



Fitzroy History Society Oral History Project 2015-2017

Transcript of interview with Sister Fidelis and Sister Amalia

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

Sister Fidelis and Sister Amalia are Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, part of a small group who came out to Fitzroy from India in 1970 with Mother Teresa to open a community house in Gore Street Fitzroy, at the invitation of Archbishop Knox. They talk about conditions in Fitzroy at the time and their charitable work in Fitzroy, mostly amongst the lonely, the homeless and alcoholic men. They provide many anecdotes of people they have worked with over the years and the changes they have seen, including the growing prevalence of younger people with drug issues. They also talk about differences in working with the poor in India and the contrasts of physical and spiritual poverty.



START OF TRANSCRIPT

[811_0010.wma]

Facilitator 1: I will start recording now. This is Rosa Simonelli interviewing Sister Fidelis and today's date is 26 February, my brother's birthday.

Sister Fidelis: We arrived to Melbourne with Mother Teresa and my five sisters. We came but we have no house so we stayed there two days in Loreto Sisters. Two days because our guardian [unclear] not here so he rent the room. So he came on third day and he saw the house that is 54 Gore Street, yes. [Unclear] his mother, mother came with him to see the house and same day we came to claim the house. Because this is the one play the organ for church and they take the house but it was very old so we have to clean and everything.[1:20]

Facilitator 1: Was it in bad condition?

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, it was bad because past day we had [unclear]. We clean everywhere but rained when we went to sleep in. It was raining and rain pour on us so Mother said Sisters, will you go down [unclear] nowhere to, no place to sleep, to put the bed or something. So we had the first room only this big, only that much here and we have to sleep six of us. But we slept on the floor and that is we supposed to make the chapel for next day priest is coming for the mass to bless the house so there we were.

But we had good people to help us [unclear] Mother Teresa's ... and they had children and some of the workers, our co-workers, Mother Teresa's of co-workers they were there. [Dean Pietz and Peter Pietz], he was doctor and they came to help us. So everywhere bang, bang they put, yeah, so they did the house for...

Sister Amalia: Aha. There is something.

Facilitator 1: You've found something.

Sister Amalia: Well we haven't got a copy, just this one. It's about next door. Do we wish to look at them, show them.

Facilitator 1: Oh, lovely, yes.

Sister Amalia: This is the [bunker], that one you may keep but this one we need to make a copy.

Facilitator 1: I'll tell you who will be very interested in this, the Fitzroy Residents' Association. For National Heritage Week they are having a happy birthday house where they put the history of the house on the outside [3:32] so that people can come and see and find out about what it was like once upon a time, I suppose. So I will pass this on because they might be very interested.



- Sister Amalia: I have not read it myself. Oh, I can see the first - 1864, 1853 it was. So this one came after.
- Facilitator 1: Yes, and the first...
- Sister Amalia: Great dream [laughs].
- Facilitator 1: The first house you had at 54 Gore Street, that was built in 1854.
- Sister Amalia: Oh yeah.
- Sister Fidelis: Oh.
- Sister Amalia: Still after yours.
- Facilitator 1: Still after. Her house is definitely the oldest.
- Facilitator 2: Well they found - the Fitzroy History Society found a map from 1853 and they identify 16 houses still standing and mine was one.
- Facilitator 1: We were talking about when you sisters first arrived at number 54 and the condition of the house, yes.
- Sister Amalia: Bit below human expectation or duress.
- Facilitator 2: With rain coming in the room.
- Sister Amalia: Yes, when Mother Teresa brought them the one that was used as a chapel in the front...
- Sister Fidelis: Yes.
- Sister Amalia: Which one was leaking?
- Sister Fidelis: Top floor, yeah, the second...
- Sister Amalia: That one, the top floor. So they put it down.[4:57]
- Sister Fidelis: Yeah, there also...
- Sister Amalia: She had the broken [unclear] plaster so they put around the altar to make sure that it's ...She wanted to use an umbrella while she's sleeping.
- Facilitator 1: Oh, that's very funny. Now with Mother Teresa do you know what triggered her coming to Australia? Okay, can you tell me why Mother Teresa came to Fitzroy in the first place?
- Sister Amalia: Mother Teresa came to Fitzroy invited by Archbishop Knox who prior to coming to Melbourne was apostolic nuncio in India where he met Mother Teresa on several occasions and saw the work that the Sisters were doing in India. When Archbishop Simonds died Archbishop Knox was invited to take his position as



Archbishop of Melbourne. He saw the need of homeless people who were living on the streets, in the boarding houses, in any kind of shelter. [1:18]

Most of them were alcoholics, most and while drunk they didn't realise what they were doing and often were caught by the law and put to prison. After a short stay in prison well, they came back to their usual place and usual way of life and continued to drink and continued to commit the same crimes that were seen as crimes by the law at that time. Of course, within short time they would be imprisoned again and on release did not have any change of life but came back to the same life, came back to the same friends, the same shelter and possibly even drank more and committed silly little petty things which were against the law.

So it was continuous from the street, if you like, to prison, from prison back to the street, to prison. So Archbishop Knox asked Mother Teresa if she could bring the sisters and try to break the cycle of men who had no occupation, they didn't have anything really to look forward in life. They spent their days and weeks and months drinking really, drinking and unaware really what they were doing. There would be indecent exposure on the street, there would be a lot of swearing, when money was desperately needed there were break ins and such crimes for which they were imprisoned.

Facilitator 1: Was Fitzroy identified as the place where this problem existed primarily? Was that problem more prevalent in Fitzroy than anywhere else?

Sister Amalia: Well see when Archbishop Knox invited us he needed to find a place for us and I think sister knows more details of why we came to 54A, as it was known then, Fore Street in Fitzroy rather than Carlton not Fitzroy or any other area.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, this house we had no house to live so Cardinal Knox was in Rome and he came back and that time we were in Loreto Nuns, we were living two days. Third day we came to 54A Gore Street because [3:54] Cardinal [unclear] Mother and this is the house we have to live. So we came, we have ... we have to clean everything but [unclear] that one, many things we have to clean and we have to hammer and everything, and repair. So many people that came to help us.

Mother Teresa [unclear] not here so have children, ... children, they came to help. So we have co-workers before we come they began to help us so they were with us. The same, the third day, we began to clean and evening, evening, they call about 12 men, alcoholic men, some they hold the rosary, some they, you know. We didn't tell them that we are here and [unclear] nobody we know but they came and they sat down outside. Nothing is there and raining a little, but they still did not mind and they sat down.



Mother came to see them and they wish Mother and they were very happy that God told ... maybe them, that they came there. So Mother say to us Sisters, give for them some soup and we had nothing and our superior she went to buy the soup packet and we made soup, bread, and we give for them. So Mother say to us and when she saw them she said go and look for the house for them. So we did after three days we have to go out to see the house where we can find for them the house.

Facilitator 1: How did you find adapting to a new country and a new culture?

Sister Amalia: Empty streets.

Sister Fidelis: In the street we went two by two, some Sisters they go on other side but two of us, we walk here to find the place and we taught many people we meet but early morning, about eight o'clock, we are walking, no people walk that time. They didn't [unclear]. Yeah, so no people there are here and the only one lady in the whole street she say anything, sister we don't have any people we can put, we have nothing, no people comes. [7:03]

So in the town I take the end of the road one lady was coming, walking forward, and said oh, you are sisters. So we told her sister, in that place you go one old lady's living she said, and she doesn't like anybody. She doesn't like nuns, priests, nothing. Then we said thank you to that lady and we went and her name was [Peggly].

Sister Amalia: Mrs Peggly.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, Mrs Peggly and then we knock that door. She [unclear] she said, who are you, she said. Then we said, this lady told us not to ... you answer your own door. But she said, nuns and priests don't come, I don't want to see them, she said [laughs].

Facilitator 1: No, I like to see nuns and priests. So the first big surprise for you was the empty streets ...and then the fact that the first woman you spoke to said I don't want to see nuns or priests.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, but still we were happy.

Sister Amalia: Because of the difference in India and here. See Sisters were all used to packed streets, hundreds and hundreds of people, not walking, living on the street.

Sister Fidelis: Yes, so we did leave her but we came away and after two days once more [unclear] then she came in at the door and smacks it open and she said, no, I don't want anybody, I don't want anybody to talk she said. But we came from India, we said, we came from India, we want to talk with you, but she said no, and she



closed the door. So [unclear] but we tried many times and at the end she came the friend, she took us inside and near the door we stood and we talk and she ask about us. We told from India we are coming and she for you only we are coming. We like your people, we are come to see them we say. [9:43]

We talk with her and then once more we went, we went many times to make her [unclear] friend. Then another time we went she took us inside and she had a fire and she told us sit down, so we sat down then and we had good chat and we became friend. Sisters were very much they took care of her. One day she said, you can cut me the wood so - to burn.

Sister Amalia: Fire wood.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, so we cut for her. So we came very friend and she wants the Sisters after, so many Sisters they went to visit her.

Facilitator 1: So you were working with men who were alcoholic and had other problems, but also with people who were on their own.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, on their own or [unclear]. We went each house to knock the doors and then came to know many of them and we went in Fitzroy everywhere, Collingwood and Carlton, everywhere.

Sister Amalia: See our work is to seek out the lonely, the forgotten, the abandoned, those who are sort of forgotten by the society, those who struggle in any way.

Facilitator 1: So those were the ladies that you came here with.

Sister Fidelis: Yes.

Sister Amalia: That's why Sisters were knocking on the door to find if there was anyone who belonged to that category. Because Mother Teresa believed, and he said this before the Sisters arrived here, that now you have medicine almost for everything but there's no medicine for feeling forgotten, abandoned and lonely.

Facilitator 1: Were there a lot of people for you to help in this particular area?

Sister Fidelis: Yeah.

Sister Amalia: We used to help. [11:54]

Facilitator 1: No, that you helped.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, yes.

Sister Amalia: Oh, yes well like Sister Fidelis said without inviting, without seeking, without looking for them the men came to us seeking help.



- Facilitator 1: These days has your work changed a lot, have the people that you work with changed a lot?
- Sister Amalia: No it hasn't really, it has grown but it hasn't changed from the original plan, doing the most necessary things for people. Like we have soup kitchen in George Street and most of those are from boardinghouses, many of them are homeless, they live anywhere and they come for a meal. What has changed dramatically is that when the sisters arrived before alcohol was the primary thing.
- Sister Fidelis: Yeah.
- Sister Amalia: Most homeless men living in boarding houses were alcoholics or drunkards. Methylated spirits was number one drink when they couldn't afford other things. Throat spray, shoe polish, Brasso for polishing metal, all these things they drank because they were really alcoholics. But today there's very little alcoholics really, drugs is the main thing. There are some who come to our place who neither take drugs nor alcohol but they've got addiction like to gambling and such things, real addiction.
- Facilitator 1: So you help them as well.
- Sister Amalia: Yes, they're all welcome to come to the soup kitchen and have a meal and have a talk and they do, they like to talk.
- Facilitator 1: Do you find that there is still poverty in Fitzroy these days?
- Sister Amalia: Mother Teresa saw it more - in countries like Australia - more poverty [13:59] of the spirit rather than actual poverty and she found in an abandoned person, a forgotten person, that poverty. Actually she said on a number of occasions that it's very easy to fulfil the need of a hungry person, give them food and they are happy, satisfied. But it's very difficult to fulfil the need of a lonely person, especially a person who has been hurt by the family rejecting them, disowning them and no-one claims them as their own, they don't belong to anyone.
- Facilitator 1: Do you find that - because when you first arrived here Fitzroy was not such a wealthy area ...with the increasing affluence have you noticed other sorts of problems coming up?
- Sister Fidelis: Yeah.
- Sister Amalia: Well there is more loneliness. See just recently one of the men who comes to the soup kitchen, just last Wednesday, today's Friday, he was very upset. He said, can I see you after I finish my meal? I said, sure Vince. He finished his meal and he came and I could see he was very upset.



He lives in a boarding house just in Brunswick Street, oh Fitzroy Street here, very close and he held my hand and I said, what is it Vince? Well he said, my friend who live just few doors from me, I went into see him, the door was open so I walked in to see him and he was dead for I don't know how long. He said the smell was just unbearable, it knocked me back. So I said, what did you do? He said, I called the police. Now this is not the only case, we've heard of many cases where people die alone, no-one knows what their condition is, how sick they are, no-one knows how much in need of companionship they are.

This is going away from Fitzroy, but when I was in Sydney, Surry Hills, we've got high rise flats very close to us and there was this couple living on the 11th floor, Ron and Mavis. Ron was sitting at the little [16:33] kitchenette and Mavis was at the stove, they were talking, and suddenly Ron didn't answer. So Mavis said, Ron? He still didn't answer, so she turned around, he wasn't there. She looked, the window was fully open, she looked down and she saw. He threw himself down from the 11th floor.

Now, all the neighbours said how happy he was, how contented and they got on very well, but who knew the pain and the struggle that he had in his heart to commit such a thing, who knew? There are many who suffer that, no matter where they live. They're not physically isolated, they may live like in this boarding house and yet all alone, with no-one knowing what's deep in their heart, the struggle. Often in our visits when we are in contact these people they will pour out their hearts telling how they were rejected, how they were not wanted, how they were forgotten.

A man some years that we took care of who stayed first in 101 Gore Street and we help the man, Fred Murphy, he said I was drinking, I was drinking a bit. But then he said, I remembered it was Mother's Day so I searched my pockets and I found two shillings, he said, I wanted to buy my mother a bunch of flowers for Mother's Day, but I needed sixpence more. So he asked his friends, yes, one of them had sixpence and gave it to him.

He said I went to the fruit shop where they were selling flowers, I bought a bunch of flowers and I went to my home. I knocked on the door, I was really looking forward to wishing my mother a happy Mother's Day. I knocked on the door but my brother came to the door, what do you want? Well, he said, I just want to wish mum a happy Mother's Day. He grabbed the flowers from me, he said get lost we don't want you.

Years after when he came to us he was still in tears remembering that experience that he had to live with. Some time after he had desire to find his mother's grave



and I don't know the result, whether he [19:30] succeeded or not. But he lived with a painful memory that he was rejected from his home. That's one person.

There was another whose nickname was Socks because he had one leg and one sock, obviously, so people nicknamed him Socks. Well Socks came to our place because he was in a geriatric centre and they found they could not manage him, could not deal with him. He was rude, he would throw things, he would throw plates, he would swear at them so he was brought to our place.

To make the long story short, Socks was crossing the road when he was drunk, didn't make it, lost his leg. He was walking up the stairs drunk, he staggered and fell backwards and broke his neck. He was walking past something that caught his little finger, didn't even feel it, he tore it off. Now by the time he had cancer in the oesophagus and there was little hope, years ago. Geriatric centre helped him but could not cope with him so he was sent to our place.

After - well, he was put under my care and I was very careful remembering how he would swear, how he would spit, if you brought something he would throw it, I was very sort of careful even though I was taking care of him. So I would bring whatever he needs, he could take only soup that went through the finest strainer or ice cream or something liquid, he couldn't take anything stronger, thicker.

One day I walked in with something and I saw an armchair. I said Socks, are you going to sit in - because he was always lying in bed - are you going to sit in this armchair? He said no, and I said, is it for visitors? Well, not exactly. I said, who is it for? He said, it's for you. But why an armchair? He said, I want you to come and sit and talk to me sometimes. I know you're busy, you've got a lot of work, but come and sit and talk to me.

Anyway, these talks, long time after he revealed when he was 11 years old at home he was playing cricket with his brothers and he [22:12] happened to be good at the game, so one of his brothers said, you're not our brother after all. So he ran to his mother, mum, Ron said I'm not his brother. No you're not, she said, I picked you up in an orphanage, you belong to no-one. So - he was only 11 - so he said he walked backwards away from his mother, he said he felt as if he was in a daze, it was too much for him, he couldn't believe.

He ended up on the street with a gang, they needed food so they were constantly breaking in. Well, he soon learnt to drink, he said by the time he was 13, 14 he was an alcoholic. He was drinking and drinking and drinking. He needed money for the drink so they would steal and break in, whatever they could do to get the money which they needed. He said, I was as a juvenile in and out of gaol, in and



out of gaol, in and out of gaol and he said to me there's no God, I don't believe there's God. If there is a God why did he let me suffer so much?

He said when I had drink and cigarettes I had friends, when I had no drink or cigarettes I had nobody. So he was quite elderly when he came to our place and then he found that he was accepted as he is. He wasn't expected to become anything, he wasn't expected to change, but he was accepted and loved as he was. So that's the kind of people we dealt with at the very beginning and we still do.

So the work may have grown in the sense that we have soup kitchen, we've got a women's refuge for women in crisis, but we still seek the people who experience this rejection, this loneliness. Sorry, bit long.

Facilitator 1: No, honestly these are stories of your experiences.

Sister Amalia: That's the people we're dealing with, and they may come from what appears to be a happy family. But a person in this happy family may feel rejected. There's a beautiful story of a district nurse, she was doing a follow up of people who had strokes. So she had the address [25:03] and she would go and find out what happened to the person who had a stroke.

So she came to this particular place, she knocked on the door, the lady of the house answered then the nurse said, I'm looking for so and so. Oh, she said, that's my husband. Could I come and see him? No, sorry but no use. My husband's in bed all day long, he can't speak, he can't do anything, it's useless to go and talk to him. But then the nurse said, even though he doesn't speak may I just go and see him. You'd be wasting your time, she said. Well I'd like to waste a little time with him, may I go in? Oh, if you insist, she said. Come in, she said.

She opened the bedroom door and the nurse was surprised, the blinds were closed and it was dark, so she went, she opened the blinds. Well, she said, I'll leave you with him, I'm going back to the kitchen and the nurse started talking to him. Wife in the kitchen, not far from the bedroom, nearly dropped a dish. She heard her husband's voice, he was speaking and he - with a little difficulty - and he was saying no-one listens nowadays.

Facilitator 1: Do you get many young people come here now?

Sister Amalia: In need? Well in our soup kitchen yes, we do, sadly so young that I wish to tell them go back to your mother. But they can't go back because mum doesn't want them, mum doesn't approve of their way of life. They know they're rejected and they know where they'll be accepted. So they take drugs and all these things to deaden the memory, but they always wake up with the feeling worse than before



so they continue. It's a vicious cycle, they just continue mixing with these people and taking drugs and committing all the other crimes which you need to commit because you need the money. Drugs are very expensive. [27:31]

Facilitator 1: It's not a question of affluence either, is it? In India obviously there are pockets of enormous wealth, just as there are numbers of incredibly poor people. But in Australia which is supposed to be one of the most equal and affluent societies there are still these huge pockets of need. In terms of the work that you did in India and the work you're doing here, do you see a big difference?

Sister Amalia: There is an extreme difference, very big difference. As I mentioned earlier in India there's physical poverty, but there's spiritual riches in India. See a person accepts their condition, them that live in the streets they're proud of every comfort, every necessity not just comfort, need. Brother Andrew, who was a co-founder of Missionaries of Charity Brothers with Mother Teresa told a beautiful story.

It was his day of prayer, his quiet day, so to spend the day of prayer he goes to a railway station called Sealdah Station, one of the busiest in Kolkata. His quiet day he goes to such a place and he said he found the corner, he sat down on the floor and he observed, he observed. The sun had gone down and he said there were many people who were begging on the streets coming to sleep there. It was a huge area, big station, they were coming to sleep there so he observed. He said among them he saw a family, young couple, they had a little boy.

So they came looking, searching for little space because there were too many people. They found a little space and they put down their rags and the husband and wife just laid down to sleep. But the little boy - may have been 4, 5 years old - he got up and he danced and he danced and he danced and he danced. Smiling, he danced and when he finished dancing he sat down and lay down. So Brother Andrew explains how in the dire poverty, with absolutely nothing, the joyfulness of that little one and of others.

Sister Fidelis: I like that. [30:21]

Sister Amalia: Sister has a lot of experience in the work in India and in Australia, here.

Facilitator 1: What are the things that disappoint you most that you come across around here? Do you get disappointed by some of the things that you see?

Sister Amalia: Well I think the greatest disappointment is when they cannot accept that they are loved as they are and that God forgives. They seem to live with or hang on to that rejection and not believe that they are forgiven.



- Facilitator 1: Sister Fidelis, when you first came how did you find the people who lived here? Just generally speaking.
- Sister Fidelis: Alcoholics or...
- Facilitator 1: No, everybody.
- Sister Fidelis: Oh people, people they [unclear] their surprise that we are here and many questions they will ask, why you came here. So we have to tell that we came to see you, we came to work with you people [unclear] and we have to console some of them. Many people ... visited here with the Sisters, but now different houses and some of them they died who [unclear] we were going.
- Now you will see different from beginning that we see, but beginning it was more easy to go in the houses because we were new people [separate also, so because back then not all this ... they were there, so we had boarding houses we were going for the people and they asked us, they come sister, come and they are longing to talk with us. Yeah.
- Facilitator 1: Do you do very much work with the residents at the flats, at the Atherton Gardens flats? [32:58]
- Sister Fidelis: Yes, Sisters they go now and [unclear] so we went but not many houses and [unclear] that other people they from different country, not so many there anymore. Yeah, like the Africans now too. So we [unclear] be meeting them.
- Facilitator 1: What do you think is your happiest memory here?
- Sister Fidelis: [Laughs] Yes, happy because I am always happy because God touched me and brought me here in this place, but past day when I get, I said - well, Mother said, you go now look for the people. Then myself I thought how I will talk? My English they won't understand [laughs]. But with my people they are accepted and I was happy. When we began this house with one old man here and his name was Andrew and sometimes they were keeping Sisters, you, you look after him like that.
- So I was - old, he was very old - but still I was praying them, you know: I want to stay and I will work with this man. But he was [unclear] ill, but during the day he would go and [unclear] he would come back. So, but slowly, slowly people did begin to come old ones, so for them we give the place to sleep and half the people new, many of them they came for food. So we gave soup and bread, we gave, and [unclear] people they grow more and [unclear] they came to know us, then I help that day, many people help that day.



I hear sometimes, sometimes I was going visiting. But I love to do for them, you know? Talk with them, ask them how they are and keep and [unclear] come to know everybody how they are suffering, how they are. They are seeing many people, we took them that when they are giving up the drink, we try to take them to show their families, I want to go and see. So we took them but they didn't accept them. They call one man, he was beautiful and he was helping us and his wife said no, I don't want to see him she said. So but then we have to bring him back.[36:05]

So they'd stay long time with us, yeah, some of them then became good they got a flat for them, but some of them very old. One man died past in this house, yeah, because he was very old and we took him but he was appreciated that Sisters came. Thank you, coming from India and this and that, yeah.

Facilitator 1: Marion do you have any questions that you can think of?

Facilitator 2: Yeah I thought, I was just going to - I didn't really have too many questions, but I remember when I was working at St Vincent's in psychiatry you used to have young women come...

Sister Amalia: You were working there.

Facilitator 2: Yeah, I'm an occupational therapist and I was working in psychiatry there and...

Sister Fidelis: In 69 there.

Sister Amalia: Yes, 69 George Street we had women who had mental problem we kept them there for as long as they needed and many of those women would've gone to St Vincent's Hospital.

Facilitator 2: Because I remember the social worker would sometimes place them with you maybe on a temporary, as a halfway until they found their...

Sister Amalia: Yes, because those women could not manage on their own, they could not live on their own and they did not need to be hospitalised, like there were hospitals Mont Park and other places, they did not need really to stay there and yet could not cope on their own so we help them. When I went away to Papua New Guinea I related an experience very much of that work.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah, when - see I went to work New South Wales and Northern Territory then I came back. But this 69 they have to repair and so these ladies they look for then the houses and they began to repair. So from that time our sister from India, she came, and what they call our superior ask what can we do in this house? So this sister, Sister [38:28] [unclear] she said, you [unclear] start the soup kitchen. So [unclear] asked [unclear] if that is going on.



- Sister Amalia: Oh, soup kitchen. Our work may change, but it doesn't go away from the neediest, the poorest.
- Facilitator 1: What are the biggest challenges you face?
- Sister Amalia: Drugs, I think, because it's really devastating their lives, the drugs and when they are on drugs they just don't realise what they are doing and I think there's more crimes since drugs became very popular and common. In the beginning when we were dealing with these men, as I said, most of them were alcoholics or drunkards but majority were happy drunks. They were very happy and very generous.
- Sister Fidelis: Generous, yeah.
- Sister Amalia: Because I remember passing the corner of Gore and Webb Street, just that corner, that used to be a shop. It was pouring rain - this could've been in 1972 somewhere - and as I was just about to turn the corner I noticed two men, drunk, sitting under the shelter of the little shop there. They were emptying their pockets and I stopped to look, I said hello to them and one collected all the cigarette butts that he found on the street and he said here, they're all yours. They were very generous, they would give their last cigarette butt. They were very appreciative. Do anything for them, God bless you, God bless you, God bless you.
- Facilitator 1: Was it still six o'clock closing when you came at the pubs and the people would come out and...
- Sister Amalia: It must've been.
- Facilitator 1: Because at six o'clock there would be drunks everywhere fighting, do you remember that?
- Sister Amalia: Yes, yes, yes. [40:40]. Yes, the pubs was all closed and actually we were familiar with all the pubs. I have been inside the pub a few times too.
- Facilitator 1: Did that surprise you? Were you surprised by...
- Sister Amalia: It would have surprised the other patrons of the pub to see us coming in. But one thing is very interesting, very, very interesting. In the beginning people used to look, not recognising who we are, and yet people living on the streets in these boarding houses, the people that we call poor, sister they would call out from far. How did they know that we were sisters? They always recognised what we were while others didn't. Still, I cannot understand why but it's still a fact.
- Facilitator 1: That is interesting. Now, I'll just have a quick look, I think you've answered a lot of...



- Sister Amalia: More than there are questions.
- Facilitator 1: Is there anything that you can think of that you would like to say about you living in Fitzroy and the influence, maybe, that it had on you or obviously you've had an influence on the suburb and we've heard about it. But have you changed in any way through living here?
- Sister Amalia: Maybe we came to understand deeper what real poverty is by living here and working with the people here in Melbourne and other cities and places of Australia. While Mother Teresa often said that poverty of feeling unwanted, rejected and not wanted is greater than material poverty, we said yes, yes, yes but never really experienced and really understood it deeply as much as we do now.
- Because talking to the men, in general when I talk to them, I always tell them that what matters is what is in the heart. Because we can have an appearance - like that Ron and Mavis that I mentioned on the 11th floor, when he committed suicide - we can show on the exterior a certain face but deep down it may be different. You often find what's [43:24] really in their heart when you meet with that person again and again and again and when they'll tell you I'm so frightened, I'm so scared, I'm so lonely. I feel worthless, I feel useless, I feel rejected, I feel like I'm nobody.
- So maybe that's what we came to realise, what the greatest poverty is and it's not found only with those who appear to be poor, living on the streets or in boarding houses, or those who just drunk, you can have to some degree this poverty in families that look so well, so happy.
- Facilitator 1: That's actually interesting, since Fitzroy has changed so much...
- Sister Amalia: It has.
- Facilitator 1: ...in terms of the demographics - oh, I should ask you first of all, what changes have you noticed in - obviously you said from drinks to drugs, but have you noticed that some of the more affluent people can come to you as well with different problems?
- Sister Amalia: Yes, and they do. We are constantly asked please pray for so and so. There is a man, Robert, who was actually a volunteer at the soup kitchen and he came a few times pleading. Now Robert and his wife and family are very well off, very well off financially, but he came pleading, please pray for my daughter Kate, she's going through terrible depression and we just can't seem to help her. We love her, we accept her, but we can't get to her, there's like a barrier around. She's on medication, she's seeing a psychiatrist, but she just is not improving, she just seems to be getting worse.



Said I feel that these helps, psychiatrist and medication, even the love of the family is not helping her so that I turn to spiritual things and asking for prayer. We are asked a lot to pray for certain intentions. Someone is sick, someone is separated, someone is suffering from rejection. Many things we are asked to pray for.

Sister Amalia: So that wasn't exactly in the beginning, it slowly... [46:00] ...developed where people saw the need to have someone pray for them as well as other physical needs.

Facilitator 1: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

Sister Fidelis: I'd like to say good people here before, beginning, they were like against [unclear], no? Yeah, but after here this house of man, he very good with us, friendly, no, and he's the one who signed for the Sisters to come work here for these people. But people they went from many houses but now they didn't, maybe also, they won't. But people not complain here, not for us.

Sister Amalia: Very beginning. They did not know what we were about and they felt that this is not India, we don't need the Sisters, we don't want them in our area, we don't want them where we live.

Facilitator 1: And they didn't want alcoholics living next door to them.

Sister Amalia: No, they knew that where we live we would attract such people.

Sister Fidelis: So...but [unclear] alright. There also.

Sister Amalia: Yeah, we don't know how many people who lived at the time when Sisters arrive in 1970 are still here or whether they're new people but we feel accepted by the society around, by everyone. Actually a lot of people just pass going to work, going jogging, going - as you know. Most of them good morning, good morning. They say good morning or they'll slow down and stop over the fence to look at the flowers so I say come inside and have a smell of them. [47:54]

Facilitator 1: It's a lovely garden that you have.

Sister Fidelis: Yeah.

Sister Amalia: So the people we feel very accepted by, we don't feel rejected by anyone in our street and in the vicinity around us, Fitzroy and beyond.

Facilitator 1: Well thank you very, very much for your generosity, more for your time and for your beautiful stories, thank you. Now I can stop it. [48:26]

END OF TRANSCRIPT