



Fitzroy History Society Oral History Project 2015-2016

Transcript of interview with Rose Mary Brondolino

(Interviewed by Rosa Simonelli and Marion Glanville from the Fitzroy History Society at Fitzroy on 26 February 2015)

Rose Mary Brondolino, who conducts a law practice in Fitzroy, talks about her very early years in southern Italy before she came to Fitzroy in the mid-1950s. She provides anecdotes and descriptions of her childhood growing up in Fitzroy as an Italian migrant from 6 years old, the traditional preparation of food, various festivities and celebrations and family views on politics and religion.



START OF TRANSCRIPT

- Facilitator 1: Can you just tell me what your name is and where you got it from?
- Rose Mary: My name is Rose Mary Brondolino. Rose Mary is after my grandmother, [Rosa Maria] and Brondolino of course is my father's surname.
- Facilitator 1: Where were you born?
- Rose Mary: Southern Italy.
- Facilitator 1: Can you remember anything about your early years in Southern Italy?
- Rose Mary: Yes, can't you? [0:23]
- Facilitator 1: No, I can't. But I was two when I came here so no, I don't have any memories of before I was two. But you tell me, what can you remember about Italy?
- Rose Mary: Well I can clearly remember that we as a family lived in one room, right. That was our bedroom, our dining room, our toilet, our washing area. But when I say washing area it was just minor washing because if we had to do major washing we went to the local fountain and used that. That also included dishes you washed there. But this bedroom was - well, we didn't own it we somehow rented it; I don't know how, where we got the money from.
- My father worked as a labourer and my mother also worked and she would go out and gather olives, that's how she got paid, to pick up the olives from the ground. I clearly remember when my father would go to work I'd - because we were upstairs - I'd be up at the window and I'd shout to him, [spoken in a foreign language] don't forget to come home for lunch, I get hungry, and he would laugh. But he'd be home for lunch.
- Facilitator 1: Did he bring food back for lunch?
- Rose Mary: That I have no clear recollection of.
- Facilitator 1: Did your grandmother live with you as well?
- Rose Mary: No, my grandmother lived further down the road in a wooden shack, it was literally a shack. It was just a wooden shed, I suppose we'd call it these days here, but it was a shack and I can remember I'd go down there to play at her place. She had a bit of a garden and I can clearly remember - I was not a very good girl, I was



a bit naughty - crawling up the fence to get to the tree to pick the fruits and I went - I was about to fall and my hand went on top of the shed and I impaled myself on a nail. I still have the hole there.

Facilitator 1: Gosh, good heavens, so you do. [2:34]

Rose Mary: Yeah, and I was hanging and screaming.

Facilitator 1: Oh God. How old were you then?

Rose Mary: I would've been all of about two, three or just over three.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, I thought you were pretty small when you said you were crawling, yeah.

Rose Mary: I was trying to crawl up, yes.

Facilitator 1: Oh dear. What do you remember of your grandmother?

Rose Mary: She was a lovely person. My grandmother used to be a nanny for the local noble so although she was illiterate because back then Mussolini hadn't yet arrived and Southern Italians were not entitled to an education. But having said that, she was a very bright person and in fact she spoke fluent Latin, fluent Italian - proper Italian, not the dialect - and she would talk to the local priest in Latin. No-one else could understand what they were saying but they knew what they were saying, they understood each other.

Facilitator 1: Was it through the Church that she learnt Latin?

Rose Mary: I can't say, Rosa, I can't say. I don't know how she learnt it but you may well be right because one of her cousins was Archbishop Reggio. I remember travelling from [Barabodi] on the bus the long journey to Reggio so she could see her cousin, she would drag me with her on the - do you know the cathedral there in Reggio? You would've been there, I'm sure, we would go in there, this Archbishop would, they'd chat, chat, chat away in Latin. I didn't have a clue what they were talking about.

Facilitator 1: Is it possible that your family's fortunes could have, with the various invasions and the various interferences with the south, that your family's fortunes could actually have diminished by the time your...

Rose Mary: We had no fortunes. [4:32]



- Facilitator 1: But you may have in previous generations. Do you know anything about previous generations?
- Rose Mary: Well I've tried to Google the name and it comes up that we are somehow related to the nobility, we just lost it all. But don't know how they got that. I really don't know.
- Facilitator 1: You'd need to do proper researchers, yeah.
- Rose Mary: Who cares?
- Facilitator 1: No, it's interesting.
- Rose Mary: Can't get any of it back, no.
- Facilitator 1: History is interesting.
- Rose Mary: It might be interesting but it might upset me as well so I really don't want to know.
- Facilitator 1: Now you mentioned Mussolini. Obviously your family lived through the War, what sorts of stories did they tell you about the War?
- Rose Mary: Well my father was in the War right, he fought for the Italians in the War and he's got nothing but praise for the Germans. Hated the Americans, hated them, and I can remember as a child we'd be watching TV, watching *Combat!* - did you ever watch *Combat!*?
- Facilitator 1: Yes, and lots of other war films as well, war TV shows as well.
- Rose Mary: Well *Combat!*'s one I do recall, I don't recall others. Oh, then there was, was it the comical one which was okay. He would sit there and watch it and he would say to me Rose Mary, don't believe them, the Yanks, the Americans were not like that, they were not that nice. That's what he'd tell me but he would never explain what he meant by that, what they did or did not do that he thought was not nice, so I can't tell you.
- [6:07]
- Facilitator 1: There's a book by Norman Lewis which I'll lend you, it might answer some of those questions.
- Rose Mary: What does he say?



Facilitator 1: He was with the English and they occupied Naples and he just talks about - I won't stop now because we've only got a couple of hours, we haven't got all day.

Rose Mary: Well quickly tell me.

Facilitator 1: Oh no, he was just basically talking about the sufferings of being Neapolitans, not only, I mean obviously under the Germans to a very large extent but also under the Americans and the English and the exploitation that they had to suffer.

Rose Mary: Well as I said my father never went into it, never said to me, told me why they weren't nice people. So I can't tell you. He had the greatest respect for the Germans, other than German Shepherds.

Facilitator 1: That's ironic.

Rose Mary: I actually worked out years later when I got my own German Shepherd he went hysterical and I couldn't make the connection why. I would say it's a dog. It's a German Shepherd. It's a dog. It's a German Shepherd. Then I recalled that he did tell a story once. He actually was a prisoner of war at a German camp and who were patrolling the area around there? German Shepherds. He saw how clever these dogs were and how they were just on guard all the time.

But when I got my German Shepherd, [Thorsby], and I brought him home so they could meet him he fell in love with the dog. He just fell in love with him. I'll say look, I have to take Thorsby to the vet he's sick, he'll go hysterical, what's wrong with him? Don't know, that's why I'm taking him to the vet. So yeah, anyway.

Facilitator 1: What are your happiest memories of Italy?

[7:56]

Rose Mary: Living with my grandmother because when my father - my father came out here in 1951 when I was three and I still remember we went to Messina to see him off, wave him goodbye, and I could see him standing on the ship up against the rails and tears just came down, they were just pouring down his eyes. I suppose because he thought he may never see us again, so he was a bit concerned about that.

I started to cry as well and my mother sort of grabbed me and shoved me towards my grandmother and said, you can have her, I'm keeping the boys. So I went to live with my grandmother. Best thing she ever did for me, best thing. Because my



grandmother was a talker, didn't scream at a child, didn't slap you, did nothing, she'd talk to you. So I lived with my grandmother for three years until I came out to Australia.

I have a clear recollection that one morning she was walking me to kinder and I was walking behind her and I said oh, oh, didn't dress myself properly. She just turned around and said, what do you mean? I didn't dress myself properly. She says well, how come? What have you done? I didn't put my underpants on.

She said, that's fine, she said you've got two choices. You can either go up - we can go back home and you dress yourself properly but you'll be late for kinder or you can keep going to kinder. Oh, go to kinder. She said it's fine, you can, but don't lift up your skirts. That's all she said to me. No telling off, no nothing. Also, I was christened, baptised, when I was five.

Facilitator 1: That's unusual.

Rose Mary: Yeah, four or five, yeah. My ex-mother, because...

Facilitator 1: We may not go into that here.

Rose Mary: No, no I'm just explaining to you why - wasn't prepared to have a baptism just for me, she'd have to spend money on just me so she waited for the boys so we could all be baptised at once. I can clearly remember standing at the font and of course the priest was [10:16] asking the godparents questions, I was answering them. I'd just butt in with the answers.

Anyway, this was a Saturday, apparently the following morning being a Sunday the priest decided to give a sermon on me, how he found it extraordinary - look, and in a way he was right, Rosa - that a child should be baptised at such an age. That she knew more about her religion than the godparents did and answered all the questions. So everyone knew who he was talking about.

Of course - my grandmother was a very religious person and of course, as the church mass ended and the people came out on the steps of the church, one person, one neighbour, one resident, said to my grandmother well the priest had a great time, he's just given a sermon on your granddaughter. Well my grandmother lost it. She waited for the priest to come out and she then, well abused him I'll say. She apparently said to him, next time you decide to discuss women in public talk about those prostitutes of your sisters, we all know who they're fucking. He just ran off.



- Facilitator 1: You actually started the way you meant to go on by the sounds of things because it's not the first time that a priest has talked about you from the pulpit, is it?
- Rose Mary: No, not about me. Who else did it?
- Facilitator 1: I just remember your aunt's funeral.
- Rose Mary: What did he say about me?
- Facilitator 1: Oh, look you were busily trying to get people organised and he was trying to control you and you wouldn't listen until you actually finished what you wanted to do and...
- Rose Mary: Can you remember that? I can't recall that, what was I trying to do?
- Facilitator 1: I think that I've got a bad memory but yours is even worse than mine. We'll talk about it later, it just struck me as interesting that it happened back then and it's happened again. Let me go on to another thing now. Can you describe your journey out to Australia and [12:25]
- tell us about the members of your family at that time and if you can remember any of...
- [Over speaking]
- Rose Mary: What do you mean about the journey to Australia? What do you mean?
- Facilitator 1: Didn't you sail here?
- Rose Mary: Yeah, yeah, came out on a boat.
- Facilitator 1: Alright, so tell me all about it.
- Rose Mary: Hated it.
- Facilitator 1: Okay, when did you leave Italy? Where did you leave from?
- Rose Mary: Well we got here in about late September 1954, maybe early October, because I know I had already turned six but I'm not too sure if I turned six on the boat or initially, I can't recall that part. Well I'm not a sea person, I'm not a boat person and I hated it because my mother made it my duty to look after my brothers on the boat. So I had to be running after them all the time making sure they didn't fall overboard or whatever.



The only thing pleasant I found about the boat were two things, a) the dolphins and the whales, I liked watching them; and I must say the staff were very nice to me, for whatever reason they were.

Facilitator 1: Can you remember the name of the ship?

Rose Mary: Was it - no, I can't. No, I can't. It'll come to me if I think about it long and hard but I can't recall at the moment. I can still remember we arrived here in Port Melbourne and my father was standing on the wharf waiting for us to disembark and we were looking through the bars of the boat, I suddenly said, there's my dad. Dad, dad, dad. He, Rose Mary, Rose Mary. So as soon as I was able to I ran down the gangplank straight into his arms, he picked me up, hugged me, whatever, hugged everyone else then put me on his shoulders.

[14:17]

It was late at night, it wasn't during the day, late at night and we walked from Port Melbourne to North Melbourne to the house.

Facilitator 1: Who's we?

Rose Mary: My father, my aunt, mother and the children.

Facilitator 1: How many children? Ages?

Rose Mary: Three, three. I was six, Joseph would've been about three or three and a bit and Tony would've been about 12-18 months. My father put me on his shoulders as we walked, Joseph was running around and Tony was being carried. I can remember Joseph was running around simply because we walked past the Vic Market, so it was dark, so it was late at night, very late at night and the Market had already shut up, the stalls had shut up. I can still see it in my mind's eye, and Joseph ran in through stalls and got himself lost.

Of course his mother goes hysterical, I've lost my son, I've lost my son. My father said, I don't care, I've got my daughter and continued walking [laughs]. Finally, they found Joseph so he got home. We lived in, as I said, North Melbourne and it was a little weatherboard cottage, loved it, with a veranda and if I stood on the veranda and looked to my left I could see the sail masts and somehow I got it in my head that if I could get to those masts I'd go back to my grandmother.



Anyway, mother was actually quite a harsh woman because even from that age I had to do a lot of the shit work. Set the table, clear the table, wash the dishes, help with washing of the clothes. I was only six, and I'd never done that before, Rosa. I'd come from living with my grandmother and I was not exposed to this to now having to do this. At some point or other I must've decided that I really wanted to go back to my grandmother and I must've come to the point where I thought just give me the shits once more and I'm off and out of here.

I can't recall what happened, so something must've happened because I can remember packing my little bag and I'm leaving home, I'm following the masts, I'm going to get to those masts. So I [16:56] started walking and I'm walking up Errol Street and I've got my eye on the masts, I've got them in my sight, and I walked straight into a man, Dad. He said, what are you doing up here? I'm in Errol Street mind you, I'm all of about six and a half by now. No, I hadn't even started school, no so I wasn't even six so it must've been the same year we arrived.

He said, where are you going? I said Dad, I've got to get to the masts, I've got to go on the ship I'm going home to Nonna. He said why? I said oh, she's giving me the shits. I said, she's really upsetting me. He said oh okay, I don't have a problem with that. He said, but why don't we just go home and talk about it and if you really want to go back to Italy he said I'll send you back to Italy. Silly me, I believed him. So we walked back home, he was talking to me and I'm talking back.

Get to the house, knocked on the door, his wife opens the door and whack, he gave it to her. He said next time my daughter leaves home because of you, he said, you'll end up getting out of here in a coffin. But that didn't stop her, Rosa, that didn't stop her. I learnt from then on not to tell my father, I learnt. Anyway...

Facilitator 1: To keep the peace, basically.

Rose Mary: Well only because I remembered what my father said. Anyway, the house wasn't good enough for her. Why? You're Italian, why? Come on? Am I the only one who can think?

Facilitator 1: Not big enough? Timber?

Rose Mary: Poor people lived in timber homes, wealthy people had to have brick homes. Remember? So she got on his back until finally they ended up buying a house up the road here.



- Facilitator 1: In Fitzroy Street.
- Rose Mary: Yeah, Fitzroy Street, up the road - and I would've been about seven when we moved to Fitzroy and my father was very careful with his few coins. He didn't spend them unnecessarily. So he wasn't [19:17] going to catch cabs, he had to pay for the removalist and that was enough money gone. So we walked from North Melbourne to Fitzroy and we came up Grattan Street past Melbourne Uni. I said oh, what's that? I said, it's beautiful. Then my father said to me, he said well, he said it's a college, that's what he said to me, it's a college. When you're a big girl if you're good enough you might go there.
- Oh, school. I said, I don't think so, another school right [laughs]. So anyway we continued walking until we got to the house, so that was in - I would've been about seven, it would've been what? - 1954 I was six, so it might've been 1955, early 1956 and we moved there. As I told you the Standard, there was a blood bath, five o'clock closing, police cars all over the place and this wasn't just one night a week, it wasn't just on a Saturday night, it was every night. Do you remember that?
- Facilitator 1: Mm, we lived opposite the Standard. It would've been in the '70s.... early 1972.
- Rose Mary: Oh no, this was in the '50s.
- Facilitator 2: What number did you live in Fitzroy Street?
- Rose Mary: 259.
- Facilitator 2: We were in 270.
- Rose Mary: 270, that's further down this way. Yeah, and if you remember on the corner of Moor Street and Fitzroy Street was Apps' funeral parlour?
- Facilitator 2: Yes. [20:41]
- Rose Mary: We lived next door. Yeah, so and I was fascinated with Apps' funeral parlour as well. If you remember, well okay, if you remember also the laneway like, let's say this is the house and it's got a laneway and another laneway, further up the road that laneway would go more towards Nicholson Street. That's where they used to make the coffins, remember?
- Facilitator 2: Oh, no I don't remember that.



- Rose Mary: Really? Oh, okay.
- Facilitator 1: The other thing too is that Fitzroy changed a lot between the mid-'50s and the '70s.
- Facilitator 1: I mean the '70s was when...
- Rose Mary: Oh no, in the '70s no they weren't making the coffins there by then, they'd gone, they'd gone.
- Facilitator 1: In the '70s it was renovation heaven but in the '50s it was...
- Rose Mary: So you wouldn't remember the dairy either? Larchers, remember? I've still got one of their bottles somewhere.
- Facilitator 2: Mon Ami was our milk bar. The little restaurant Mon Ami...
- Rose Mary: That used to be a milk bar, yes, Mon Ami, yes. I remember. I used to buy my stuff there.
- [21:42]
- Facilitator 2: Mm, and then there was a milk bar also on the other end of that street which is that, the Good - what's the name of the pub on the...
- Facilitator 1: ...Labour in Vain.
- Facilitator 2: Labour in Vain, that was a milk [bar back then].
- Rose Mary: Yeah, this was owned by the [Tosins], Italians. Tosin, T-o-s-i-n? Yeah, the Tosins, it was Mrs Tosin because we used to buy our milk - when Larchers moved on - and our bread from them, yes. Also around the corner there used to be the fruit shop, the [Tuccis], remember them?
- Facilitator 1: Definitely, they were there in the '70s, yeah.
- Rose Mary: Yeah, oh they were there for ages.
- Facilitator 1: Where Red Rice is now.
- Rose Mary: Yeah. Well they were there when I was a child here and I can remember on my way to school I'd go by the milk bar, [because they had Pezzanis] and I would get a granny smith apple and a grapefruit and I would just say, my father will pay and



they said don't worry about it. They never charged me, okay. So I'd be eating these things before I got to school, yeah.

Facilitator 1: I'll go back a little bit. Can you talk about when you first moved to Fitzroy, basically what was your family life like? What were the good things that you remember about your family life in Fitzroy when you first moved in as a child?

[23:06]

Rose Mary: Well Rosa I'll tell you what my family life was like, you tell me whether or not it was good. I as a child, during the school holidays we had to stay home and look after the three brothers.

Facilitator 1: Because your mother was working?

Rose Mary: Yes, okay, and cook for them and when Charles was born I would have to take him to the lady who looked after him during the day early in the morning then after school pick him up. Now, I'm nine, eight, nine, 10, but I had to do all that. As I said, I had to clean the house, that is mop the floors, polish them and I wasn't allowed to use a mop because I would splash water all over the place, so I had to do all that by hand. Wash by hand, dry by hand, polish by hand and buff by hand.

I used to have to - we used to change the bed sheets once a week - so I used to have to change the bed sheets then put them in a copper, boil them up then wash them, then hang - I couldn't even reach the clothesline to hang them up.

Facilitator 1: What about your aunt?

Rose Mary: She worked as well.

Facilitator 1: So all the adults were working and you...

Rose Mary: This is during the holidays, okay? That's what I used to do during the holidays. Then on the weekends we'd start all over again, clean, polish the furniture, polish the brass numbers on the door outside, cook. I mean from a very early age Rosa I was making gnocchi, linguini, lasagne, I used to make the best lasagne out. I'd have to wash the dishes, set the table, clear the table, do all that sort of stuff.

Facilitator 1: Is that why you're not very, you're not exactly a domestic goddess now? Because you had enough of it in your youth?



Rose Mary: I've done enough, thank you. Now it's a case of what can people do for me, not what can I do for people anymore. What can people do for me. Of course my father had a real thing about his children playing outdoors, only because of the people who were around us.[25:35] Remember I told you about the [Peirces] and other people, and they weren't...

Facilitator 1: Can you tell me about the Peirces? Apart from the fact that I've got a really bad memory it might be interesting for the tape.

Rose Mary: Well I think, yeah, well I think you should speak to Pat [Durango], she actually knows more about them than I do. I just know that they lived - you know where the house is, where the flats are in King William Street, the corner of King William Street and Fitzroy Street there are flats there. Well there used to be a huge old building and I can only think that once upon a time it may have been a boarding house or something. It was basically used by people who didn't work, had no money like the Peirces or that maybe just wanted free rent.

They would come down to the pub, they would create the problems. There was a lady called Jenny - was it Jenny? Yeah, I'm sure it was Jenny - and she'd come down, she'd get pissed out of her head then she'd start fights between the men. [Laughs] They fought for it, and you know where that little playground is in King William Street well once upon a time it only had a merry-go-round, it had a monkey bar, a merry-go-round and a slide. Next door to that used to be an SP bookie thing.

I can remember walking past it as a child and hearing all these sounds coming from inside and thinking, what's going on, what's going on? Next door to it was a vacant block of land, it was just vacant and I loved walking past it because often I would find threepences because people would just drop it, that's why I would go past it.

Like Annette Peirce, oh, I think I told you the story. I'm walking down King William Street one day, I think I'd been to confession at Sacred Heart, I'm walking down King William Street to go home and she's behind me, for some reason she didn't like me. So she said something to me and I must've bit back because the next thing I know she takes my shoes off my feet and throws them over the gate.

[27:53]

Back then where the restaurant is now the building behind it there used to be a packing sort of factory there. But I couldn't open the gate because the gate had



been locked so I couldn't get my shoes, but imagine me going home without shoes, I'd live a long life, wouldn't I? So what did I do? I walked back to the police station, I said I'm going to report you to the police, and she followed me.

So we go to Fitzroy Police Station and I'm standing at the front desk telling my story to the sergeant behind the desk and she's standing beside me and she said, you're lying. The sergeant picked up the ruler, back, he said to her. He said, I know which one of you two is lying, it's you he said.

Facilitator 1: Would the Peirces have been known to the police back then?

Rose Mary: Yeah. So then he said right come on, let's go and find these shoes. So of course we went to the place and they were still there, so I was telling the truth. Now the police had to call someone to open the gate so I could go in and get my shoes out.

Then she had a cousin called Jimmy, I don't know whether or not his surname as Peirce or [unclear] can remember him as Jimmy. We're playing in the playground and her brother was giving me cheek this time and Jimmy used to be the local bodge, with the pink socks on, the black tight pants, the pink shirt and the studded belt. So her brother was giving me shit and I said to him, well take off your belt. He said, what for? Just take it off please. What for? Jimmy, just take off your belt.

Jimmy's nice, right. So he removed his belt, well like I stuck it to her brother with that belt and [the next thing I knew] Jimmy said, good on you, he said, he won't be coming near you again. Then they kept away from me after that, they just kept away from me.

Facilitator 1: Were they involved in criminal activity back then?

Rose Mary: Oh, I would say so but I can't confirm it. I would say so, yeah.

[30:14]

Facilitator 1: Were you surprised to hear about the way that they developed later on in the...

Rose Mary: I don't know if they're the same Peirces though, I'm assuming they are but I don't know. I don't know.

Facilitator 1: What else can you tell me about neighbours that you had at that time?



Rose Mary: Well basically all our neighbours, Rosa, were either Italians, Greek or Maltese. We had a few Australians. Now on the corner, you know where the playground is there's a laneway, there's a house on the corner there and they were Mr and Mrs Glover there and they were lovely. They made it their point in life to make sure that when we played on the streets or in the playground they actually would look out for us and make sure we'd behave ourselves, didn't belt each other stupid, didn't hit each other on the head with a rock or something. Oh yeah, they'd be standing there just supervising us.

Facilitator 1: Was there a lot more activity happening on the street in...

[Over speaking]

Rose Mary: Oh yeah, we played in the streets back then, yeah. Well so much so that when the TV came out in 1956 my father - well this used to be the picture theatre, remember? It used to be the old Hoyts picture theatre. Beautiful old building, look, the Council should be shot. Why they would allow a beautiful - it was very similar to the Princess Theatre - why would they allow a beautiful old building like that to be pulled down and this monstrosity constructed?

Yeah. Why? So we used to come down here every Saturday afternoon and watch the flicks. Anyway, when TV came out my father worked out it was cheaper for him to buy a TV than give us all sixpence each to come to the flicks. But more importantly he [32:16] had another plan in mind. See he couldn't supervise us when we were here, he didn't know what we got up to, whereas with TV he'd sit with us and he would - he had a rule, we could not watch TV unless he was home.

In fact, I remember we broke that rule one day and my father got home from work, we were all watching TV. You know what he did? Walked up to the TV and put his foot through it to teach us a lesson. He said, I told you, you cannot watch TV unless I'm at home. Why? Because he could censor what we were watching. He didn't want us watching these funny American shows that might influence us, no, no, and I was never allowed to watch *Mickey Mouse Club*, the Mouseketeers. Why?

Facilitator 2: American?

Rose Mary: My father made two comments about that show. The first comment he made was, those children will be the ruination of the world. He did not like Walt Disney, he hated Walt Disney with a passion, just hated him. Did not like him. Not only - I



think I know why, a few years ago it was made a one line news headline and never heard of again, he apparently was a pederast.

Facilitator 2: Walt Disney?

Rose Mary: We never heard it again. ... Okay, but why didn't you ever hear it again? Because I'm sure the Disney people got straight onto that, otherwise what would it have done to Disneyland?

Facilitator 1: Mm. Now, what kind of things did you like about living in Fitzroy in those days, in those early days that you came here? [34:05]

Rose Mary: I didn't, I had to live here, I was brought here. I had no choice, that's why the minute I could leave home and buy my own house I ran away from Fitzroy.

Facilitator 1: But you've kept your practice here.

Rose Mary: Well that's different, because once you're established moving offices is just not that easy firstly, and secondly now that I've got my practice here it's actually far more, location wise, suitable to me. Because if I need to go into court I'm only 10 minutes away. If I need to go to [Tarda's] office it's 10 minute away. But if I were to move out that a way it takes half an hour to get into the city, if not more these days.

Facilitator 1: True. Now, can you kind of describe what sort of food you were eating in that period?

Rose Mary: Italian food, pasta. My father, if he didn't have spaghetti for dinner or for lunch it was not a meal, always have pasta, [sorgo], [Rovinj]. Come summer - because back then you only bought what was in season because we only got what was in season if you recall - my aunt would insist that she'd make pasta with eggplant sauce, but that was so hot because it had all this chilli, it was so hot I couldn't eat it. Sure as eggs it would be made on a very hot day. So we'd have that.

Also, once again because we bought things that were in season, you could only have soup in summer because all the veggies were out, you couldn't have it in winter, you just didn't cook that. So we basically had Italian food and of course the week leading up to Easter, you know that, it would all just be fish, fish, fish. You couldn't get anything else. We'd do our shopping at the Vic Market, we'd buy our meat there, our fish there, our veggies.



We would buy our pasta from Andrew who used to have a milk bar up the road who'd order it for us. But we'd buy three or four boxes at a time, we just wouldn't buy one box, that was how much we went through, three or four boxes at a time. Then we'd have the [36:21] homemade pasta as well, the gnocchi, the linguini, the - you know the ones you curl and roll, you roll? What are they called?

Facilitator 1: Yeah, Pille. They're a typically Calabrian...

Rose Mary: You'd curl them on a knitting needle. We would have that.

Facilitator 1: You can buy it now at Mediterraneo.

Rose Mary: Had enough of those in my younger days thank you very much, don't need to buy them. Yeah, that was basically - and lots of salads, my father loved his salads so we had to have a salad and, yeah. Cheeses, we had lots of cheese.

Facilitator 1: Did you make a lot of your own sauce...

Rose Mary: Oh, we made all the sauce, yeah.

Facilitator 1: Sausages?

Rose Mary: Yes.

Facilitator 1: Tell me about that home food production cycle.

Rose Mary: What do you mean? Well, you've been through it.

Facilitator 1: Darling, I'm not on the tape, you are.

Rose Mary: Well what do you mean? You just have to make the sauce. You would buy the tomatoes at the Vic Market, we'd have to go there and order them. Occasionally we'd order them from - you know we used to get the trucks driving past - we'd order from them, and it'd be a massive job. It was just like you wash the tomatoes, and you'd have to get your boxes ready and keep [unclear] as well. Then you lined the boxes with white towels, whatever and slice up the tomatoes. [You] knew what it was. [37:49]

Slice up tomatoes, cut them in half, douse them in salt, another [throw], more salt, another [Roma] and you'd top them up with bricks. So by the time you got up the next morning all the acid had come out and then you'd start mincing them so you'd get just the sauce out. Of course you'd have to boil the bottles, you'd



have to be very careful with those too to make sure the bottles didn't pop, yeah. Then we had to go around collecting beer bottles because we didn't have enough beer bottles for the sauce.

The same was with making the sausages. You'd be up all night dicing the meat, the fat and the lean. Once again you leave it overnight with lots of salt, whatever and seasoning then you get up the next day and you'd have to put it through the mincer with the tube and off you're making sausages. Then you'd have to let them cure outside under covering. It was about a month I think? For about a month and we would preserve ours in olive oil.

Facilitator 1: What about vegetables, did you pickle vegetables like eggplant...

Rose Mary: Yeah.

Facilitator 1: Did you help...

Rose Mary: Not with the pickling I didn't, and we used to make our own home made soap. I still can't use shop bought soap because I break out but feel my hands with my home made soap.

Facilitator 1: Was this a whole family business or was it just the women who did the work?

Rose Mary: Just the women [laughs]. What do you mean a family business? Just the women. My father wouldn't come near it, no way.

Facilitator 1: No, I just ask because a lot of the men did join in.

Rose Mary: No. [39:39]

Facilitator 1: What about festivities, what were your Christmas' and Easters like, and birthdays?

Rose Mary: Well birthdays were very, very - how can I put it? Really not celebrated until we got a lot older. But Christmas, New Year, New Year's Day and Easter Sunday there were huge celebrations, yeah. It would either be a case of we'd be invited to a place where there were lots of other people and of course we'd do the same for the next festive occasion which might've been New Year's or Easter Sunday. It was all spent with friends.

Facilitator 1: Did you have an extended family?

Rose Mary: No, just us.



- Facilitator 1: Can you describe what your Christmas lunch would've been like?
- Rose Mary: Oh, we had turkey, we had pork, we had the ham, yeah, and then we had the cutlets and of course the pasta. This time it had to be home made because it was Christmas Day or Easter Sunday it had to be home made, yeah. We didn't use the shop bought one then.
- Facilitator 1: Do you remember any special festive dishes, any special festive sweets or anything like that?
- Rose Mary: Well my father used to go up to [Cilla's] and buy the cakes there. The almond cakes and the cannoli, yeah. He'd come home with boxes. I couldn't much get my mouth into them, yeah. In fact, Cilla, if you remember, he was actually, he actually got his TV before we got ours and he used to have his in the shop but facing the window and everyone would just walk past that shop and stand in the window and watch the TV.
- Facilitator 1: I don't remember because I lived on the other side of Fitzroy.
- Rose Mary: Yeah, no but I remember telling you that, yeah.
- Facilitator 1: There was a shop in Smith Street, I think it was Patterson's and they had a...and they had a television.....set in the window and there'd be crowds standing outside watching it.
- [41:51]
- Rose Mary: Oh, Patterson's. The furniture people. Yeah, well Dominic's father had that too, yeah.
- Facilitator 1: What kind of values do you think kind of most of the people in Fitzroy believed in? What values did they believe in in those days?
- Rose Mary: Well as far as I'm concerned they cared for their neighbours, they looked out for you. If you needed help they'd give it to you. They were honest, they wouldn't cheat you. They just wouldn't. Also they had this attitude of giving. We had a little plot of land so we could make very minimal, my father could grow very minimal veggies. So if the lady across the road, they were Italian back then, they had the big front garden, if she'd made too many tomatoes to [unclear], she'd just dump them at our place. But most of the Italians were not just in Fitzroy, were all around, and Greeks were like that.



Facilitator 1: Was there any conflict with the different nationalities that lived in...

Rose Mary: Not that I recall, no.

Facilitator 1: Can you kind of say what kind of skills did you learn from growing up in Fitzroy do you think?

Rose Mary: Well it was a different era back then, Rosa. I mean my father taught me a lot, i.e. be careful, and I think I told you the story when I was walking down the - I went to the Academy - and after school one - I used to love walking down the laneways because you would see very funny things. To a young girl seeing a man on top of a woman I didn't know what that meant but I couldn't work it out. I thought, what are they doing? Anyway. [43:57]

My father worked six days a week unless it was a weekday, and it was a Friday and I'm walking down the laneway, so I'm looking around trying to see funny things and I walked straight into his legs again, a bit like Errol Street, right? Oh, oh he said and he grabbed me. He said, what are you doing here? I'm coming home from school. Whack.

He said, I'm going to ask you the question again, what are you doing here? I just told you, I'm coming home from school. Whack. He said, I'm going to ask you the question again, he said, and answer it properly. What are you doing here? I said, I'm coming home from school. He went, whack. He said, look around you and tell me what you see. I said, apart from you no-one and nothing. He said, precisely my point. He said, you could've been sexually molested, raped, abducted, murdered, he said, no-one would've seen a thing. He said, don't you ever walk down a laneway again. I haven't done so since.

Funnily enough - this was, I was in Grade 6 - in Form 1 the local police sergeant used to come up and give us lectures. The first lecture he gave was a warning about girls, don't walk down laneways. I thought, he's spoken to my father, they've rigged this up between them. He gave us exactly the same reason why you shouldn't walk down laneways. Anyway, his next lecture was on the mode of dress, girls. Be careful about how you dress when you're walking down the street, he said, because it could be an invitation to be assaulted. Mm, mm, okay. I didn't know what he meant by that either.

The next lecture he gave was on cheques. I'd never seen a cheque in my life and he explained to us that unless cheques are written out properly and signed they're



worthless. I can still remember what he - he said girls, watch out for the sign, [CD sign, CD sign]. I still remember that [laughs]. Yeah, so and I mean all around you I think people were trying to help you, yeah. [46:18]

Facilitator 1: It was a policeman who was giving those lectures that you're talking about?

Rose Mary: I think it was the police sergeant, yeah.

Facilitator 1: What jobs were your parents doing at the time?

Rose Mary: Well my father was a labourer, my mother worked in the kitchen at the eye and ear hospital and my aunt worked as a [presser] in knitwear factories, yeah, that was it.

Facilitator 1: Did - you mentioned before that you had quite a wide circle of friends, what...

Rose Mary: The family did, yeah.

Facilitator 1: What can you tell me about these family friends?

Rose Mary: What do you mean?

Facilitator 1: Were they friends from Italy? Were they friends...

Rose Mary: Oh yeah, yeah the Pezzanis. Most of them were Pezzanis, others might've been ring ins.

Facilitator 1: Was your family interested in discussing politics?

Rose Mary: My father was, yes.

Facilitator 1: What were his political views?

Rose Mary: A bit like yours Rosa, he was a Labor man, okay. The first time I voted, when I was old enough to vote, it was up in the town hall and he walked me to vote and as we were walking along he said to me, how are you going to vote? I said, I can't tell you that, it's called a secret ballot. [Laughs] As we were walking along he said, you're going to vote Liberal, aren't you? I said, I can't tell you that, it's a secret ballot. Anyway, we went in and voted, walked out, he said did you vote Labor? I didn't answer. He said no, you voted Liberal, didn't you? He went hysterical that I should vote Liberal.... I did it on purpose because I knew it would upset him. [48:22]



- Facilitator 1: Did you have ongoing - oh, so you weren't a committed Liberal, it was a...
- Rose Mary: Still am not.
- Facilitator 1: It was a reaction against your father.
- Rose Mary: Yeah, I've said to you before Rosa, I'd vote communist if I thought it would help this country.
- Facilitator 1: Did you have ongoing battles with your father over politics?
- Rose Mary: No, no I refused to get into an argument with him about politics. I mean he was just dead set in his ways, he was a Labor man, he felt Labor did more for the working class man and... So he was a complete Labor person.
- Facilitator 1: Religion, how important was religion to your family?
- Rose Mary: Well my parents only went to mass on the main days, i.e. Easter, Good Friday, Christmas, New Year's. After that my father - my father really had very little time for the priests and the nuns quite frankly, very little time. He just, I suppose in his own mind - and a lot of Southern Italians are like this, he was not unusual - he just thought that the priests and the nuns, et cetera, just grabbed all they could get and gave very little back to the poor people.
- It's still just like that today, Rosa. I mean in fact that's, if you remember - oh, you probably would remember - when the mafia first got going in Sicily, now it's not Southern Italy because the mafia's not Southern Italian, [unclear] they're Southern Italian, the mafia is Sicilian, let's get that straight, okay? Well the first thing they did was? Attack the priests, burn down the churches, right. Because they blamed the Church for them not having enough. [50:25]
- I don't blame them, Rosa. I mean and it still is the Church's attitude today. They'd rather make one cent from 20 trillion people than hope to get a million dollars from a few people. It's quite, when you stop and think about it - because when I was in the village in Italy I'd be going to church all the time and people would always be putting money in the tray. Not a lot, just [spoken in a foreign language] decimo, but these people didn't have enough food on their table. Did the priests give them anything back?
- I can remember I was at uni and it was Good Friday and I got up and made my breakfast, I'd forgotten it was Good Friday so I made myself bacon and eggs for



breakfast [laughs] on Good Friday. My father came in and he started screaming. I said, what's wrong? He said, do you know what day it is? Yeah, so what? Do you know what day it is? I said, what are you talking about? He said, it's Good Friday. It still didn't twig. He said, look at what you're eating. Anyway.

Then the mother comes running in and he screamed at her too, look what she's eating, why aren't you supervising her? She said, leave her alone. She said, I can remember as a child on Good Friday I was asked to go and give the parish priest a message. So she said, instead of knocking on the door I just barged straight through. It was lunchtime and there's the parish priest, at the table sitting down having his lunch, chicken. Chicken, on Good Friday.

Facilitator 1: Your father's objection to priests and nuns and the Church didn't impact on his religious belief though, did it, from what...

Rose Mary: No, he believed in God, yeah. Yeah, he believed in God, yeah.

Facilitator 1: So he disassociated the Church to the...

[52:41]

(interview continued on another day)

Facilitator 1: If you look at those photos of Hanover Street, can you remember that streetscape?

Rose Mary : Vaguely, I can remember some of the houses. I can remember that,

(Timecode 00:00:35)

I can remember the bluestone house. All I can remember basically is that, I wasn't there for long Rose, it was before they were demolished.

Facilitator 1: That's right, What year did you move in?

Rose Mary: We came out in 1954 and I think it was 1956 when we moved into Fitzroy.

Facilitator 1: And you would have been about 8 then?

Rose Mary: Yes. I went to school that way because I was going to Sacred Heart to start off with and then to the Academy a couple of years later so I would have been walking up that way to school.



- Facilitator 1: So you would have been quite young when that was your environment.
- Rose Mary: The houses that stick in my mind are these houses, big houses I don't know why I - perhaps a love of them or what impact they had on me.
- I do have a recollection that in between the big bluestone mansions there were little weatherboard cottages and I didn't like those so I paid very little attention to them. I think one of the reasons why I didn't like them because when we lived in North Melbourne we lived in a weatherboard cottage - I actually did like that one because from the verandah; I could look over and see the bay - we had a view. But my father didn't like weatherboard houses, why? why?
- Facilitator 1: You tell me.
- Rose Mary: If you owned a wooden house you were poor. It was like living in a shed.
- Facilitator 1: Things have changed.
- In the late 1950's, can you remember the people that lived in those houses that existed around your neighbourhood?
- Rose Mary: I can remember houses there now because they haven't really moved or changed except for where the flats are now, so I can remember on the corner of Fitzroy and King William streets, where the flats are, there was a big huge house is it here? It may not be but I can try and get it for you.
- Facilitator 1: Can you remember what architectural style it was?
- Rose Mary: (identifying photo) - I think it is this, Rosa, on the corner of King William Street I think this is it. It was huge, it was an old hotel or something it was all run down, not looked after. Who lived there? ... The Pearce's?
- Facilitator 1: Is that where the Pearce's lived? Would they have been the only people who lived there or was it a rooming house?
- Rose Mary: No it was full of derelicts and drunks, I don't even know if they paid rent. The reason why I remember all this is I can still see it now ... is that for some reason Annette Pearce hated me, and I know why I can remember. If you go into King William street you can see a little park there. When I was a small child there was a monkey bar, merry-go-round and slide. I was playing on the monkey bar ... she



was doing something to me - she whacked me - so I ran home crying, and my father told me to fight my own battles - then back out there again a few minutes later and she gets stuck into me again - I couldn't go home crying any more because my father. Her cousin Jimmy, who's surname I can't remember, was there - he was an attractive man, a bodgie, with tight pants, pink socks and a studded belt. I said Jimmie take your belt off please, and I got stuck into her and she never forgot it. A few months later after that I'm coming home from Mass on Sunday morning and she was walking behind me and got stuck into me again - so I said I would going to the police now, so I just turned around and walked to the Fitzroy police station but she ghoulishly walked in behind me. So I started to tell the police officer about it and she said 'she's lying' and the police officer said, 'no, if anyone here is lying, it's you'. After that Rosa she never bothered me again.

Facilitator 1: So it was a situation where you had to learn to fight your own battles and stick up for yourself?

Rose Mary: Every other child in the area were all ... or Wogs. If you did it to me we really weren't like that, we played together. The boys would play cricket, football. We had these little racquets -we played tennis and I don't know what it was like up your end of town, but down here, Rosa, if we played in the streets the parents used to take time to supervise us. 8 to 10 it would be my parents, from 10 to 12 it would be your parents. So we couldn't really get up to mischief. The only time we could was when we played in areas that weren't supervised. We couldn't get up to too much mischief, Rosa as if we walking down Brunswick Street there were coppers. Do you remember that?

Facilitator 1: Yes, I certainly do. The police presence was always fairly visible.

Rose Mary: If you did something wrong, the boys would run the other way and what they didn't realise was that they gave themselves dead set away because then the coppers would Remember here the picture theatre? Do you see the guy who's been the manager here? Haven't you seen him? Where have you been?

Facilitator 1: I don't have as good a memory as you do Rosa.

Rose Mary: He's blind and he walked around with a stick and he just whacked you and he did that to me once. I said you were nasty to me now and you are still nasty.

Facilitator 1: Did you come to the pictures often?



- Rose Mary: We used to be allowed to go to the pictures every Saturday afternoon until TV came in then my father decided to chip it, to buy a TV so he could watch it as well. So he bought a TV and after that we were not allowed to come down here.
- Facilitator 1: Did you get a television set fairly early?
- Rose Mary: Yes
- Facilitator 1: Did the neighbours come and watch television at your place?
- Rose Mary: Yes. That's OK we didn't mind sharing back then, it was the done thing.
- Facilitator 1: It certainly was.
- Rose Mary: And also back in those days Rosa, I don't know if you remember, but if you had to buy something from the shop, but you didn't have money I used to come down to Brunswick Street and say 'Andrew I need to get some bread, my mother will pay tonight'. He said 'Just take it'. Do you remember that. And on the corner of Moore and Brunswick Street, there was a little milk bar run by Italians, Matarases, and we used to be there all the time buying stuff. 'Take it, take it'. We would pay later.
- Facilitator 1: Were the shopkeepers all local, did they live above the shop or did they come in from ...?
- Rose Mary: Matarases lived above the shop and a vegetable and fruit shop further up lived above the shop, but also they all knew each other.
- Facilitator 1: Were these the people that your parents mixed with as well?
- Rose Mary: Well but with the Matarases, no because they were northern Italians. With the Tuchi's yes because Mr Tuchi and my mother came from the same village and were somehow related, cousins whatever. With Andrew no, because he was Greek. The fish shop were Greek. But we all knew them.
- Facilitator 1: The parents would stop and speak to each other in the street I assume. So there weren't any issues with nationality?
- Rose Mary: As far as we were concerned Rosa, we were all migrants. And they were all working hard and I think that was one of the reasons why they all shopped at these shops. And also don't forget back then we didn't have supermarkets or cars and we used to shop locally and walk to the Vic market and do our shopping



there, we used to walk to the city. Not catch by tram. But mostly around here we were all Ities and where the Lotto shop now is, Michaelangelo do you remember him?

Facilitator 1: I certainly do. That's where we got our magazines from Italy, he was a lovely man, very well educated. There was also an Italian shoe shop on Brunswick Street that sold kids shoes.

Rose Mary: Brunetti's, yes.

Facilitator 1: Was Brunswick Street a busier street then? because I remember when I moved back in 1970's a lot of the shops had closed down. It was just before the revival in the 80's. Most of the shops were either boarded up or empty. What was it like in the 50's and 60's?

Rose Mary: Well I was a child and I would try to avoid it because they knew my parents; if I did something wrong, Rosa, I would get be reported and also in a way unless you had people supervising you it was quite a scary area. There were a lot of drunks around and I would be absolutely freaked out at the Standard Hotel at 5 o'clock closing. The Aussies would walk out absolutely pissed and punching each other. Moore street at Fitzroy street and Bell street at Fitzroy street, were all blocked off by police cars and there were quite a number of police officers in the street and I can distinctly remember one Saturday and my father walked past as it was 5 o'clock closed and my father said 'get inside', and they were already in trouble and if it wasn't for the fact that the Wogs supervised us was this safe. We had to be completely careful. And even walking to school. Have I told you the story about me of when I was walking home from school on Friday afternoon, it had raining and I didn't stop to realise that because it was raining my father would be home from work. I was looking around; I saw a couple, a man on top of a woman, I was only a kid, right. I was only coming home from school. I ran into my father's knees and he grabbed me and he said 'What are you doing here?' and I said I was coming home from school; whack. He said 'Look around and what could you see' and I said no one just you. 'That's precisely what I am trying to tell you. You could have ben assaulted, raped, molested, murdered and nobody would have seen a thing. Don't you ever walk down a laneway again on your own'.

Facilitator 1: When we move into the 60's, can you remember when the demolition was going on? What happened to the area once they started demolishing houses. Can you remember any impacts?



- Rose Mary: Actually there were more people moved in because being Housing Commission houses. I think they got them for almost nothing. It's like what was happening when Housing Commission apartments so we got more people moving into the area. What do they pay? \$45 a week?
- Facilitator 1: What about during the actual demolition itself.
- Rose Mary: I would have remembered that because I walked up King William Street to go up to
- Facilitator 1: So you don't remember the noise or any of the disruption.
- Rose Mary: I would have remembered it But there wouldn't have been much obstruction because we didn't have cars. Even if we did have cars we wouldn't have been driving up King William Street, we would have been walking up the street.
- Facilitator 1: So you don't remember having any impact, but did it change the feel of the neighbourhood?
- Rose Mary: But a lot of the people You must remember Rosa, firstly the Aussies didn't think this was a good neighbourhood. The other reason was that, I sometimes get quite angry, they talk about the great Australian dream of owning your own home. We Wogs taught them that. We Wogs owned our own homes. They were renting all over the place they were after the more affluent suburbs not like Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Carlton it was full of Italians, Greeks buying their own homes. Back then it was actually reasonably cheap, 5000 pounds they paid for that house in Fitzroy Street. It would have been late '55, early '56. 5000 pounds was a lot of money when you were only earning a pound a week.
- Facilitator 1: I know that in 1950 my father paid 1400 pounds, and lots more people in the area. Do you think the reason was that's why people in Fitzroy were very house proud because they looked after them
- Rose Mary: I think that was part of the reason, but they owned their own homes. They had good homes, stone homes and had come from homes with one room just a wooden shack. They had to cook, eat, sleep, go to work, wash yourself in one room.

END OF TRANSCRIPT