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An Interview with Ross Rocca

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Interviewee: Ross Rocca

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Q: Let's talk about your father migrating from Italy to Australia in the 1930s.

That's right. Dad came to Australia as times were very, very hard in Italy. Well, the depression had set in and there was no way that he would ever get himself advanced in any way whilst he was over there and the Government allowed people who wanted to come to Australia and work on the sugar cane fields of northern Queensland to come out for a short period. They allowed migrants to come in from the European countries and dad was fortunate enough to be amongst some of the last that came into the country and he went straight up to northern Queensland and there he was cutting sugar cane. He did that for at least six years and then he left my mother and myself a year old when he came out here.

Q: What year exactly did he come here?

What year? 1930.

Q: Was it an assisted migration scheme then?

No. No assistance then. No. He had to borrow from his sisters and to have enough money to land here. When he landed here he also had to have an additional '40 to sustain him to be allowed to stay. Well of course the moment he got here he sent the '40 back to his sister that he had to borrow and then he had to pay off his fare as well.

Q: So he was cane cutting in Northern Queensland? Hard Work?

Very, very hard work. He used to, he earned a little bit of money while he was cutting cane and then he would send that over to us and save a bit for our passage as somewhere for us to live and then the other six months, when there was no cane cutting, he virtually was fortunate to be able to work on a farm for nothing just for his board and keep because there was no work you know while the sugar cane was, some of them would go to the Tablelands on the tobacco industry but he would work around one of the properties virtually for nothing for the other six months but then he would make a bit of money with the sugar cane cutting.

Q: How did he get down to Ryde?

He got a bit of sunstroke at one stage in Queensland and the doctor suggested that he ought to go to a cooler climate and one of his good friends said to him "Look, your wife and family is coming out to Australia" (this is about 1937) "why don't you go down and see my sister and brother-in-law. They have a farm at Eastwood (or Marsfield as it was known) and they might be able to help you out". So he came to Sydney and met us at the Sydney port and we didn't expect it because we expected to get off in Brisbane.

Q: So he came down here not long before you arrived in Australia?

He would have come about a week or so before we arrived.

Q: Tell me about yourself back in Italy, as a little boy your early childhood was without your father. Do you remember that decision to come to Australia. Were you excited?

I do. I remember as a little boy I actually went to school over in Italy for about a year or two and I used to walk quite a long way to go to school. We lived with our grandparents, dad's father and mother and mum was't well they had a bit of a share farming property over there. They were working for a property owner.

Q: What sort of farm was it?

Mostly vineyards and olives and chestnuts and that type of thing you know that was grown there. And then mum you know assisted them on their own property. Worked very hard. She was very anxious to come out here to be with her husband. I mean she had only been with him less than a year you might say, well I was just born, so it was just over a year and I was growing up and I do remember some of the things about the house where we lived. It was a big stone place - two storeys. I remember the doors. As a little boy when you would look up to these massive oak doors and stone arch, you think that they are giant doors but really when we went back years later to see the place, they were very small - the doors. When mum came out here I recall, she was very popular and I recall that the neighbours were all very weepy and crying and wishing her well and on either side as we walked down this narrow street a lot of them were there, coming out and they were throwing rose petals on mum and on the road as she was approaching to go down to an old car for that time that was going to take us to the railway station and then on to Naples port.

Q: Do you remember your grandparents being upset about losing you and your mother?

No. My grandfather thought the world of my mother because she nursed him through pneumonia and looked after him. He was a very, very kind gentleman. The grandmother was more of a gallivanter, you know hard worker but some□

in the old days mother-in-laws could have a very strong tongue you know but she was very well liked. Mum also as a young girl lost her own mother at the age of eight and she reared three of her step-brothers you know, she did herself. She was quite used to hard work and when she came out here she really got stuck into the work.

Q: Do you remember the boat trip coming out here?

Yes I do. Everybody was sick on the boat and I was as lively as a wire. Mum was quite sick too with sickness and everywhere where I used to go on the boat you used to see people through rough weathers and it didn't worry me one bit but mum couldn't get up to go to breakfast and the rules were on the ship you had to go and didn't matter how sick you were. I remember going to the kitchen demanding that I have some breakfast for my mother to take it to her and they gave it to me just to get rid of me.

Q: What were you called in Italian?

Well, my birth name, I was named after my grandfather. Old Italian customs is that your first child is named after the husband's father. The first daughter is named after the husband's mother and then you have got the wife's father and the wife's mother. You have got to have about five or six children before you have a choice of your own. So my name was Rossario. That was my birth name, named after my grandfather. The pet name as you call it for little boys was "Sorrino?????" that would be the male for Serena. You might have heard that. But when I came out here and my first introduction to the school, I noticed that I didn't know one word of English. I might be jumping around here but I know that the teacher when she heard "Rossario" said "Oh, we'll call him Ross". Although I didn't understand but I do still remember at that stage that lady, that person said "Ross".

Q: And that's how you got Ross?

And it's been Ross ever since.

Q: You arrived in 1937 so Australia was coming out of the depression but some areas were still quite depressed. Do you remember that arrival in Australia and you'd be meeting a stranger, your father, you wouldn't even know him?

Totally. I remember dad coming to the boat and I had to sit on this man's knee and he cuddled me and I didn't know him from anything. I didn't know him at all. I knew I was going to meet my father but he was a total stranger.

Q: Was it hard to adjust for a while, to get used to him. Were you a bit of a mummies boy?

I think my biggest difficulty was trying to call him Papa I think. Something you know that I had difficulty as a little boy to call him Papa or dad. I do remember getting off at the railway station at Eastwood and it was quite late and they

bought an ice-cream and it was a two-in-one and shaped like a rocket. I remember that. That was my first introduction to ice-cream, chocolate coated too and there was two-in-one and they were both together, two sticks together. I do recall that.

Q: Where did you go to live when you arrived?

We went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Mangano who had a property on the corner of Culloden Road and Waterloo Road. That's right and on the corner there. They had about twenty acres of land there and so we stayed there for a while and helped them out on their farm and then dad was going to take us back to Queensland.

Q: Sorry, was that a market garden?

They had orchard and market garden.

Q: Were they from the same part of Italy as you?

Yes they were fortunately because it was Mrs. Mangano's brother that recommended dad to come and see them. They found us very nice hard working people and instead of going back to Queensland they suggested that we you know stay here for a while. Dad went back and did one more crop of cane cutting, left us here and mum worked hard and they were amazed at the way mum worked and they said "I think we can help these people" and that is when we were share farming with the Mangano's for just under two years actually. Share farming as we knew it then was Mr. Mangano had the land, he provided the seeds, the fertiliser and the water and my parents did all the work in producing the crops and get them to the market. Then when the crops were sold whether the price was high or low, the money was divided half to the owner of the property and half to the farmer. That worked quite satisfactory but dad and mum felt that living in the house there with the others was restricting them and restricting us. They only had one daughter and my parents only had one son.

Q: Were you in the same house as them?

The same little old house on the corner there. Tin roof and weatherboard and you had to be careful - you could see through the floor.

Q: What were your early impressions of that house having come from a big stone house in Italy. Did you get a surprise or did you as a child take it all in your stride in your new environment?

Well, I took it in my stride because although the house that I came from was a big stone house we still had the lamps you know the wick that you light with kerosene and walk around the rooms with it. They had it in, I think they had, they did have power in that house and so that sort of compensated a little bit but I was sort of excited to be somewhere different you know. I don’t recall very, very much that I was upset about it. My mum and dad had arrived in

Australia and this was the, you know the America as it was known in the old days, if you went overseas anywhere you always went to America except Argentina. In Italy you always knew Argentina because a lot went there, a lot of Italians. But if they went to Canada, New Zealand, Australia they would always say "oh, they have gone to America".

Q: You have mentioned the school already. You started at Marsfield Public School on your first day. How did you feel ?

I remember being taken by Mrs. Mangano to Marsfield Public School□

Q: Had the Mangano's been here very long. Have you got any idea?

They were in Queensland, they had sugar cane and unfortunately they had bought a property but there was a plague of beetles that wiped out, they used to eat the roots of the sugar cane, the sugar cane would fall down and wipe them out and they lost a lot of money and they lost their property in Queensland and that is why they came down to Sydney and the farm that was bought was in the wife's name. They did pay off the bankruptcy in those days, they did pay the money off but they were forced to you know, I think the bank must have taken the property off them.

Q: I was just wondering if they had been in the Ryde area for very long?

They had been there about at least four or five years before that. Mrs. Mangano took me to school and I spoke to the teacher and the teacher accepted me and told me what my name was and what I was going to be called. I remember being Ross. I knew no word of English and that made things very, very hard. But there were other Italian boys there. There was the ?????????????? family that lived close by and they spoke a bit of both and I recall some boy telling me that there were ants, I can remember back, there were ants on my lunch and because I didn't understand what the word ants was I kept saying "no, no, no". I soon got the grasp of it and the eighteen months that I was at Marsfield school really helped me a lot for later on.

Q: By the time you had finished there, eighteen months, you were speaking English quite well?

Pretty good.

Q: So you were bi-lingual?

Yes and that's when we bought over here in Owen?? Small's Road you see, five acres in Small's Road and then I transferred from Marsfield Public School to Ryde Public School.

Q: So what year would that have been, about 1939?

That's correct.

Q: So your father had been share farming and saved up enough to buy five acres?

He didn't have enough money to buy the five acres because he bought the five acres for about £640. He had a mortgage of about £400 and had about £250 deposit and he only had about £40 odd pounds to survive and clear the land. But in those days you just worked day and night to make ends meet.

Q: Tell me about the move to Small's Road and the routine of work there and what it looked like?

Ok. We were still finishing off the crops at Marsfield and we were carrying from Marsfield there which would have been oh at least three miles I say, my parents would still carry loads of plants you know that were going to re re-planted over here and walk backwards and forwards and walk from Small's Road to Culloden Road with a load of boxes.

Q: Walked?

Walked. Yes, walked. We just walked everywhere in those days. So we started cultivating Small's Road, clearing the land while we were still finishing off this share farming you know over in Culloden Road.

Q: Do you know who your father bought that property from, the five acres?

Yes. People by the name of McPhersons. But recently prior to McPhersons there were the local family and still many of them are here, the Bishop's owned it. The Bishop's did some good work on it but then I think they lost the property because they spent a lot of money, they built big brick fowl sheds, all of brick. For some reason or other, I never ever knew but I believe the old Bishops had lost the property to the bank. McPherson took it and then we bought it from the McPhersons.

Q: So when you moved there was it a combined market garden/poultry farm?

There was nothing. There was a row of these brick sheds.

Q: Empty?

Empty. And trees that had just grown up over from what it had been before. I do vaguely remember dad having to clear all of it. The sheds later on got turned into a poultry farm when we were able to have a poultry farm as well as a market garden.

Q: It was probably a place that had gone to rack and ruin by the sound of things?

Bricks were always brick and so they didn't deteriorate. The roof wasn't too bad you know, it was quite all right. The floor was a very thin you know ash and the rats used to tunnel everywhere through it.

Q: Was this the house or the sheds?

The sheds. The house was just a small weatherboard house. I recall the name of the house too. A small weatherboard house called "Aruluen". There were no numbers in those days. All the houses had names. So if you were looking for us you would go to Small's Road and you would look there for house called "Aruluen". It was later that we got our number, 20 Small's Road and then later on through re-subdivision, we got brought back to 14 you know the same house.

Q: The house isn't there now I suppose?

No. The old house, in 1948 dad and mum had saved up enough money to build their first house so the old house was moved further back onto the farm and the new house was built, brick. I recall it was during the 1947, there was a big coal strike because we got the last through the architect, the last supply of tiles from the Seven Hill tile yard for the roof because, and that is when I think the Chifley government or whatever government it was brought in the army I think.

Q: 1949?

Something like that. Then in the old house that we moved further back on the property, that is where two lots of families who came out from Italy later on were able to live while they worked some of the land.

Q: As a nine year old boy moving to that farm what were some of your duties? You had to go to school of course but you would have had plenty of jobs to do I suppose?

Correct. I had to, in the early stages it wasn't too bad but once we got the poultry farm started my chores were that I was to make the mash you know for the fowls. In those days you didn't buy mash ready-made you had bran, pollard, wheat meal, bone meal, fish meal, Epson salts, all these things and you mixed them all up in the big mixer and then you put water in it. In Winter time I had to light the fire to make the water warm because it used to get very cold and then feed the fowls. That was my chore and it, at one stage we were close to 3000 fowls that I had to look after before I went to school. So I would make the mash, feed the fowls and then on the way back you would clean all the water troughs because they would be a bit dirty from the day before. Then you had to wash all the buckets out because any mash that got stuck there in a matter of hours it would go stale and sour and poison. So they had to be

cleaned out properly. The mixer had to be cleaned out properly. Then having done that, I would then come inside, get the hard-boiled eggs and some bread and salami and cheese. We had a billy. We used to make coffee, we're not great tea drinkers. I'd make the coffee, tie this bread up in a towel, salamis and cheese. I would go and find mum and dad on the farm, get a few boxes, sit down have our breakfast. I would then come home.

Q: What would they be doing in the field?

Oh, they'd be working in the vegetables as to whatever had to be done, planting, weeding, thinning out plants or pruning the tomatoes. They would be working out in the fields from the very earliest of sunrise.

Q: You were the little breakfast boy?

I was that and then I would come home. Although it was an old house, I had to sweep the kitchen, put the dishes away, make myself a sandwich or something for school and walk from Small's Road to top Ryde Public School. I loved sport. I was very, very good at it but I never had the opportunity to play because by the time I got there, it was nearly nine o'clock and the sports that I was really good at were soccer, cricket and we used to play rounders in those days which is a sort of a baseball game but it was called rounders in those days. I loved that very much. I was very, very good but as I say I never.

Q: Do you remember being tired when you got to school after all those jobs?

Not really. No, no, no, no. I was full of life actually. Plenty of life and -

Q: What was Ryde Public School like. At that stage you were obviously speaking English a lot better?

Oh, yes thank God and the War had broken out by then you see and□

Q: They thought you were the enemy?

There was a little bit of difficulty but Ryde wasn't too bad. I found it wasn't too bad. I didn't get a lot of it. Some of the other areas where they had more Italians, you see North Ryde would have copped it a lot more there as there were more Italians going to school. I wouldn't have been myself and maybe one or two others at the school, so I can't say that I was ill treated but still there was a bit of that feeling there. One thing I do recall, Friday mornings there used to be religion. Now there was only about myself, Charlie Phillips and about one other boy who were Catholics. In those days Catholic children had to go to Catholic schools. We were just outside and later on when the Japanese came into the War we used to be digging trenches, zig-zag trenches and they had to be dug zig-zag.

Q: In the playground?

In the playground, just below the school ground.

Q: So you would do this whilst other children were having Scripture?

That's right you see and occasionally there used to be a lady come along, Mrs. McDonald. She would you know give us a little bit of scripture and she would have everybody from the little ones to the bigger children. I can't recall at what stage she used to come in but I do recall you know her coming in at some stages. If she didn't come, there would be no religion.

Q: Your parents didn't consider sending you to the Catholic school?

I don't think they could afford it but then later on when my cousins came out from overseas I think the Catholic school woke up to if they can't afford it they would provide a uniform because my cousins didn't have to pay any fees or provide a uniform, not at that time during the War.

Q: At that time, were your parents regular church attendees. Did they go to Mass?

Mum used to go to Mass more so and made sure that I used to go too but it all depends how the farming crops were. We never missed the Holy days you know, they were special days. Good Friday, Christmas Day and Easter and those holidays they were very strictly observed from their whole upbringing. No happiness for a week around Good Friday.

Q: Where did you make your first communion?

I had made it in Italy. I had made that in Italy yeah so I remember that.

Q: In the Second World War some Italians were interned. Do you remember any anxiety amongst your parents?

I can remember two nice men in suits coming to the house. They inspected, they went through everything in the house. Very, very polite. Very friendly. We didn't have much to offer them. I know at the time mum was just offering them cups of tea and coffee and tomato sandwich. Now don't ask me why I remember, there were tomato sandwiches. Tomatoes was on because in those days whatever crop was on that is what you ate. Mostly tomato sandwiches. They found that we were just hard working people. They spoke to the neighbours. The neighbours spoke very highly of us as hard workers and I recall that they took dad and mum's passport that they had because they had the fascist people on the cover of it you know. They took that. You see at that time a lot of them were being interned but we decided through the advice of a gentleman, Mr. Morgan and the Agriculture Department, that we should grown a lot of the vegetables for the army. So although we got virtually hardly any payment at all for the vegetables that we grew for the army, that

helped a lot keeping dad out of camp too and the good report that those policemen made.

Q: Were they policemen that had come?

They were in disguise. Policemen out of uniform, whatever security or police or whatever they were. They were police but not in uniform.

Q: Do you remember your parents resenting that at all, or where they just relieved?

No. I think their main worry was because mum had packed dad's suitcase with some clothes and everything. I think their main worry was that dad was going to be interned because everybody else was being interned you see and I think that having them there, I do recall them being very friendly. I know dad had a piano-accordion. I think they played a little bit of the piano-accordion too.

But what we did have to do when dad wasn't interned, we had to report to Ryde police station twice a week. We had an identity card, oh about four inches by about six inches with mum's photo on it and one with dad's photo on it. The words were at least an inch high the words "enemy alien" written on top of it and inside there were a lot of squares and every time they went to the police station they would stamp the time and the day reported. Now they would walk from Small's Road to Ryde police station. I would accompany them after work at night-time after doing a hard day's work you know and then back again twice a week.

Q: That must have been very time consuming when they were very busy. Do you remember them being annoyed at that?

I think they accepted it you know because it could be worse. I recall mum having to go to a specialist in Macquarie Street for her pain and we had to go to Ryde police station and get permission for her to go to Macquarie Street because she would be crossing two bridges. Gladesville Bridge and Drummoyne Bridge.

Q: It was quite restrictive then. I hadn't realised. At this stage you were speaking English quite well. You were acting as interpreter for your parents?

Everything I did I interpreted for mum and dad and I would do whatever correspondence that couldn't be done. I would have to do it. Many times when we had to get the crops out for the army. West Ryde station was known as Ryde station and it was a goods yard and the other goods yard was Epping. Now when the army would send out a wagon for our vegetables, the vegetables had to be there.

Q: You were saying that you always had to have the vegetables there at the railway station.

Yeah. Now if dad needed the help and mum, I had to help because they had no assistance of labour and I would be kept home from school to assist them and get the crops ready. So he had to have a note for the teacher. Now my parents couldn't write one word of English and very little Italian so I had the difficulty of having to write my own note and then asking dad to sign it and having to explain to the teachers that my parents could not and that was my dad's signature. That didn't often go over too good you know, whether I was trying to wag school or not but that happened a fair bit and that was one of the reasons I suppose that because I couldn't handle some of the work like the other boys were able to handle - they were able to have their parents assist them with homework. Of course my homework would be late at night you know nine o'clock after dark, an hour after dark and that's when I would have to my homework. I had to do it to the best of my knowledge and well I know that my age kept putting me up in the class to the other and maths was the only thing that used to help me. I used to do well in the exams for maths. The others, if I just passed them, I was very lucky.

Q: Do you think the teachers were very sympathetic when you came along with your own hand-written note or did they give you a hard time about it?

It was'it all depended on which teacher it was. The lady teacher there, she wasn't too bad Miss Larkin. That one teacher she wasn't too bad but there was another gentleman there. In his class it was a bit more harder, less understanding. But as I say there was nothing I could have done about it. They did, I'm not sure whether they, they did send a note to my parents about it by mail but I think the reply was saying that I had to do the replying.

Q: At this stage you were talking about providing vegetables for the army. You're not talking about the army camp out at North Ryde we're talking about putting it on the train and sending it elsewhere?

Yes. That would go to wherever the army food depot was. Whether they directed it I wouldn't have any idea where it went and also in those days we all had our identity cards, food rationing you know only so much butter, only so much meat, so much sugar and things like that. Also I had to do all the interpreting for dad. Eventually we had a little rotary hoe to cultivate the ground and for that we had to have a ration. You had to apply for, you know you might get two gallons a month, eight litres a month or something like that during the War time.

Q: Were you competent to do all these things or did you feel it was a bit beyond what a child could do?

I felt I had to do it. There's no way, I had to do it and I just did it to the best of my ability. Whether I could understand some of the big words or not I would answer them as to what I thought the answers were.

Q: During this time, what other Italian families were around. Was there a community of Italian people in this area?

Not in the area where we lived. We came to an area in Small's Road where there were mostly Australian poultry farmers. The biggest ones were the Norman families, the Bishops lived there. They were another big family and then there was quite a few Chinese gardens which were leasing the ground from the bigger property owners in the area. It wasn't to well after the War that the Italians starting buying close to our area. Most of the Italians were still over at Marsfield you know in their orchards and flower farms. Quite a lot where Macquarie University is now that was mostly Italians in that area. This section here which was close to top Ryde there were very few Italians when we came.

Q: Did your parents mix socially with those other Marsfield Italians or where they a little bit isolated down here perhaps amongst all the Australians?

Well, we didn't mix a great deal because they were always working you see. Occasionally we would visit a friend or we had no relations here in those days. We would occasionally visit somebody but you either had to walk or very seldom did we get public transport. If we ever visited anybody special I think the only way you could have got to him if you didn't know was by taxi and that wasn't very regular. You saw most of the people on special occasions at Mass one Sunday, Christmas or Easter or things like that but -.

We eventually got the phone on after the War. No, during the War because we used the excuse we had to have the army contract to ring up to when they wanted the things see. I recall my mother talking to a lady, one of her, she's godmother to her child, an Italian and the Exchange cut in and said "if you do not stop speaking another language, I will cut the line off" I recall listening and mum says "what is she saying" and I told her she had to stop speaking in another language.

Q: Oh, your poor mother. Do remember her being upset by that. Imagine not being able to talk to a friend?

Well all I did was the interpreting but I do recall that because the Exchange was listening in on the telephone.

Q: Which they weren't supposed to be doing of course?

I know because we got the phone on during the Wartime. Our phone number was Ryde 294. You had to dial if you were on automatic WY. That would give you Ryde Exchange and then you would tell Ryde Exchange you wanted 294.

Q: It must have been quite a good thing to have that Army contract even though they may not have paid a lot wasn't it?

Very little, very little.

Q: But it was regular. Do you think that helped your father a lot economically?

No. What it did was it kept dad out of concentration camp and enabled us to still have our poultry farm going and if they wanted cauliflowers, cabbages and potatoes and we would plant an acre of each, well we could still have some lettuce, spinach or carrots or as the case may be a little bit that we would also grow privately for us. So they would tell us what they wanted growing. They knew when it was going to be ready and we would grow that and then there was still a little bit of room for something else to be growing.

Q: Were you eating typical Italian food during all this period?

Oh yes. But most of the food we ate, it was what was growing.

Q: Your produce?

Fortunately they say eggs are bad for you but if eggs were supposed to be bad, I should have been gone years ago because when you have so many fowls, there is a large percentage of cracked, soft-shelled eggs that cannot be used for any other purpose. In those days they would just have to be thrown away so egg was a very, very strong staple of everything. Eggs galore in each meal. Our breakfast, mum would boil a dozen eggs the night before. So eggs were just the main basics.

Q: Did they eat a lot of meat. Would they get meat from the butchers?

I recall coming home from school and I would go to the butcher at top Ryde. There was a butcher there just near where the arcade is now and I would bring home a load, three pounds of soup bones and I would have an armful. Now the soup bones were the basic of many things and the marrow, I used to love sucking the marrow out of the bone and mum would make pastas and spaghetti and that. It was very cheap you know something like three pence of four pence a pound which is half a kilo. But I do remember bringing home. Dad would buy the meat when he went to market and the cheese and things like that but if I wished to buy anything mum would give me three pence and say "bring three pound of soup bones home" and that was a load.

Q: Now, when you say he went to the markets, this was in Paddy's Market. There was a new Paddy's Market built in the late 1930s?

That's right in 1937-38 they built the new market, Paddy's Market, where the Entertainment Centre is today. Now before that they used to be the fruit market and vegetable growers were out into the street. So here you would have a carrier. The Higginbotham family were a very old identity of Ryde and they used to be our carriers. Phil Higginbotham. Now my dad used to have to go into the market early because to get a possie for the stall. In those market stalls, to get a stall to sell the vegetables, it was very, very hard to get. He would leave around about 3 o'clock or so and he would catch the tram at top Ryde.

Q: Three o'clock in the morning?

Yes. Yes. Every half hour there would be a tram. He would catch the tram at top Ryde and he would arrive down at the markets close to you know, well actually it would be about quarter to four or thereabouts. He would have a stand. The carrier, Higginbotham would arrive around about half past four and I used to have to go on many, many occasions and help dad unload and sell some of these vegetables. Now I would go with the Higginbotham carrier around about four o'clock. I would walk from Small's Road to Pope Street to where the shopping centre is now. That's where the family lived right opposite where the kindergarten school is now. In the Wartime, first you would have to light the old gas producer for his truck because the petrol was rationed. They used to have the coal gas producer. Light that and then we would go to market and I would help him unload. I would stay there until about half past eight and then catch the tram and come back all the way to Ryde and go to school.

Q: That was a busy morning for you?

That would be a busy morning yeah. That was when dad had extra staff you know a fair bit of, and then later on we got our little truck ourselves. 1936 one tonne Ford and I used to go with dad and help him unload and then go to school. Help him sell and unload because you need two to unload because you would stuff on the truck and you had to pack it all over onto the stand.

Q: Someone said there were bad positions in the market and that there was an area called "Siberia"?

That's right. If you...

Q: You avoided that I suppose?

That was very, very nasty that part there because the market's were so corrupt in those days. The people there were so corrupt. Every morning, they would take whatever vegetables, the market men would take always whatever what they wanted. You know just take it off your stand and they would take it. If we lost a dozen of say ????????????? or something that would be nothing you know we would be happy to give it to them.

Q: These are the people who are running the market?

Yes. See and you had, if you wanted a good spot you had to compromise with them because even though you were there early you know. There was one gentleman Mr. Small who was a very religious man. There is no way he would compromise these people and he would be sent to the end of the world. There would be no way he would, he just had to get out of farming, it was dreadful.

Q: Would you almost have to bribe them or just give them veggies?

Virtually. They would come around and get their collection.

Q: Take money as well?

Their money yeah. One pound minimum.

Q: They could put somebody out of business by sending them to the wrong spot?

Oh yeah, if you didn't co-operate. I remember, I mentioned this to somebody and I think there was a bit of an uproar. I was only a kid, I never used to get any papers but this man was trying to correct things. He was a member of the Labour Party, a very nice man and he wanted to do something about it but he was really squashed.

One of the things that annoyed me I think as a little boy then, well I wasn't so little because I was getting involved more later on in the Elections. Later on we acquired a stall. Now to have a stall we had to really battle and waited many, many years for it.

Q: This is in Town at the markets?

At the markets. Because you had a stall at the markets, you had to vote in the City Municipality Elections. We were given the application form to sign and when we received the ballot paper we were to hand it in unfilled.

Q: That's corruption isn't it?

Well, that's as far as I'm prepared to say! I could go on further but -.

Q: You would rather not?

That annoyed me that.

Q: Yes. Even as a child you realised that wasn't fair?

It wasn't right.

Q: Before you had the stall, how was the goods sold then. On somebody else's stall?

That's right. You see what they did is, they had the stalls divided into sections. Monday, Wednesday, Friday that would be one set of stalls, then Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Alternate days. So they had more control over you. They wouldn't let you, very few people only the big agents had their fixed stalls. We got one stall for the Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday first and then it was at least two years waiting before they would let us have another stall nearby for the other days. Now, if you didn't turn up you had to tell them, although you were paying rent for every day whether you went or not, you still had to tell them if you were coming or not or they would re-lease that stall to somebody else.

Q: And make a bit of extra money even though you were already paying?

Yes. Yes.

Q: Do you remember your father being really annoyed about this?

He was just part of the game. With the Italian background you know, he had to just go along with it. There was nothing he could do about it. He dare not rock the boat in any way. I was the one who was rocking the boat as a kid because I couldn't see the right but I didn't have the knowledge then, the trouble that I could have got my parents in by opening my mouth when I should have kept it closed. I think they realised that it was only a kid talking and looking back I could have created problems for dad because I was talking about these things being wrong, many things being wrong.

Q: Do you think there was a criminal element involved in the markets in those days or it was this petty corruption amongst the officials?

I think it went right up to the City Council. It went right up to there looking back you know because I mean it was common knowledge what was going on. You could see it you know and I'm sure that people in position. You know why did you have to hand in your ballot paper in not filled in? That was only on the once that they knew that they could sort of trust. I mean if you were an ex-policeman turned market gardener, they probably would not have approached you and if you were a you know, but all the ones that they really knew, I knew I had to hand them in.

Q: Before the Second World War, there are a lot of Chinese market gardens in the area and you mentioned some at Small's Road. What are your memories of them and your memories of them when they left the area?

Yes. Yes. I remember them. They had all these holes in the ground dug and they used to go with the watering cans, these giant watering cans with the bar across their shoulders and they would always water their plants. You know we had sprinklers. They would always be working very, very hard and long hours. They used to grow a lot of the fiddley vegetables that we know did not like growing. They used to do the parsley, the shallots all the more delicate stuff and they used to work very hard and long hours. Most of the Chinese we saw never had their women with them. They were mostly men and they lived in very humble accommodation you know in sheds.

Q: Did you know any personally?

There was one of Quarry Road right opposite ??????? Avenue "old Charlie". We knew him as Charlie. What I remember of him is during the Wartime there were water restrictions and they used to have inspectors going round and so he was letting the water run into the dam and well and then carry it out. They told him that he couldn't do that but he didn't want to understand that and I believe that they ended up taking him to Court and he was fined five pounds. This is only from information that was said to me through our produce merchant. Old Charlie could not understand what the charger was saying when he was fining him the five pounds so they brought in an interpreter and then they had to pay the interpreter so the fine went up to ten pounds. There was no way he was going to pay the extra five pounds, he said "You said five pounds, why now do you want ten pound" you know. All of a sudden he understood! I recall that.

Q: We have this picture of single men and no women and then people say they gradually faded out but what exactly happened as they were leasing the land?

Yes. All the land where the Ryde High School stands today and right up to Quarry Road and Small's Road near Arthur Street and all that area there, I'm pretty sure it was the Benson's that owned a lot of land there. After the War they sold a lot of that and that is when the Chinese went and the Italians bought in. After the War to try and stop inflation, there was a law saying that if you had acquired one property you could not buy another property. That is why we were able to buy Quarry Road Farm because we had not acquired another property until after the War. This is where the Italians the Bensons and a lot of other people sold out their farms and the Italians came in and bought up and this is when we started to get the Italian community around this area.

Q: Do you think the Chinese were forced out by the land sales?

Yes.

Q: Do you remember any of them being in a position to buy the land they were working?

I don't know whether they were allowed to buy it at that time. I might stand corrected there. I'm not sure.

Q: They probably had temporary visas?

I'm not sure because you didn't have many of the Chinese that actually owned the land they were nearly all leasing the land. I recall where we had part of our Quarry Road property that was originally owned by the Troys. Mr. Troy and Mrs Troy was the sister-in-law. The husband had died. They were leasing a portion of that to a Chinese family and I didn't know this but many years later Mrs. Troy told me how hard working and what kind people my parents were because the Chinese had a little shed that caught fire and they lost everything. There was two of them there and they didn't have a thing to stand on. Everything was burned in that little shed, the little lamps that they had. She recalls my father putting his hand in his hip pocket and he got two pounds and gave it to these people and that made an impression on Mrs. Troy and it wasn't until many, many years after that she told me about my dad doing that and she thought what a nice gesture it was. We are all humans after all aren't we?

Q: Your memories of the Chinese market gardens are that they were still there during the War and after the War is when they went?

Yes that's right.

Q: Your parents seemed to be going quite well as they were going to buy another property in Quarry Road?

Well, the Troys, we knew that they wanted to sell their property and we introduced them one lot of family who wanted to buy their property, the Vesta family. Now the Vesta family tried to buy that property but because they had stood in for one of their close friends in Queensland and bought a property in their name that eventually would go back to him, that stopped them buying this property. They were just refused. They went as far as Canberra to try, they had political friends and they still couldn't get permission to buy because they had already. That left a bit of a sour taste with the Troys when they went because first they were annoyed because they couldn't buy it and then secondly they messed the Troys around. So then we had another family who would like to have bought the property and I recall Mrs. Troy saying "look Ross, we are not going to sell it to anybody but if your parents would like to buy it, I would be happy to sell it to you". So I went back home to mum and

dad and I recall this very clearly.

Q: How old were you at this stage?

Oh, fourteen. No fifteen I suppose.

Q: Property tycoon at fifteen!

I went to mum and dad and said "Mrs. Troy doesn't want to sell the property. I told her what nice people Mr and Mrs. Costello would be (because they were other people who came from Queensland) but she says she won't sell it to anybody but she'll sell it to us". OK. She was a very honest lady. She would only sell it at VG that was the law in those days. You could not buy property more than what the value of the government was.

Q: Valuer General's?

That's right. To try and stop inflation. So when I told that to mum and dad and mum said "well you know we could borrow a little bit and with what we have got and we expect to get some of the relations out from Italy too so that they could have somewhere to work". So we said to Mrs. Troy that we would buy it and we bought Quarry Road. Therefore the VG of fourteen hundred pounds. Later on it came of great assistance to help the rest of the relations to settle down here. We allowed the Troys to stay there free of rent and then Mrs. Troy also owned this property here where I live No. 96 North Road with three acres here. They had tenants in which they couldn't get out, and she got frustrated with them and that is why she offered to me again "if you want to buy that, you can but that". Of course we couldn't get the tenants out we were getting 2/6 a week or three shillings a week for the property which was ridiculous for the little old house that was here.

Q: So where we are here now, what year did you buy that?

I was eighteen and I was born in 1929 so that would have been 1947. I was under age and I remember asking the solicitor "am I allowed to buy as I'm not 21? He said "well, we are not going to say you're not 21". So I was able to buy it. I had at that time in my pennies because I used to save my pennies and because they used to make a shilling. Twelve pennies made a shilling and twenty shillings made a pound and I had saved close to over my youth and any present I got at all went to the bank. In those days you would go to school and on a Monday you could put money into the bank account and the teacher would fill it in. That is why we went to them. I opened my first bank account at the Commonwealth Bank at Ryde at the early age and I'm still with the Commonwealth Bank at Ryde after nearly sixty odd years. I had saved up just on five hundred pounds over my youth completely, all my gifts and what my father used to do, at the end of each crops there would always be crops, he only sold quality and at the end of each crop there would always be a certain amount that you just left and ploughed in. What I used to do is pick that, put it in boxes and give it to him to sell at the markets and he would give me two shillings of 2/6 or whatever it was. What he was actually doing was giving it to

Vincent De Paul nuns and Vincent De Paul society who would used to come round begging at the markets. He would give them this second quality stuff to them because he wouldn't sell it and still give me two or three shillings to give me the incentive to do it. I used to pick blackberries a lot you know and sell them at three pence or four pence a punnet and mulberries too.

Q: Where did you sell them?

At the markets. Yes at the markets yeah.

Q: So you were three very hardworking people. Do you remember observing Aussies working as hard as that?

Our next-door-neighbour Mr. Len Norman, he used to say "if a man had two women like your mother he would never have to work for long". The way my parents worked you know we really worked hard. I've got to be honest when I look back at the work I used to do but what they used to do was unreal. In the early mornings when the frosts were down, it was very thick on the plants down near the creek. The frost used to settle in. I remember we would be carrying out cabbages out of the farm into the roadway and then the horse and the slay would bring them up to the house and my hands were turning blue because of the cold. I remember crying because of the pain of the cold but it taught me to grow up the hard way.

Q: When you were say seventeen or eighteen and other young blokes might have motorbikes tearing around, you weren't doing that?

Not even allowed to go to the movies.

Q: Weren't you?

No. No. No. I just. They felt that bad company

Q: You said you weren't allowed to go to dances or to sport?

Never. Never.

You might go to the Rialto perhaps if other relations were there?

That's right. This lady that was with me that used to come here for a holiday and I remember that the theatre was owned by the Gazebo family that lived close by and the lady would say "oh, your aunty has brought you along tonight" you know. They knew I wasn't allowed to go. I loved to go to the movies or sport or anything like that but it was never allowed. At the age of about eighteen when I had to be in a wedding that's when I met Rose for the first time. I had to learn to dance because we had to do the bridal waltz and I went down to Joyce Street and I think was it Ron Bailey the dance studio in George Street in those days? Well, it meant going to Town roundabout six o'clock for your lessons. My father after doing a day's work would accompany me.

Q: He would chaperone you?

Yes. He would chaperone me and then he would sit in the corner because the teacher's would try and pick him up to teach him to dance too. I had to pay two shillings I think for a lesson or something like that and of course I wasn't very happy about that but still as I say.

Q: We have this picture of Italian girls being chaperoned very carefully but a young Italian boy was as well?

Yes.

Q: When you became a partner with your father that was when you were about eighteen?

Yes, I would have been about that age because I, it was the time when the provisional tax was introduced by the Government and I recall them getting this big tax bill. The bill was as much as virtually earned in that year and they were very shocked that they had to pay that sort of money. That is when they got some advice and I became a partner with dad and mum went on a wage. I used to have to stick by the stamps and stick them in the book, put the money into her bank account with her so although we were all one family we just used the money as we needed it but this was for tax purposes.

Q: Did you have a sense of pride of being a partner?

It didn't mean a thing. I had to just work as hard. All it meant was that my name was there mostly for tax purposes you know that's how I look at it.

Q: You were doing all the paperwork of course?

All of it yeah. All the bills and everything.

Q: Earlier on we were talking about the post war years and the development of the area. What were some of the changes that were occurring as suburbs spread out and the Housing Commission came into the area. What are some of the problems this presented for market gardeners like yourself?

What we were going to do? Where were we going to go after here? A lot of them went to Liverpool area in that part of the world, looked at it and it seemed to be out in the never nevers particularly in those days. We were all very, very concerned because we didn't have a great deal of money. Everything we had was on the land and what where we going to do in the future? It was a very big worry and I was doing anything possible. Actually it was me that went to somebody at the University of Sydney and asked them, I think Harris could have been the name, asked them what I could do to try and save the land. This gentleman was a Town Planner and I was told to go and see him for some reason and he told me about getting the people together

and forming a Committee. I spoke to the Norman's then and got that together and then we got a few more. We held meetings at the North Ryde School of Arts down in the Blue Room as it was known then and we gradually got the whole of the community that was going to be affected right behind us and formed this Committee. An ex-policeman there by the name of Harry Clay, he was a very staunch supporter. He had a property in Trevitt Road a very big property there and we just tried to do everything humanly possible.

Q: Was this called the North Ryde Defence League?

That's right.

Q: When are we talking about, late 1940's or early 50's?

We are talking around about 1948 shortly after. You see it was just after the War. Ryde Council had done this big housing project here in Denistone East where the old golf course used to be because they were all for residential development because you get four houses on one acre where you get the ??????????? of one acre which would be peanuts. They were extending and building and acquiring land. In 1948 the area where we lived was on the boundary of Eastern Municipality was amalgamated with Ryde so we appealed to Ryde for help to try and retain the land but they weren't interested a bit.

Q: What was the danger that it would be resumed for Housing Commission houses or the Ryde Housing Scheme? What was the biggest threat?

No. The Housing Commission. That was the biggest threat because if affected so many. I mean it was one thousand and thirty acres you know. So it was a big area and it was the area from Quarry Road, along North Road to Watts Road, Watts Road into Bridge Road to Herring Road. Herring Road right to Epping Highway (in those days it was known as Spooner Highway) and then Epping Road down to Lane Cove Road where the overpass is and then right back along Lane Cove Road right back to Quarry Road and up to the top. So it was enormous big area.

Q: The people you organised it with at the North Ryde School of Arts where the property owners within that area? Had you all received letters from the Housing Commission?

Oh yes. It was already gazetted that this was going to be acquired by the Housing Commission and there was nothing you could do on the land without permission and if they ever gave you permission you would never be compensated for it. I noticed there were pegs on our properties too. They were going to leave you one block where your house stood and that's all you were going to get.

Q: What did the North Ryde Defence League do. What was your course of action?

We called public meetings to the people. We invited the members of Parliament to come there. We invited Council. We did a lot of printing. We had an aerial photograph of the area. We ???????? to represent us in Parliament who was then Ken Anderson representing Ryde. He tried to bring that up in Parliament but he was ruled out of order I believe. We tried to get deputations to Clive Evatt who was Minister for Housing and he refused to interview us. When we went to Ryde Council and I was on that small group of people that went there we received no support from them whatsoever. You just continued to do writing to different people but we weren't getting anywhere. Gradually they were resuming as people got fed up of waiting. We were forcing it because we were cultivating our land and when they came along to put pegs all around our property, I remember saying to them "well let us continue to plant our crop and just give us three to four months notice when you want to come in with your machinery and we'll just stop the crop". So they didn't acquire us straight away. There were quite a few people that continued to cultivate their land but the people who were not cultivating their land they thought they may as well take the money and so something else because they were sure that they would lose it.

Q: Where the land was leased to a Chinese market gardener, the owner might be the type of person who would sell. Would that be the case do you think?

In some cases yes but then if the owner was getting some rental then he may be happy to leave it until the time come. Fortunately for the majority of all the Chinese gardens I knew around the area, they were not acquired. I mentioned the Benson's property. Eventually they sold to the Italians who came along later on.

Q: In that big area you mentioned, how much did the Housing Commission actually acquire?

I would say at least a third. Some of the houses that they built then have since been demolished and re-sold privately but some of them are still there. If you look opposite "El Rancho" there is a lot of Housing Commission on the Herring Road side of Epping Highway to the right side, a lot of Housing Commission there and a lot in different areas.

Q: Did your parents feel upset at this stage?

Yes. Very upset.

Q: Did they feel their living was going to be taken away from them?

Very upset because they would have to start all over again. They would get little money for their property. There wouldn't even be enough to replace it a long way away and we knew the area and no, we were all very, very worried. As I say, I never missed a meeting. I used to try and harass all our members of Parliament to try and do what they can.

Q: How did you eventually manage not to have your land acquired?

The new seat of Bennelong was formed in the Federal Parliament and as we had nobody to turn to to assist us, there was a gentleman who was going to stand for this new seat of Bennelong a chap by the name of John Cramer and he came to one of our meetings. We invited him to come and asked him if he could help us in any way. He explained to us that being a State matter, it was very, very hard for Federal Government to try and do anything with it but with the elections coming on and if the Menzies Government was elected into power he would endeavour to try to do what he could to assist us by having the money diverted to the War Service Homes which build a better type of home and brought a better type of person into the area rather than the Housing Commission. As it turned out the Menzies Government was elected. John Cramer was elected. I don't know who was responsible for it but the funds to the Housing Commission were drastically cut. The War Services Homes were built particularly in the Wick's Road area in North Ryde. In all the old army area where they had army trucks and things for the army, they all became housing areas. The Housing Commission found out it didn't have any money to even acquire the land. A few of the bigger people then put pressure on the Housing Commission, people who owned larger quantities I believe. They put pressure on the Housing Commission "either resume us or pay us or release us". That was when it was released.

Q: So you were released at that stage?

We were all released at the one go.

Q: So you are talking about the election at the end of 1949 when the Menzies Government got in and of course a State Labour Government at that time?

At that time there was a State Labour Government yes and of course Clive Evatt was the Minister for Housing but then we are talking about the Federal Government was the one I believe was the one that would have turned off the supply of money to the Housing Commission and diverted it more to the War Service which it was controlled by the Federal Government.

Q: What did you feel you had learnt from this North Ryde Defence League. Did you change your political ideas or was that in line with your political ideas?

Well, when I went to Ryde Public School as a young boy there was one of my friends, his father was a fireman and he was just an ordinary worker. They were giving out badges outside the school asking the boys to wear badges which said "Vote 1 Labour", for the Labour member and this boy's father was the Labour supporter. He was a fireman at Ryde and they were nice people. He was a very good friend of mine and I would have thought if the Turner family. you know thinks that Labour is good, then it has to be good as a young man and I had not thought anything else of it. But then when John Cramer and the Menzies Government got in to power and we supported John Cramer in the election at North Ryde which I would say he would have received 80% of the vote because of the farmers that were affected then my views changed because he was able to help the people and I felt it was wrong to be able to take something off another person. It just wasn't right and to me the Labour Party then was a nasty thing because they were doing these sort of things. Whereas, if the Federal took it they had to always negotiate it with you if they bought the land. They would pay you a lot better than the Housing Commission would. So my allegiance has been to the Liberal more.

Q: Did you actually join the Liberal Party around this time or after?

Yes. We formed a branch in North Ryde around about that time and I suppose to this day I would be the only member still of the Liberal Party of the North Ryde branch. The only other person who I think, no he had to resign recently, was my very good friend Jim Hull. Jim was a very great supporter of us too because although they were not in the area affected in the Housing Commission, I know that his father and Jim supported the party very much. I suppose I would be the only one there now of the North Ryde branch of the Liberal Party.

Q: During the 50's and 60's, what changes did you see in the operation of the market garden and did your parents start taking a back seat as they grew older?

No. No. They kept working at the same level. Then around about the late 50's when we found that everything had been sub-divided and we had all these roads coming to our boundary fences and stopping there and then people were building their homes taking shortcuts through our property. A lot of the crops were "walking" you know. They were helping themselves as they went through. You didn't put up massive fences up you just had two strands of barbed wire and that was about it to keep the cattle out more or less. We found that we were in a position that we knew that we had to eventually sub-divide. We had the choice of doing of what everybody else had done and gone to the Baulkham Hills area. All the people who had sold from this area all bought properties in Castle Hill, Dural you know all in that hills area. Even in Carlingford. One of my uncles bought a big area in Carlingford, which was all

farmland but I looked at it differently. I felt there is no future in that. Only more hard work inland. So I heard that there was some good land, which was full of Yugoslavs in an area called Warriewood Valley. So I went and had a look and I could see there were a lot of glasshouses, a lot of farming but no Italians in that area. While we were driving around we saw a notice of a property for sale, so we bought another three acres in Warriewood Valley, which we cultivated in conjunction with here so we had something else to go to when we cut this up. Well, what we did find is because of the tropical temperature of Warriewood Valley, it's a hotter climate than it was here, we found we used to grow a lot of celery. We specialised in celery. We found that we could grow the celery about five or six weeks earlier in Warriewood because of the different climate than we were able to grow here because in Springtime your celery would go up to seed in the centre. We came very, very close almost to producing celery all the year round. By combining Warriewood and Ryde, we could grow it earlier and later here. Then later on when we were forced to cut the land up here mum and dad still kept a big area about 2 acres about six or seven blocks of land in Small's Road. which they still cultivated. and we also cultivated Warriewood. It was pretty hard work traveling backwards and forwards all the time because it is about thirteen miles.

Q: Were you employing people by this stage or were you still managing as a family business:

No. No. The only people we ever, ever had was weekend workers. People who worked on the factories, lived in Glebe, Surry Hills and that area. People who got to know who would come, to catch the tram and come to Ryde terminus where the Civic Centre is now. I would pick them up there around about five or six o'clock off the truck. Bring them home. Have a nice big meal which they, they were all single men you know their wives (or they were not married) were overseas and they would have a lovely chat. There would be about three of them.

Q: Were these Italians?

Italians. They would have a lovely meal then chat at nighttime and around about nine thirty they would go to bed. We'd provide accommodation in the house that we built at the back that we moved to the back and provide accommodation for them to sleep. They would then, early next morning, they would be really rearing to go. Help you out in every way they can on the farm. Breakfast! Eggs! Bowl of eggs like that would be, I can remember one chap "little Joe" he was ????????????? and strong and he would eat four or five eggs without any trouble you know. They would have a good breakfast and then they would help out on the farm. Lunch - a nice lunch and then teatime there would be a nice tea. Sometimes they might go to the pictures you know from here and walk down to the Rialto and go to the pictures occasionally but mostly they would want to chat and get together. Sunday was also the same. They would get up, do a day's work and around about three o'clock we always knocked them off. We would load them up, put all the vegetables that they could carry, fruit whatever we had, eggs and that would last them for the rest of the week. Around about three thirty you know I would take them down to

the tram. They would get about two pound a day. They were paid two pound and board. This was their argument, they paid two pound and board so they used to say "if we didn't come here to work and enjoy it we would only be walking the streets and we would be not saving two pounds, we would be spending two pounds and so they were able to save their money. Whatever they got from us they were able to save, pay their board and they would have enough fruit and vegetables and eggs.

Q: To board in Town?

And board in Town, little rooms. We made a lot of nice friends and retained their friendship to this day and they respect and appreciate because we used to look after them.

Q: When these other families came that you mentioned before, did you feel this was the beginning of a real Italian family community for yourself and your family. Did you feel like the Godfather?

Well, funny when you just mentioned that word you see we had no relatives here at all. The first person to come out here was my mother's brother, her eldest brother. Now, he was one of the first to come out here and then he later on brought his family out. But while all the men came out individually by themselves first, I would have to do all the paperwork. I'd have to be sending all the money to the wives, any correspondence, anything that had to be done. Any letters that had to be filled in. Everything that had to be done by them I, would do it. The agreement that we had was that if I spend one hour with you you know doing this or sending money away, you come and do one hour's work for me and that worked quite all right. They appreciated that but I used to have to do all their paperwork. Later on when they gradually made money, they bought their wives and children out and they settled in this area until they had enough money and then they went and bought their own properties. And they have all done well, they have all bought their big areas of land and they, well one has passed away. Dad's brother passed away but his children here are all married to Australians. My cousin she has I don't know ten or twelve grandchildren now, so really from them there is very little line of Italian blood in there because we have all inter-married in most cases.

Q: As you were very protected and chaperoned and not allowed to go out at all, how did you meet Rose and I bet they were pleased that you chose an Italian girl.

Well.

Q: They must have wanted to keep you away from the Australians I suppose, did they?

Well. I think they wanted to keep my away from anybody at first they wanted to make sure, because there were a few of them that used to hop around and you know be very friendly with mum. We had a friend, family the ???????????????? family who were close friends of the family and one of them was getting married and he was marrying this girl from Glebe. Now she was a cousin of Rosina who ended up as my wife. We first met in the Catholic Church in Glebe on the corner of Abercrombie Street and Broadway. There's a Catholic church there. I had never seen Rose before and she hadn't, she was only a few weeks off turning fourteen. I would have been sixteen and a half and her other cousin who was chief matron of the wedding, matron of honour, introduced me to Rose and said this is your partner. So I accepted this as my partner and I liked the idea of it and tried to ring up occasionally. It took about five years on the phone before I eventually was allowed to go in and pay them a visit. Of course mum and dad were pleased with Rose you know the Arena family because of what else was hovering around here. She would rather that I associated there but I never ever had anybody else only that, and I just persevered until I almost gave up because I couldn't get an answer out of her. Her mother maybe had a lot to do with that but what it did do it gave me, you see the Arena's were very, very wealthy. Supposed to be very wealthy, very well off and you know they had a lot of airs about them. Am I right in saying that Rose? Not many people were sort of good enough. I don't know, prove myself you know but I'm good enough for them you know. As my mother taught me as a little boy, the world is like a ladder. Go up and you can come down. You always want to be very careful and I always done one rung at the time up the ladder and here I am today.

Q: On that note I think we'll finish unless there is anything else you would like to add?

Well, all I want to say is I am so lucky that my parents decided to come to this country and I was so fortunate to have ended up here and when they say that Australia is the lucky country I can only say that the harder you work, the luckier you will be.

Thanks Ross, I really appreciate that. It was a great interview. Thanks very much.

END OF INTERVIEW