, get the eyes [laughs] and then plant them one by one.

OH: A lot of work?

MR: There was a lot of work in everything. There was a lot of work, yes.

OH: If we go back to the land and we've covered of these blocks that we can see on the map.

MR: Mmnn.

OH: (20:05) If we come to what we now know as Hartley Road?

MR: Yeah.

OH: Who's north of Hartley Road?

MR: [coughs] Well, north of Hartley Road, there were, I can remember the Ballestrin's. Isidoro Ballestrin, he was there before we came down here and quite often, there on a Sunday all the Ballestrin's were there because the Ballestrin's were quite a big family as far as brothers and nephews and aunties and so on, and they always used together on a Sunday morning and have glass of wine and a chit chat. And quite often there as children we'd go over there and the men would be talking about the gardens and the boys and girls, they'd be running around having a bit of a play.

OH: Where were the women?

MR: Oh, the women, they'd be home cooking, getting ready for dinner.

[laughter]

MR: No, oh that was good, that was the Ballestrin's.

OH: What do you remember the Ballestrin's grew?

MR: Ballestrin's mainly had tomatoes, they mainly had glasshouses, that's what their main interest was mainly glasshouses. And then there were Ballestrin's opposite us on Valetta Road and he also moved to the northern side of Hartley Road in the later years, I think it was late or mid '50s, I think they moved down there. And he also had a property just abutting the Flinders Park football club.

OH: And we can see what looks like to be the oval there.

MR: Oval, yes.

OH: Already in 1949?

MR: Yes.

OH: On the northern side of that oval and that road there.

MR: Yeah.

OH: We see quite a few houses adjacent to Findon Road?

MR: Yes, they are.

OH: Behind here, some open land and then on the northern side of Drake Avenue?

MR: Yeah, now on the northern side of Drake Avenue, I'm quite sure that was the Zerella's, I'm quite sure that they had land there but I'm not sure on the southern side, who had that land.

Whether that may have been Zerella's at that time, I'm not exactly sure. But then there, I know the houses were built there but then there were a lot of Housing Trust homes that were built that was back in the ... oh, just after the War, I think, that quite a few Housing Trust homes.

OH: It's interesting, isn't it because you can see them just south of Grange Road there.

MR: Grange Road, yeah.

OH: Like quite a concentration?

MR: Yes, there was quite a big concentration. I think these were nearly all Housing Trust homes in there.

OH: And the Catholic church on Captain Cook...?

MR: The Catholic church on Captain Cook Avenue down here.

OH: Did your parents go to church there?

MR: That's where Mum and Dad always used to go to church there.

OH: Did you walk there?

MR: Yes.

OH: Did you walk along...?

MR: Well, it was only a 20 minute...

OH: Yeah?

MR: 20 minute walk.

OH: How would you have walked from your place?

MR: Yeah, we'd usually go down here to Drake Avenue. Yeah, we used to walk across Drake Avenue and get across there.

OH: If you were waking there, what would you have seen?

MR: [laughs] Well, I can't remember much about seeing too much. Oh, you'd just see a few houses. But, it's amazing in those days, doesn't matter where you walked you always seemed to know somebody. And you know, you knew -- in the 1946 when we moved down here, you could have just about named every person that lived on Findon Road. But in those days, you could, because everybody knew everybody. It was the same as almost like living in a country town

where you know everybody.

OH: Would your father have experienced sharing equipment and things like that with other market gardeners in the area?

MR: Oh, yes, quite often if you wanted special equipment that you didn't have, you'd go and see another framer or another gardener that had that equipment and would willingly let you have a loan of it. But, most times, most of the farmers, most of the gardeners had their own equipment. There wouldn't have been too many people that didn't have their own equipment.

OH: (24:29) You talked about horses before. Did your parents have animals?

MR: Yeah, we had two draft horses. Originally that's when we first come down, we had two draft horses but then tractors became in vogue so then we got rid of draft horses.

OH: A cow?

MR: We had two cows. [laughs] And we had to get up in the morning and go and milk them. Yeah, two cows originally and quite often they'd be tethered on River Road which is Findon Road. They'd be tethered on the side of the road to keep the grass down. [laughs]

OH: Was the milk used productively in your household?

MR: The milk was used to make cheese and butter and well, that's the only milk we used to drink. It wasn't pasteurised, it was in your eyes.

[laughter]

OH: If we go back to the other side of Findon Road...?

MR: Right.

OH: To the western side and we're down at the river.

MR: Yes.

OH: What can you tell me about the people there that you knew?

MR: Well you've got, the first one I remember is Ballantyne, there was Rae Ballantyne, he's about a bit older than what I am, then his sister Margaret.¹² Down from them, there was a place called Daminato's. But at the back of Daminato's, there was also another Chinaman but I just cannot think of what his name was. But he used to live at the rear of Daminato's and he had a few glasshouses.

OH: And that looks like it could be those ones there?

MR: Yeah, that's right. Because Daminato's, they didn't have any land at all. [coughs] pardon me. They just lived in the house.

OH: Right.

MR: But there was a Chinaman lived at the back of their property and he used to have glasshouses. And then you had the Keele, Miss Keele and she had a very big homestead covered in a lot of trees and they had a big barn along the side of the homestead with a loft and I presume that was their stables and that and where they stored the hay and fodder for their horses.

OH: And when you say it was a big house, like a...?

MR: Oh, it was a massive house.

OH: Two-storey?

MR: Oh, no I don't think it was two-storey but I know the barn was, the barn was two-storey but whether the house was two-storey, I can't really recall. I know it was a big house and they had a big willow tree out the front, you could stand under it and you wouldn't be seen. And...

OH: Was that a family?

MR: No, well, I can only ever remember her being there on her own. Only as Miss Keele, they

¹² Rae Ballantyne's sister was Barbara

used to call her. And I can't really say that I remember any other [laughs] person being there. But she was very friendly, you know you'd go there, you'd walk past and she'd always say hello.

OH: And was she an older person?

MR: Oh, yes, she was much older, Yes, she would have probably been oh, I think when we came down here, I think she would have been probably 70 years of age when I first moved here.

OH: Older than your parents? A generation?

MR: Oh she would have been much older. She would have been a generation older than Mum and Dad, yes.

OH: (27:32) so we're going north?

MR: So we're going north, past Keele's place and on the corner of Findon Rod and Valetta Road. The Ballestrin's, Narcisio Ballestrin was there and he was married to Maria Ballestrin. He came out and four years later, his wife and son came out. We became very, very close to them because they were our closest neighbours.

OH: What sort of occasions did the two families get together for?

MR: Well, not very often but well, you always used to talk to one another. But then again they had their family and we had our family. You know --- if there was a party going, they would always be the first ones you'd invite. If they had they party going, you'd be the first ones they would invite. Like we were very friendly but we never seemed to get into each other's homesteads sort of thing. But if you wanted something, you'd only have to ask them and they'd come and help and vice versa. If they wanted something they'd come and ask them and Dad would help them. But we became very, very close friends with them.

OH: Were you and Jimmy the same age?

MR: Oh, I'm about nine months older than Jimmy but he would be one of my best ever mates. He was best man at my wedding and I was best man at his wedding. No, we've known each other since 1946, he was a year younger than what I was or nine months younger. He came out here as a four year old from Italy so he was born in Italy and he came out here as a four year old. But we've been friends ever since, and we still are.

OH: That's lovely. Shall we go further north?

MR: Further north?

OH: Along Findon?

MR: Further north and we were down here. The land on the northern side of Grange Road, Valetta Road, sorry, heading towards Grange Road, the land there was owned by Mr Keele and he had a son, David Keele and I know he had a daughter but I can't quite remember the daughter's name. But David Keele was a very loyal person, I know when Dad passed away, he came to Dad's funeral. And I still remember Keele's place, he had a vacant block next door and which had a model train and the model train was on the southern side of the house and we used to go down there and hop on his model train and he'd ride us around this track on this vacant block.

OH: How big was the train?

MR: Oh, the train would only have to be what? Two feet off the ground. It was on a train track, it had its own train track and he went choofing around and you'd be sitting on little chairs on the back.

OH: Was he okay about kids coming?

MR: Oh, he loved kids going over there. He loved the kids going over there on his train. And that was his passion, he loved his model train.

OH: Did he have land that he grew stuff on?

MR: [coughs] Pardon me. Oh, he didn't grow any stuff on. The land he had, that was all he leased out. He leased his land out and that's where he got his income from. And he was the first house that I ever knew that had a swimming pool.

OH: Was the swimming pool as available to people as the train?

MR: Yes, well, it wasn't an Olympic size pool, of course. But no, quite often on a hot day, we were allowed to go in there and have a dip in the pool.

OH: That's interesting.

MR: Yes, we did quite often. Of course the Keele's and Dad got on very, very well together. An on the corner of Valetta Road and Findon Road, that was mainly an almond orchard. There was all almonds in there originally when we moved in there in 1946.

OH: Then...

MR: Then, past Keele's and you go past Keele's and I know there was a chap in there by the name of Sbrissa and he had what they called a *bocce*¹³ green, they used to play *bocce* there on a weekend. [coughs] Pardon me. And then past Sbrissa's, there was an easement, just past Sbrissa's that used to take you further inland or further [laughs] or further --- west and we used to go into what they used to call the Tonellato's and the Piovesan's [coughs]

OH: Can we stop and you get a glass of water?

MR: I think I might have to.

OH: We're resuming the interview and we've both had a glass of water and Mel, you were talking about that easement going in off Findon Road?

MR: Off Findon Road. There was an easement going off Findon Road, next door to the Tilley's property.

OH: What was on the Tilley's property?

MR: Eh, he used to grow a few vegetables himself, he was a bit of a market gardener. I'm not exactly sure what he grew. On that easement, we used to go down that easement and heading in quite a way, it was only like a one-way track, so to speak and we came across the Piovesan and the Tonellato clan. And on the right hand side, I remember distinctly they used to have this railway carriage and that was used as accommodation. But then around the house, it was like a bike track. We used to go down on our pushbikes and race around this, race around [laughs] the house. It was all dirt and rubble sort of thing but we spent many and many a time racing around there on our pushbikes.

OH: Who would have been in the group?

MR: Oh in the group, there would have been myself, Bruno Piovesan, Egidio Ballestrin, Frankie Ballestrin, Johnny Marchioro, Guido Rebuli used to come down there occasionally but not very often. But mainly the five or six of us and we'd be there hurtling round on our pushbikes, having races. --- Oh, they were good memories, good days. And as we go, if you go further north, you come to the Adami's. The Adami's have been in the area for quite a while. They weren't market gardeners, they were more --- wheelers and dealers.¹⁴

And then you had, the, there was the trotting people. You've got Mrs Bush there, I can't remember Mrs Bush but there used to be a Robinson. I know there were Robinson's down near the corner of Grange Road and Findon Road.

¹³ *Bocce* is the Italian form of lawn bowls

¹⁴ Mel explained in the editing process that old Mr Adami whose name was Domenico had a truck and his main income was transporting fruit and vegetable to Broken Hill twice a week

OH: Like on this...?

MR: On that side, yes.

OH: South-western?

MR: They used to be the Robinson's.

OH: Okay, and what did you know about the Robinson's?

MR: They mainly had trotting horses.

OH: Oh, okay, so maybe the Mrs Bush is wrong.

MR: Well, I'm not sure, I can't remember Mrs Bush.

OH: Right.

MR: See, that now looks like a trotting track there.

OH: Yeah, it's really well formed.

MR: And that's where the Robinson's were.

OH: What about north of Grange Road?

MR: Yeah, north of Grange Road, well, there used to be a chicken farm on the corner of Grange Road and [coughs] Findon Road. Sorry about the coughing.

OH: That's alright.

MR: But one thing I do remember about the northern side of Grange Road, they used to have motor bike races down there down in the pug-hole down behind the what's called the Oberdan Centre, I think it's called something else now.

OH: So that would be further north?

MR: Yeah, further north, there used to be a big pug-hole down there and they used to have motorbike racing. You know scrambles and side-cars and normal motorbike and they were big days.

OH: Did you go there?

MR: We used to go there quite often on a Saturday, yes. [coughs] Excuse me.

OH: Would you like to stop again?

MR: Yes, I think we might have to.

OH: We're resuming the interview and Mel, you were talking about the Cole chicken place on the northern side of Grange Road.

MR: Well, I'm not sure if it was called Cole chicken place in those days but all I knew was it was a chicken place and you know they used to grow chickens there, and quite often we'd go down there and you'd get the stragglers and that, and you'd virtually get them for next to nothing and Mum wouldn't be too proud to cook them.

[laughter]

MR: But when she wanted any layers or any pullets, we used to go to the Why Worry hatchery which was opposite the corner of Trimmer Parade, I think it was on the corner of Fife Street and Findon Road, there was a hatchery there called the 'Why Worry' hatchery and we'd always go there to buy our chickens and --- that's where our chickens came from.

MR: You were also telling me about the blacksmith who was on Findon Road closer to the city?

MR: Yes, he was on Findon Road on the corner of Findon Road and Crittenden Road, used to be Fewings Foundry. They were local blacksmiths, if you wanted any work done on your ploughs or anything like that. In those days, it was only horse-power and they used to do the work on it for you. And then, but there were quite a few people that we used to know down there. There was the Carbone's, they used to be on the corner of Findon Road and Grange Road on the north eastern

corner. And they were in the area for many, many years.

OH: They would have been here, say when this map...?

OH: So they would have been there say when this map

MR: Yeah, they would have been there at the same time as we came down. Yeah

OH: Right, yeah. If we're going down along Grange Road between Findon and Frogmore Road on the southern side, who did you know along there?

MR: Well, I knew Tony Ballestrin, he was there, and he was related to the Ballestrin boys and Zalunardo, I remember him, he was related to Mrs Ballestrin, Maria Ballestrin's, I think he was an uncle to Maria Ballestrin, I'm not quite exactly sure but I think so. But then I don't too much after. But further down Grange Road, well, that's where Rebuli had their shop but that would have been probably in the late --- '50s. Late '50s, they had a delicatessen on Grange Road.

[sound of phone ringing and Mel says he will not answer it]

OH: Yeah, we won't worry about the phone?

MR: No.

OH: We're on Frogmore Road going south.

MR: Yeah, on Frogmore Road, going south, then I remember Laio's they were opposite the Piovesan's in those days. But I'm not sure what Laio done but then there was also the Tonellato's. There was Lui Tonellato, he was there, he was there almost opposite Bruno Piovesan's place, Piovesan household anyway. And ---

OH: So not too many along Frogmore Road that you remember?

MR: No, I don't know, Delicate, I can remember the name. I know back here, behind Griguol's place, originally there used to be a Zerella, there used to be a Zerella next door to Griguol, on Valetta Road but behind there, there used to be another easement, I think alongside Griguol, there used to be an Esposito that used to live at the back of Griguol's.

OH: Right, and Griguol, can you remember what they were doing on the land there?

MR: Ah, he mainly had chickens, he had a few, he had a chicken farm as well. He'd grow his chickens and sell his eggs.

OH: And then your sister, Aida married a man who had land? This is probably what? Well, in to the '50s?

MR: Ah, that was well in the '50s. Well, my sister got married in 1956, she got married, she married in '56 and my sister's husband, Amadio Valentini, he bought land off Keele, I think they leased it to start with, they leased some land off Keele together with his brother-in-law, Vincenzo Recchi which was Dad's nephew and he was, Vincenzo's wife was Amadio Valentini's sibling, they were brother and sister. And they bought some land together and they worked the land there on Valetta Road. That was virtually on the corner of Valetta Road going back --- oh maybe a couple of hundred yards. And alongside them were the Mercuri's,¹⁵ Pellegrino Mercurio, he had three sons and two daughters and then there was George Mercurio, and he had three daughters and they were in there alongside of Amadio Valentini.

OH: And that would have been in the '50s?

MR: That would have been just after the War, early '50s, that would have been, yes.

OH: And on the other side, on the southern side of Valetta Road, if we were at the corner, you've talked about the Ballestrin family?

MR: Ballestrin's on the corner of Valetta Road, yes.

¹⁵ Two Mercurio families had market gardens

OH: Then, if we were going west?

MR: 05:43

MR: Yeah, well, then the next probably west was Yick Kee and Ah Sam. They had a few, only smallish acres, they only had a few glasshouses which was leased off the Miss Keele. And Dad, back in the '50s, maybe late-ish '50s, he also leased that land from West and the Keele's and Yick Kee and Ah Sam, they moved out.

OH: What do you remember about Yick Kee and Ah Sam?

MR: Oh, they were great people, they were lovely friendly people. Yick Kee, I remember him, he brought his wife out with his family. He had two sons, one was called Allan and Allan used to knock around with Jimmy Ballestrin and myself quite often. He was about the same age. Ah Sam, he didn't have a family, he was on his own but he was a very friendly person. And they'd always, whenever you went past them or something they'd always want to give you something.

OH: Like to eat?

MR: Something to eat, something to drink and any fruit or anything they had, they'd always give it to you.

OH: What do you remember about their houses?

RB: Oh, the houses --- well, back in those days, a house was a house, I think every house almost looked the same. You know, they were, on today's standards, they were hovels. They were just a little bit of galvanised iron, I'm quite sure like Yick Kee, that was a shed on Yick Kee's property where he was and his house was virtually inside the shed. You know, part of that shed was partitioned off to resemble a house. But he had this outside oven, this clay oven in the ground and on a Sunday, you could smell the aroma of him cooking. They loved duck and he'd be cooking a duck almost every Sunday and you could smell the aroma with the waft of the wind coming through. And quite often, you'd go there and he'd give you a meal of duck.

OH: Did you know if he raised the ducks himself?

MR: They would all, everybody raised your own, you raised your own chickens and ducks. I know Mum and Dad, we had 30 or 40 ducks, that's how many we had. One day, a dog got in and killed about 16 of them. [laughs]

OH: Oh, how awful.

MR: Oh yeah, we would have had 30 - 40 ducks quite easily.

OH: So Yick Kee and Ah Sam would have had ducks?

MR: Oh they would have had ducks as well but probably not as many. On our property, we had an area that was fenced off with lucerne and that's where the ducks and the chickens all stayed. You know they'd have their cover there for the night and that but they probably had a half-acre block.¹⁶

OH: They were well fed? [laughs]

MR: Yeah, they were well fed but then the lucerne used to be for the horses as well, we used to feed the horses.

OH: And then going further west?

MR: Yes, well the next probably was West.

[laughter]

MR: West, there was Barrie West and Reg West. No, I can't remember the father. I remember Barrie and Reg very well, they maybe a fraction older than I am. I still see Barrie and Reg quite

¹⁶ Mel recalled in the editing process that the Chinese families were very quiet and very polite. Language was sometimes a problem

often. But they were mainly celery growers and that's all they virtually concentrated on, mainly celery.

OH: When you look at the map, Mel, or the aerial map, I should say, their house is a long way in from Valetta Road.

MR: The houses are a long way in and his driveway was down this side, they used to come down this side alongside Berno's and turn into the house there. And Ah Sam's house, you can see just a slight indent in that road there?

OH: Yes.

MR: Well, that's where Ah Sam lived.

OH: Right.

MR: It was only a small place. And Yick Kee would have lived in there.

OH: Okay, right, then I'm going to change that on the map.

MR: Yeah.

OH: So that we've got it correct. And it's great that you know.

MR: Yeah, that's where he lived.

OH: Yeah.

MR: You see we used to cut through quite often when we had that land, we'd cut through on the edge, the corner of Ballestrin's property alongside Mrs Keele's and come out just in front of Yick Kee's shed.

OH: Ah, so was the shed still there when you?

MR: When we leased the land, the shed was still there. Bu then it was sold, it was sold to Associated Groceries and they bought it.

OH: There's a lot of land, isn't it?

MR: A lot land, well, virtually, Ballantyne, Daminato, that was the first land that they purchased when they made the grocery store, the grocery depot. Then after that, they bought Keele's property, then they bought the land that we were leasing. After that they bought the West property but there's a section that faces Valetta Road, they cannot build on because apparently people complained that there was too many, you know they didn't want trucks coming in so they left a reserve there, probably three or four acres, just like a reserve.

OH: Oh. And then further west, there was the...?

MR: Then you've got the Berno's and the Santin's, I remember all the Santin's, the three brothers of the Santin's. Vic, ---

OH: Romildo?

MR: Romildo and...

OH: Lui?

MR: Lui, that's the one. And the Berno's, I can't remember too much about the Berno's. I know they had a fairly big hold, a fairly good holding of glasshouses and they were very good farmers. And next door to the Berno's there used to be a family there by the name of De Pasquale. But, now I'm not sure, there was quite a few of them, I think. And then there was Lui Griguol but he also had a property, I thought he was on the western side of Frogmore Road. I'm sure Lui Griguol was in here somewhere.

OH: So we might move him from there?

MR: I'd move him from there, I can't remember him being there. I know he was definitely on this side.

OH: Right. Were they market gardeners?

MR: No, I'm not sure what he was tied up but he had the car dealership in town. He used to be in Grenfell, no in Currie Street. Yeah, he had a car dealership and that's where we got our first car from.

OH: Oh?

MR: Yeah, we bought a Humber Hawk from him.

OH: Did you know the...?

MR: The Canino's, yes there were quite a few of the Canino clan. Some, I can't quite, don't remember all their names. But there was a Rebuli and they lived up near the Frogmore Road bridge which was only a wooden bridge in those days and if you got over the bridge, you used to get into Torrens Avenue, to Lockleys and that's where we used to go quite often on a weekend and play football with the Hank boys. Well, they'd had one kick and we'd have to have four kicks to get it back to them.

[laughter]

OH: How many Hank brothers were there?

MR: Er, three, Ray, Bob and Bill.

OH: And they were all footballers?

MR: They all played for West Torrens. No, they were great footballers and I think even with Bobby Hank, I played golf with him a few times, he was a good guy.

OH: If you crossed the river to the southern side and you were in Lockleys there?

MR: Yeah.

OH: Did it look similar?

MR: It was very similar in those days and it was all about the same and there was all market gardens and what can you say? Like I said, in those days, there was a lot of glasshouses in the area, there were glasshouses everywhere.

OH: We've missed out one family on the western side?

MR: Panuccio, yeah.

OH: Of Frogmore Road? Did they have market gardens?

MR: They had a market garden, yeah. He owned quite a bit of land virtually from the river right through to, what's that's street? Harrow Road, yeah, he had quite a bit of land there. But he used to grow not a lot of produce but now and again he'd put a few glasshouses, and he'd put a crop of potatoes in. He only had a few acres of potatoes and I used to go down there and dig them up for him.

OH: And why did you do that?

MR: Well, we were about the only ones that had a potato digger at the time. [laughs] So, I used to go around and dig potatoes in quite a few places.

OH: Is this when you were a young man?

MR: Yeah, when I was probably 16 or 17.

OH: Oh. And you also had an interesting story to tell when you were quite young and you used to help your father with the wages for the employees?

MR: Well, that's true. I think I mentioned it before. The fact that I was going to school and learned to read and write and Dad and Mum were both illiterate, they couldn't read or write and I had to do a lot of the interpretation for them and I had to do a lot of book work for them. And I distinctly remember how I used to have to go, do Dad's wages for the workers and I had to go up and do the Taxation papers and go up to the post office up in town, pick up the tax stamps, bring them back, fill them all out and stick them all on the tax for the accountant for tax time. But that

was, I'm not sure when they abolished the tax stamps but I think I was about 14 or 15 when they were abolished. But I used to do Dad's banking for him even at that age, I had to do his checking and banking and writing out his cheques for him.

OH: A lot of responsibility?

MR: Well, it was, it just became second nature, it just became second nature.

OH: yeah.

MR: But quite often and I still remember whenever Dad would go and buy something, he would have his cheque book and this was even when I was younger and he would hand the cheque book over and the person would write out his cheque. You know, if he had to buy something, he said: "No I have a cheque, you sign it, you write it out and I'll sign it." And Dad used to struggle through and write his name on it, you know, you could still read his name, he used to do hours and hours of practice writing his own name out. That's what he did.

OH: But he was obviously a very clever businessman?

MR: No, well, I don't know if he was a clever businessman or whether it was just sheer hard work. They were prepared to work, they scrimped and saved but no, nothing was wasted. No, they if whatever he grew, he would, if he couldn't meet it, he would save it for another day, you know. No, they scrimped and saved, but they were good workers, they weren't afraid of working 14 or 16 hours a day.

OH: Yeah, a big life, to do that.

MR: Oh, it was a hard life and of course, going through the Depression, you know, it wouldn't have been easy.

OH: No. Mel you have given a fantastic overview of all these families and the way they lived on the land and the various, especially the Italian market gardeners, who were here. So, thank you very much for that. And we're coming to the end of the interview and I just wanted to ask you if there was anything else you would like to add to your interview?

MR: Well, looking at that, [the aerial photo] map, you've got Taverno's, Taverna, he was the hairdresser.

OH: That's right, now Taverna was on the southern side?

MR: Yeah, they were on the other side of the bridge, they were the first house as you got over the bridge on, in those days, it was Rowells Road, [laughs] over the bridge.

OH: Yeah.

OH: (18:03) what about the changes that you have seen in your lifetime in this area?

MR: Oh, there are a lot of changes. Well, nothing stays still [laughs] in these days, it keeps on revolving and computerisation has changed our lives completely. Mechanisms have changed our lives completely, our feeding habits, our cooking habits, everything has changed. I remember going back to 1946, it was 110 degrees and there you are, and Mum would be cooking on a wood fire. [laughs] And the kitchen in those days might not have been any more than 10 feet by 12 feet and there you are sitting in the kitchen having a dinner with a hot stove, you know. But, the ladies they loved their cooking and they would cook every day and there was, I remember chopping up wood to light the fire. And nowadays, who lights a fire. So everything is all-electric.

OH: And when you look at this map and you see all that open land you thin now, if you took an aerial view of this area?

MR: Well, it's amazing how things change. I remember I was going out to Elizabeth and when they started Para Hills and you looked at the side of the hills and you could see all these houses on the side of the hill. Three years later you'd go down that same, and you could not see a house. All

you could see was trees. Every house seemed to have plant a couple of trees and before you know it, the houses are covered by trees and you can't see them. Our area was the same. I know the airport moved in and 6:00 o'clock in the morning and you'd wake up and you could hear the twin-engine planes or the four engine planes and they'd be roaring up and you could hear it broad as daylight. Now, you cannot hear a plane. The only changes being that there are more houses in between the airport and where you are. But before, when the airport was first built, we would have been lucky to have probably 20 or 30 houses between our property and the airport, the rest of it was all vacant land. As soon as it was built on, and trees go up, it's become a sound barrier. And now I very seldom hear a plane.

OH: Oh, that's interesting, isn't it?

MR: It is, but that's how life has changed. But to get a map of what it was like 60 years ago and get an aerial map of today and what it is like, it's entirely different but you can pick up certain landmarks, it's amazing what you can see.

OH: It is. Well, Mel, thank you very much for the two interviews, and for contributing to the oral history project about the market gardeners, it's been really instructive.

MR: Well, I hope that I have been a bit helpful for you, Madeleine.

OH: You've been *very* helpful, and I really appreciate it.

MR: Oh, you can't remember everything. Sometimes you wish you could.

[laughter]

OH: I think you've done a fantastic job, Thank you very much.

MR: Thank you.¹⁷

¹⁷ In the editing process, Mel explained what he thought about his identity: "In the Italian tradition from 1920 to 1960, families lived for each other. But over time things have changed a great deal. People are living longer and able to look after themselves and not rely on assistance from their children. It is a shame. Our standards of respect to our oldies are diminishing at a rapid rate."