Section 2: Migrant Stories

1. Egidio Della Franca

Egidio was born in Baruffini (Sondrio) in 1927. Following in his father’s footsteps, Egidio migrated to Australia in 1949. He settled in Pemberton and worked in the timber industry saw-milling and eventually became a farmer in the Pemberton area. (Interviewed in Italian)

2. Giovanni Marinelli

Giovanni was born in Appignano (Ascoli Piceno) in 1926. He travelled to Australia in 1952 under the Assisted Passage Migration scheme. He lived in the South-West clearing land and building dams until moving to Perth and settling in the Hills.

3. Angelina Martini

Angelina was born in Gallesano (Istria) in 1921. She came to Australia in 1950 with her husband and young son as a ‘Displaced Person’ or refugee. Originally arriving in New South Wales, Angelina moved to Perth following the death of her husband in an accident at work.

4. Maria Pisconeri

Maria was born in Salvi (Reggio Calabria) in 1928. She migrated to Perth in 1950 joining her fiancée Joe. She helped establish the family’s continental food retail business ‘Pisconeri’s and raised a family of four children.

5. Maria Raffaele

Maria was born in Raffadali (Agrigento). She migrated to Perth in 1955 as a fourteen-year-old with her mother and sister, sponsored by her father who had migrated years prior. The family lived in Calingiri and Perth before settling in Fremantle. After retiring from work, Maria joined the ‘Amicizia’ Italian Women’s Friendship Club and the ‘Gioie Delle Donne’ (Joys of the Women) choir.
Egidio’s Story

Name: Egidio Della Franca

Date and place of birth:
Born 1927, Baruffini in the province of Sondrio, Lombardy

Date and place of arrival in Australia:
August 1949, Fremantle aboard the ship the ‘Ugolino Vivaldi’

Type of migration:
Sponsored by brother

Date of Interview & Interviewer:
21 May 2006. Interviewer Franco Smargiassi

Summary

Egidio was born on 5 January 1927 in Baruffini, a small village near the town of Tirano in the province of Sondrio in the Lombardy region of Italy. Baruffini is near the border of Switzerland and Egidio’s family would take their livestock to mountain pastures in Switzerland during the warmer months in a practice known as transhumance. Egidio completed five years of primary schooling in Italy. After school, Egidio and his five siblings used to work on the family land, and sometimes on other properties to earn extra money. Egidio and his mother, along with others, also used to smuggle tobacco and sugar across the Swiss border to sell in Italy. Egidio later worked as a labourer constructing tunnels to supply hydroelectricity to the area.

Egidio’s father had migrated to WA in the early 1900s when he was 17 years old. Like many of the Italians who came to Australia during this period, he worked hard in Australia for several years then returned to Italy to buy land with the money he had saved. Inspired by their father’s experience, Egidio’s brother Matteo migrated to Western Australia in the mid-1930s establishing a sawmill near Diamond Tree in Pemberton. Like many other Italian migrants, Matteo understanding and speaking English was a great challenge. Another challenge was fitting into life
in a small country town, although Egidio felt he did not experience much discrimination from Australians was considered an 'enemy alien' during the Second World War and was interned in the nearby town of Harvey. After his release, he sponsored his brothers Enrico and Pietro (Peter) to join him in Pemberton. Egidio had also applied to migrate at the same time as his brothers but he had to complete ten months of compulsory military service before he was allowed to leave Italy. In 1949, 22 year-old Egidio left Genoa for Fremantle on the Ugolino Vivaldi ship. As his sponsor, his brother Matteo agreed to provide him with work upon his arrival in Australia. However, as Egidio was sailing to Australia, his brother Matteo died in an accident at his sawmill. Egidio and his brothers Enrico, Peter and one of their cousins bought the sawmill from Matteo’s widow, Elsie, and ran it together.

The Diamond Tree Mill was one of several mills in Pemberton at the time. At its peak, the sawmill employed nine workers as well as Egidio and his three co-owners. Daily life was hard working nine-hour days and also on weekends. There was no electricity in the area when Egidio first migrated, they only got to shower once a week and there were very few pastimes. Most of Egidio’s fellow sawmill workers were Italian. As Egidio knew very little English when he first arrived in Australia, when he arrived because he had blonde hair and blue eyes.

In December 1951, Egidio married Elsie, his brother Matteo’s widow. Elsie (née Omodei) was born in Pemberton to Italian parents, and she and Matteo had had one son. Egidio and Elsie had another three children. In 1973, after working at the sawmill for 23 years, Egidio moved to the farm he had bought earlier in 1960. Egidio continues to work on his farm today and enjoys it. Egidio and Elsie now have 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Egidio became a naturalised Australian citizen so that Elsie could get her Australian citizenship back, which had been taken away from her when they married according to the laws of the time. However, Egidio still considers himself to be Italian. He made his first return visit to Italy with his brothers in 1986 after 37 years living in Australia. At home today, Egidio speaks a mix of Valtellino dialect and English.
Interview

Egidio Giuseppe Della Franca was born on 5 January 1927 in Baruffini, a small village near the town of Tirano in the province of Sondrio in the Lombardy region. The town was about 4 kilometres away from Tirano, in the mountains. It’s near the border of Switzerland. [...] Dad had property in Switzerland, you know, because we would take the animals to the mountains. We were there...we had pastures, some in Italy and some in Switzerland. [...] You lived from the land. [...] You made enough grain...wine. [...] We had cows, two cows, yeah. [...] We also kept a pig to make sausages and lard.

School

Egidio was the third-eldest of Matteo Della Franca and Teresa Della Costa’s six children. He completed five years of primary schooling in Italy.

We had snow there but we were fit. When the snow came up to your knees...but you went all the same, because Mum would say, “You have to go, you have to learn”. She was right...[but] it wasn’t my kind of thing to sit at a desk with paper...I liked doing other stuff... [...] I did it until year five. [...] Until year four in Baruffini and then I did a year in
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Tirano because that’s all there was in Baruffini. [...] I didn’t like it, I wanted to be a farmer from a young age.

After school, Egidio and his siblings used to work on the family land and they would sometimes work on other properties to earn extra money.

After school you would go to the property to help with things like collecting chestnuts, making bundles of the wood cut from the vine. [...] The evening before [you would say], “Tomorrow in that particular place…” because we didn’t have land that was all together like here, it was spread out. A piece of land here, a piece 500m away and so on. [...] That was our work, when we were 7 or 8 years old.

Quando finivi la scuola si andava in campagna per dare una mano come raccogliere castagne, fare i fasci della legna tagliata dalla vite. [...] La sera prima [si diceva], “Domani nel tal posto…” perché non avevamo la terra tutta assieme come qua, era spezzata. Un pezzo di terra qua, un pezzo a 500m distante e così via. [...] Quello era il nostro lavoro, che avevamo 7-8 anni.

On Saturdays, Egidio sometimes used to participate in activities run by the Balilla, an Italian Fascist organisation for boys aged 8-14, which included paramilitary training.

You could see them there down the mountain, they were marching on the sports oval and doing all those kind of things. [...] We were there on the mountain that was fairly steep and you could see down to those people who were going around. They left me out because we were a bit too far away to walk down. [...] At that time (we’re talking about ’33, ’35), the fascists were the strong party [...]. We had to show a certain distinction with our uniform [...]. But we didn’t understand what it was all about at that time.

Là li vedevi giù dalla montagna, che marciavano nel campo sportivo e tutte quelle cose. [...] Noi eravamo là in montagna che era abbastanza ripido e si vedeva giù a questi che giravano. Mi lasciavano fuori perché noi eravamo un pochino troppo a distante per camminare giù. [...] A quei tempi che si parla del ’33, ’35, il fascista era il partito forte [...]. Avevamo un distinto che dovevamo portare sulla divisa [...]. Ma noi non si capiva mica a quel tempo.
Working Life

To earn extra money as a teenager, Egidio joined others, including his mother, in smuggling goods across the Swiss border into Italy.

*It was kind of to make pocket money that we smuggled contraband... [...] It was against the law, but you went to Switzerland and you got tobacco and sugar because Switzerland was neutral and you didn’t pay any customs fees or taxes at all. On the other hand our government had the monopoly. You bought, you sold it at the shops but we had to pay more. On the other hand going to Switzerland you paid less and from Switzerland you brought it to Italy and in Italy you sold it at a lower price than the shop.*

*Era un pochino per fare pocket money si faceva il contrabbandiere... [...] Era contrario alla legge, ma si andava in Svizzera e si prendeva tabacco e zucchero perché la Svizzera era neutrale e non pagava mica la dogana o le tasse. Invece il nostro governo aveva il monopoly. Noi compravamo, si vendeva ai negozi ma dovevamo pagare di più. Invece andare in Svizzera si pagava di meno e dalla Svizzera si portava in Italia e in Italia si vendeva a meno prezzo del negozio.*

Egidio later worked as a labourer constructing tunnels to supply hydroelectricity to the area.

*I worked in the tunnel for ten months but I didn’t like working underground at all. [...] There were miners that worked at the front. They made holes, excavating. [...] Then we would come with shovels [...] and we loaded up the stones, earth etc. on small wagons [...] Then you pushed the wagon out to the dumping area. [...] Everything by hand in those days but we were young.*

*Ho lavorato in galleria per dieci mesi ma non mi piaceva mica lavorare sotto terra. [...] C’erano i minatori che andavano avanti. Loro facevano i buchi, sparavano. [...] Dopo andavamo noi con la pala [...] e si caricavano i sassi, terra ecc. sui vagonetti [...] Poi si spingeva il vagonetto fuori fino alla discarica. [...] Tutto a mano a quei tempi ma eravamo giovani.*

Egidio had to stop this work to help his father on the family land when Egidio’s brothers migrated to Australia. One of the tasks was to harvest the wheat.

*Dad couldn’t do it on his own, so I left my job and I stayed at home to work. [...] [The grain was harvested] all by hand, with a sickle. You left it to dry on the field for a week and afterwards you brought it home and you beat it by hand to get the grain. [...] When you did 400 – 500 kilograms of grain, it was all that you could do. [...] There was [a mill] in the town and you would bring the grain and he would grind it. [...] [Then] there was the baker in town and you would bring him the flour, he made the bread for you and you paid him for his time.*

*Papà non ce la faceva mica da solo, così ho lasciato il lavoro e sono rimasto a casa a lavorare. [...] [Si tagliava il grano] tutto a mano, con la falcetta. Si lasciava seccare nel campo per una settimana e dopo si portava a casa e si batteva a mano per prendere il grano. [...] Il grano quando si facevano 4-5 quintali, era tutto quello che si faceva. [...] C’era [un mulino] in paese e si portava il grano e lui lo macinava. [...] [Poi] c’era il fornaio in paese e gli portavi la farina, lui ti faceva il pane e te pagavi il tempo.*
Migration Journey

There was a history of emigration from Egidio’s hometown, with many migrating to Argentina, America and Australia. Egidio’s father had migrated to Western Australia in the early 1900s when he was 17 years old. Like many other migrants, he returned to Italy after several years of seasonal work.

Everything they had was in their backpack and that was it. [...] They stayed here for 6-7 years and then they returned, they got married, they bought some land and they went on. [...] [Dad] was here when they made the [rabbit] proof fence and he worked there. In those days you used to dig the holes with a spade and pick [...] . [...] He always used to talk about it at home, you know. [...] He [...] would say there was no place like Australia. [...] He would say that there was a lot of space [...] . [...] He worked hard but he made money...a bit of money and then when he arrived back in Italy he bought land.

Inspired by their father’s experience, Egidio’s brothers, Matteo, Enrico and Pietro (Peter), migrated to Western Australia. Matteo migrated in the 1930s and the others migrated in the late 1940s. Egidio had also applied to migrate but he had to complete ten months of compulsory military service before he was allowed to leave Italy.

Dad always used to say, “Boys, go to Australia”, you know, because he knew that over there you could do it, you could do it, but... [...] . [...] You were alright there, but I didn’t see a future, you know. Instead I said, “Well, in any case if I don’t go there...I have to go...because I was ready to go any...any part, [...] , you know. But if you go to work, there is still a home to return to”. [...] I was the first in the community, so you went to the person working for the emigration authority and we filled out the paperwork. They booked my passage on the ship [...] . [...] I had check-ups, there in Tirano, in the hospital. Injections, check-ups. At that time you had to be totally clean, no criminal record, good health, etc..

Il papà diceva sempre, “Ragazzi, andate in Australia”, you know, because sapeva che là si faceva, si faceva, ma... [...] . [...] Là si stava alright, ma un avventura non lo vedeva, you know. Invece dico, “Well, in any caso se là non vado...devo vado...because ero pronto di andare any...qualsiasi parte, [...] , you know. Ma se va a mecca, c’è ancora una casa per ritornare”. [...] Io ero il primo del comune, perché si andava da quello che lavorava per la compagnia d’emigrazione e abbiamo fatto le carte. Mi hanno prenotato il viaggio sulla nave [...] . [...] Ho fatto delle visite, là a Tirano, nell’ospedale. Punture, visite. In quel tempo dovevi avere tutto pulito, niente criminalità, buon fisico, ecc..

Sponsored by his brother Matteo, 22-year-old Egidio left Italy from Genoa in August 1949 travelling on the Ugolino Vivaldi ship.

It was an Italian ship, Ugolino Vivaldi, the sailors were all Italian. [...] It was a merchant ship that had been converted to a passenger ship and they had made the rooms like those
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of the crew. A room with lots of camp beds. [...] We were in the steamer class. [...] Then there were those in first class who were staying above and in second class. [...] It was good on the ship. There was pasta to eat and I didn’t suffer from sea sickness at all but 50% were sick [...]. But I coped well. [...] You walked around a bit, every so often you would sit down and lots of times there was a map that would show you the way from Italy to Fremantle. From Genoa we went to Naples to pick up other passengers, then through the Suez Canal. [...] We didn’t stop again until Colombo when we stopped to load some cargo and then we went on. There was a map there with a pin that the sailors every day [would move according to the distance]. Those who had sea sickness put it in Fremantle because the quicker it arrived the better!

Era una nave italiana, Ugolino Vivaldi, i marinai tutti italiani. [...] Era una nave mercantile che avevano convertita ad una nave passeggera e avevano fatto le stanze come quelle sotto le armi. Un locale con tante brande. [...] Noi eravamo nella steamer. [...] Poi c’erano quelli in prima classe che stavano sopra e in seconda classe. [...] Sulla nave si stava bene. C’era pasta da mangiare e non ho sofferto per niente il mal di mare ma il 50% stavano male [...]. Ma io me la sono cavata bene. [...] Si girava un pochino, ogni tanto si sedeva e tante volte c’era la mappa geografica che faceva vedere la strada dall’Italia fino a Fremantle. Da Genova siamo andati a Napoli a prendere altri passeggeri, poi nel Canale Suez. [...] Non ci siamo più fermati fino a Colombo quando ci siamo fermati per fare un po’ di carico e avanti. C’era la mappa là con una spilla che ogni giorno i marinai [spostavano secondo ai chilometri]. Quelli che avevano il mal di mare la mettevano a Fremantle perché the quicker it arrived the better!

First Impressions

After spending one month on the ship, Egidio arrived at Fremantle and was met by his brother Enrico and some cousins.

Before disembarking I looked down and I saw my brother who was there and I said, “Now I’m alright”, because everyone spoke differently even the porters, everyone. [...] It was good to arrive because we had spent 28 days on the ship.

Prima di scendere guardavo giù e ho visto mio fratello che stava là e ho detto, “Adesso sono alright”, perché tutti parlavano differenti anche i facchini, tutti. [...] È stato good arrivare perché abbiamo fatto 28 giorni sulla nave.

After spending a week in Perth with cousins, Egidio and his brother Enrico travelled to Diamond Tree, near Pemberton where their brother Matteo owned a sawmill.

We left at nine o’clock from Perth and we arrived here at six in the evening, so the whole day without stopping, always on foot or by train, bus or truck. But even the train, I could almost beat it! [...] In those days it was still by steam, they weren’t made to go fast.

The day after we had a day off, we didn’t have anything to do, just watching the forest and nothing else. [...] When we went to the forest two days later, the sawmill wasn’t completely finished, there were still some adjustments to make here and there and we went to the forest to cut wood. But I wasn’t looking at all at those big [trees], I always looked for the smaller ones because the big ones almost frightened me, but slowly slowly... [...] [The] biggest [tree] that I chopped down would’ve been...the diameter of the trunk would have had to have been two and a half metres or more [...].
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Early Settlement Experiences

Tragically, Matteo died in an accident at the Diamond Tree sawmill while Egidio was sailing to Australia. Egidio, Enrico, Peter and one of their cousins bought the sawmill from Matteo’s widow, Elsie, and worked and ran it together.

I was in transit. [...] It was an accident with the belts that were turning, which aren’t like they are now with motors etc., it was with the belts. One of them broke and it hit him in the head and [...] he was unconscious for 8-19 days and then he passed away. [...] That was...well, these things happen.

I knew almost nothing about how they ran [things] but we went on ahead. There wasn’t any money at all and we came here to make debts. [...] In Italy no one ever had debts, not like here, but anyway we came ok. Later we began to employ workers and there were six of us.

When I came here, I had half a mind to, if it was close enough that I could have walked there, I would have gone home, you know. Just imagine in a forest in a house there made of wood that was falling down, or sometimes someone would visit. You didn’t have to open the door or go to the window to see who it was, you could see them outside through the walls. [...] The thing that I missed the most was the light because we still didn’t have electricity there in those days, there was only an oil lamp. I really missed that a lot.

Io ero in viaggio. [...] È stato un incidente con le cinghie che giravano, che non è come adesso con i motori ecc., era con le cinghie. Una si è spezzata e l’ha preso in testa ed [...] è stato unconscious per 8-19 giorni e poi è partito. [...] Quello è stato...well, cose che capitano.

Io sapevo quasi niente come andavano [le cose] ma siamo andati avanti. Non c’era mica moneta e siamo venuti qua a fare debiti. [...] In Italia non si facevano mica debiti, non come qua, ma anyway siamo venuti ok. Dopo abbiamo incominciato ad impiegare operai ed eravamo sei.

Quando sono venuto qua, quasi quasi, se era vicino che potevo farla a piedi, andavo a casa, you know. Figurati in un bosco...in una casa là fatta di legno che crollava, o ogni tanto veniva qualche visita. Non dovevi aprire la porta o andare alla finestra a vedere chi veniva, li vedevi fuori dalle pareti. [...] La cosa che mi mancava di più era la luce perché la forza elettrica non passava ancora a quet tempi, era solamente a lampade petrolio. Quello mi è mancato un bel po’.
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Language

Egidio knew very little English before he arrived in Australia. The only words he knew were the swear words that his father and their neighbours, who had also worked in Australia, used to use at home.

*We had two neighbours at home who had also been abroad, not with Dad, but abroad. Sometimes they would chat and we would listen. [...] When there was something wrong, they would swear in English, but you knew that it was something to watch them, from the emotions that they were having etc.*

*The difficulty was the language but the people, almost all of them were great. You didn’t understand and you made gestures, you said it two or three times, they got the idea and they went with it. But the language was a problem. Even when you went to the shop and you were looking for a comb or to have a shave, if you saw the object you got it, but they had them in boxes, it wasn’t like now. Then sometimes you might see some old Italian person...“Come here, give me a hand because I have to buy this...” and they would come inside and they would ask for what you wanted and you would put the money in their hand and what they gave you they gave you. If it was lire ok, but starting with pounds and shillings...it took a little while because it wasn’t something that you would use every day.*

Avevamo due vicini di casa che anche loro erano stati fuori, non con papà, ma fuori. Ogni tanto discutevano e noi ascoltavamo. [...] Quando c’era qualcosa wrong, bestemmiavano in inglese, ma si capiva che era qualche cosa a guardarli, dagli emozioni che facevano ecc..

*La difficoltà era la lingua ma la gente, quasi tutti erano buoni. Non capivi e facevi segno, lo dicevi due o tre volte, si aveva un idea e si andava avanti. Ma la lingua era un problema. Anche quando andavi nel negozio e cercavi un pettine o per fare la barba, se vedevi l’oggetto prendevi, ma loro li avevano nelle scatole, non era come adesso. Poi ogni tanto magari vedevi qualche italiano vecchio...“Vieni qua, dammi una mano che devo comprare questo...” e venivano dentro e chiedevano quello che volevi e te mettevi la mano per la moneta e quello che ti davano ti davano. Se erano lire ok, ma incominciare con i pounds e shillings...it took a little while perché non era mica una cosa che si usava tutti giorni.*

At home today, Egidio speaks Valtellino dialect and English.

*Almost all mixed – a bit in Valtellino dialect, a bit in English.*
Quasi tutto mischiato – un po’ in dialetto valtellino, un po’ in inglese.

Discrimination

Egidio feels he did not experience much discrimination from Australians when he arrived in Australia. He thinks he was lucky in this regard because he had blonde hair and blue eyes.

They reckoned all Italians are all black or dark. When we came they couldn’t believe it. [...] I remember once I was out there and my job was to cut the timber on the bench but the saw was getting blunt, so I had to go and sharpen it. [...] [A guy] came into the shed to talk and asked for the boss. I said, “I don’t know” [...] “How many running the mill?” he said. “Oh about seven, eight, nine plus others in the bush”, I said. [In the meantime] my brother had taken up my job on the bench. He had the same blonde hair and [the guy] said, “Who’s that fella out there?” and I told him, “That’s my brother”. Then another brother, also blonde, came with the truck. [The guy] said to me, “What nationality are you?”, and I said to him, “If you’ll believe me, I’ll tell you”. He said, “Yes, yes, I’ll believe you” but when I told him we were Italian he said, “No”, so work that one out!

Working Life

Egidio worked at the Diamond Tree Mill for 23 years. It was one of several mills in Pemberton at the time. At its largest, the sawmill employed nine workers as well as Egidio and his three co-owners.

We had two tractors and two trucks and you would go into the forest and you would cut, first by hand later with chainsaws and so on. You would load it up and bring it back to the sawmill every day. [...] At that time I believe that we used to do 8-10 cubic metres a day, that’s it. Afterwards you had to cut it into planks and take it to the station. [...] Most of it was karri but it was cut to make buildings, for houses and some went to the Eastern States. It was sent to Bunbury on the train and from there it would leave. [...] I remember that we sent wood to Africa for the mines. [...] We weren’t big but we did ok. [...] It was all private stuff because we didn’t have permission or the licence to cut in the State forest, only on the farms. [...] Then in the end we cut them all privately and since then we’ve had to stop because they wouldn’t let us go into the forest.

Avevamo due trattori e due trucks e si andava nel bosco e si tagliava, prima a mano dopo con i chains e avanti. Si caricava e si portava in segheria tutti i giorni. [...] A quel tempo credo che facevamo 8-10 metri cubi al giorno, finito. Dopo si doveva mettere a fare i fasci e portarlo alla stazione. [...] La maggior parte era karri ma si tagliava per fare fabbricati, per le case e un po’ andava negli Eastern States. Si mandava a Bunbury sul vapore e da lì partiva. [...] Mi ricordo che abbiamo mandato legna fino in Africa per le miniere. [...] Non eravamo grossi ma si faceva ok. [...] Era tutta roba privata perché noi non avevamo il permesso o la licenza di tagliare sulla forestale, solamente sulle farms. [...] Poi alla fine li abbiamo tagliati tutti dei privati e da allora abbiamo dovuto fermarci perché non ti lasciavano andare dentro sulla forestale.

Daily life was hard working nine-hour days and also on weekends.

At that time the season was wetter than now and you got quite a lot of water. In winter it wasn’t easy at all to go and get wood. [...] For us brothers there was never a weekend or long weekend, they were all short. There wasn’t even Saturday or Sunday. [...] You had to
have a day of rest but you went into the forest to see how you could work, how many plants there were and all those things. But really, staying at home sitting down? Going outside was better

A quel tempo la stagione era più bagnata di ora e veniva un bel po’ di acqua. In inverno non era mica facile andare a prendere legna. [...] Per noi fratelli non c’era mica il weekend o long weekend, erano tutti corti. Non c’era mica sabato e domenica. [...] Si doveva avere un giorno di riposo ma si andava nel bosco per vedere come si poteva lavorare, quante piante c’erano e tutte quelle cose lì. Ma really, stare a casa seduti? Andare fuori era meglio.

You washed yourself once a week, very seldom. Once a week we’d have our turn to do the washing and the same with the cooking. The shopping we would all do together. In the morning we would get up and we would have coffee, bread and sausage, cheese for breakfast. At midday just a sandwich, bread with salami in it and a bottle of wine. But in the evening we were either in the forest or in sawmill or at the station to send the timber away, one had to leave around about 4.30 or 5 and had to go to do the cooking. You couldn’t even say then, “I don’t like this, or you have to do better...”, you had to eat or you could go to sleep. [...] [We used to do] everything the Italian way, basically meat, potatoes, vegetables. [...] Pasta lots of times because it was easy and then you would also do frittatas [...]. [...] It’s not like we could be fussy there.

I did this for 23 years. It was dangerous in those days and you had to watch what you were doing. Now it’s different, it’s all at the press of a button, but back then it was all lifting, pulling, pushing...it was heavy work, but you were young and did it.

Si lavava una volta alla settimana, very seldom. Una volta alla settimana ci toccava fare a turno del bucato e la cucina lo stesso. La spesa la facevamo tutti assieme. La mattina ci alzavamo e facevamo il caffè, pane e salsiccia, formaggio per colazione. A mezzogiorno solamente sandwich, pane con dentro salame ed una bottiglia di vino. Ma la sera eravamo o nel bosco o nella segheria o alla stazione per mandare via il timber, uno doveva lasciare verso le 4.30 o le 5 e doveva andare a cucinare. Là non c’era mica a dire, “Non mi piace questo, o devi fare meglio...”, dovevi mangiare o potevi andare a dormire. [...] [Facevamo] tutto il sistema italiano, più o meno carne, patate, verdure. [...]
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Egidio Della Franca

Most of Egidio’s fellow sawmill workers were Italian although there were also some Englishmen, Macedonians and an Australian.

During the day you worked together and then in the evening, having finished dinner, we would have a get-together. It was like a little Italy. [...] In the evenings, the workers, my brothers and I would drink a bottle of wine or beer. We would make a fire with wood and when we had finished we would have sausages and a bottle of wine, peaceful, and then the following day you went to work and so it went on. [...] They all went back to Italy. [...] They came here as we were talking about before, they had a little bit of property but small and they came here, slowly slowly they made a bit of money, that they would send to Italy and they put themselves in a fairly good position.

When Egidio worked at the sawmill, one of the major pastimes was to visit neighbours.

Especially us Italians. Even the women would come with a plate of sweets and we were alright. [...] The people were closer, almost like in Italy [then] but in Italy now it’s a different story right? [...] We [Italians] could [have done] something else but we started [becoming] more and more Aussie as we went along, but we still get together every now and again. At the cattle sales we see all the Italians and have a chat. [...] We’re not actually apart, but we’re not really common.

In 1973, after working at the sawmill for 23 years, Egidio became a full time farmer on a property he brought in 1960 near Pemberton.

Family Life

In December 1951, Egidio married Elsie, his brother Matteo’s widow. Elsie (née Omodei) was born in Pemberton to Italian parents, and she and Matteo had had one son who was also called Matteo. Egidio and Elsie had another three children together. They now have 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.
Return Visit to Italy

Egidio made his first return visit to Italy in 1986 after 37 years.

(English only) When I got there [...] I was more or less sorry I went because [...] those I knew were no longer there. They might have been a bit older than me, but not that much older. They were all gone. I couldn’t recognise any of the young ones. [...] They picked us out in Tirano the first day we were there. I knew the town a bit, the butcher, baker and a few other shops that were still there. I went around with her [Elsie] to see them because we had our own unit and so we got the groceries for the cooking. When they saw a man going alongside a woman, which they don’t do that out there, they figured out [we must have been Australian].
Interview Excerpts

The following passages are excerpts from Egidio’s interview. The extracts are in the original Italian and also translated into English. To hear Egidio telling his story (in Italian) go to: http://www.italianlives.arts.uwa.edu.au/stories/audio#dellafranca

English

I - Interviewer
E – Egidio Della Franca

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – The family farm

I Good. So let’s start and let’s record a bit about life in the town where you used to live. You were born in Baruffini. Can you say something about your town? What was it like? Where was it?

E The town was located 4km away from Tirano, in the mountains. It’s near the border of Switzerland. Because Dad used to have property in Switzerland, you know.

I Really?

E Because you would go there with the animals. We were...we had pastures there, some in Italy and some in Switzerland. [It was] you would also do a bit of contraband to earn a little pocket money…

I That’s interesting but before we go to that, let’s go back a bit to the town and the basis of its economy. You were all shepherds and what else did you do there?

E You lived off the land.

I You owned small parcels of land?

E Yes. It was my father’s land and we worked it. We grew a fair amount of grain...wine.

I So you made wine at home, you had a vineyard?

E A vineyard yes. We had two cows.

I And also some fields on the mountain?

E Two cows, yeah. And you would go there too. Then when we had 200 or more of them, it would go better there [in Australia].

I So then you made a bit of cheese at home, butter?

E Yes, everything. We also kept a pig to make sausages... lard.

Excerpt Two: Life in Italy – Smuggling contraband
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Egidio Della Franca

I You were also saying, the town also being close to the border, that to make a bit of extra money, you would do a few other things?

E Well, they used to call it…it was against the law, but you would go to Switzerland and you would get tobacco and sugar because Switzerland was neutral and you wouldn’t have to pay customs or taxes at all. On the other hand our government had the monopoly. We would buy it, they sold it at the shops but we would have to pay more. Instead going to Switzerland you would pay less and from Switzerland you would bring it to Italy and in Italy you would sell it at a lower price than the shop.

I Who would you sell it to, family friends or other people?

E Yes, many times you would sell it directly to family members, otherwise there were others like shopkeepers who would also make a bit of profit and it kept going like that. But it was dangerous because it also depended on the guards. There were 12 or 15 who were detached there in the mountains, more from the Madonna del Tirano, but the old ones who had been doing it for years [the guards], they knew what we had to do to survive, so they would let it go a little bit, even if they saw you. They might say to you, “Be careful, be careful…”, but the young ones, they didn’t care at all and they would shoot as well. We knew the mountain well but they didn’t.

I You knew where to go?

E Oh yes.

I But would you bring a backpack, how would you do it?

E You would take a bag like a backpack, but for the most part you would buy a bag there and pack everything there because if they saw you going there with a backpack they would say to you, “But where are you going?”

I So you would go there with nothing, you would buy the stuff, you would put it in the bag…

E Yes, you would put it in the bag, pull the string tight and off you go.

Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – First impressions

I After you arrived here [in Pemberton], what did you do?

E The day after we had a day off, without doing anything, just looking at the forest and nothing else.

I What impression did you have once you had seen the place where you had come to live?

E Not very good. The thing I missed the most was the light because there still wasn’t any electricity in those days, there were only oil lamps. I missed that quite a bit.

I So you arrived in this grand forest…

E Yes, when we went to the forest two days later, the sawmill wasn’t quite finished, there were still a few adjustments to make here and there and we went to the forest to cut [wood]. But I had never seen such big [trees], I would always look for the smaller ones because those big ones made me almost afraid, but slowly slowly…
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Egidio Della Franca

Italian

I - Intervistatore
E – Egidio Della Franca

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – The family farm


E Il paese si trovava 4km distante da Tirano, in montagna. È vicino il confine della Svizzera. Because il papà aveva proprietà in Svizzera, you know.

I Davvero?

E Because là in montagna quando si andava con le bestie. Eravamo...là avevamo i prati, un po’ in Italia e un po’ in Svizzera. [Era] un pochino per fare pocket money che si faceva il contrabandiere…

I Quello è interessante ma prima di quello, torniamo un po’ al paese e la base dell’economia. Facevate i pastori e cos’altro si faceva in paese?

E Si viveva dalla terra.

I Piccoli proprietari?

E Yes. La proprietà era del padre e si lavorava. Si faceva abbastanza grano...vino.

I Così facevate vino in casa, avevate il vigneto?

E Vigneto sì. Avevamo due mucche.

I E anche dei prati in montagna?

E Due mucche, yeah. E là si andava anche. Quando poi ne avevamo 200 e più, si andava meglio là [in Australia].

I Allora si faceva un po’ di formaggio in casa, burro?

E Sì, tutto. Tenevamo anche il maiale per fare le salsiccie...il lardo.

Excerpt Two: Life in Italy – Smuggling contraband

I Dicevi anche, essendo anche il paese vicino al confine, che per fare un po’ di soldini, facevate altre cosette?

E Well, loro lo chiamavano…era contrario alla legge, ma si andava in Svizzera e si prendeva tabacco e zucchero perché la Svizzera era neutrale e non pagava mica la dogana o le tasse. Invece il nostro governo aveva il monopoly. Noi compravamo, si vendeva ai negozi ma dovevamo pagare di più. Invece andare in Svizzera si pagava di meno e dalla Svizzera si portava in Italia e in Italia si vendeva a meno prezzo del negozio.
I A chi vendevi, amici di famiglia o altra gente?

E Sì, tante volte si vendeva direttamente alla famiglia, altrimenti c’erano altri come negozianti che facevano un pochino di profitto anche loro e si andava sempre avanti così. Ma era pericoloso perché dipendeva anche dalla guardia. Erano 12 o 15 per distaccamento là in montagna, più quelli della Madonna del Tirano, ma i vecchi che lo facevano da anni [le guardie], loro sapevano il sistema che si doveva vivere, così lasciavano andare un pochino, anche se ti vedevano. Magari ti dicevano, “Fai attenzione, fai attenzione…”; invece i giovani, a loro non interessava niente e sparavano anche. Noi conosciovamo la montagna bene e loro invece no.

I Sapevate dove andare?

E Oh yes.

I Ma si portava lo zaino, come si faceva?

E Prendevi il sacco come uno zaino, ma per la maggior parte compravi il sacco là e facevi le cose là perché se ti vedevano andare dentro con lo zaino ti dicevano, “Ma dove vai?”.

I Così si andava là senza niente, si comprava la roba, si metteva nel sacco…

E Sì, si metteva nel sacco, ti tirava su un po’ la corda e avanti.

**Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – First impressions**

I Dopo che sei arrivato qua [a Pemberton], cosa hai fatto?

E Il giorno dopo abbiamo fatto un giorno off, senza fare niente, solo a guardare il bosco e niente d’altro.

I Che impressione ti ha fatto una volta che hai visto il posto dove venivi ad abitare?

E Not very good. La cosa che mi mancava di più era la luce perché la forza elettrica non passava ancora a quei tempi, era solamente a lampade petrolio. Quello mi è mancato un bel po’.

I Così sei arrivato in questa foresta grandiosa…

E Si, quando siamo andati nel bosco due giorni dopo, la segheria era non proprio finita, c’era ancora da fare qualche aggiustamento qua e là e siamo andati nel bosco a tagliare [legna]. Ma io non guardavo mica a quelli grandi [alberi], io cercavo sempre quelli più piccoli perché quelli grandi mi facevano quasi paura, ma piano piano…
Photographs & Documents

The following photographs and documents can be used to help explore Egidio’s story.

1. Scan of ‘Employment Assurance’ declaration which was part of Egidio’s application to migrate to Australia. The form is signed by his brother and migration sponsor (Matteo) prior to Egidio leaving Italy in August 1947.

2. Scan of Incoming Passenger Card with Egidio’s vital statistics and details of his journey by ship from Genoa to Fremantle. The Immigration Department collected information about all incoming passengers on their arrival in Australia.


4. B & W photo of Egidio and brothers

5. Colour photo of Egidio at the front door to his home in Pemberton which has a photograph of his home-town Tirano.
EMPLEYMENT ASSURANCE.

I, Matteo Della Franca, of the Town of Piemont, Brook now of the Diamond Tree in Yarrie, hereby guarantee to continuously employ Giuseppe Della Franca upon his arrival in Australia as a Wood Cutter at an rate of $2 per week and keep and that his employment will not cause the services of any person now working for me to be dispensed with, nor will his employment be detrimental to any local worker.

(Signature) Matteo Della Franca

Signed and declared this day of 12-8-1947
before me
Justice of the Peace.


Section 2: Migrant Stories

Egidio Della Franca

[Image of an Australian immigration card with handwritten information]

1. Name of Ship: WOLLING VIVALDI
2. Full Name of Passenger: DELLA FRANCA Egidio
3. Permanent Address: TIRANO (SONDrio)
4. Country of Last Permanent Residence: Italy
5. Occupation: Farmer
6. Date of Birth: 5/1/1927
7. Sex (Male or Female): M
8. Place of Birth: TIRANO
9. Nationality (as shown in Passport): Italian
10. If Naturalized—Place
11. Passport No.: 1630791, Issued at SONDrio on 17/6/49
12. Date of Disembarkation: 23 AUG. 1949
13. Port of Embarkation: Genoa
14. Class Travelled (1st, 2nd, or 3rd): 3rd
15. Port of Disembarkation: Fremantle
17. Racial Origin (European, Asiatic, African, Polynesian): European
18. Proposed Length of Stay in Australia: Indefinite
19. Purpose of Stay: Employment as a woodcutter
20. Does Passenger Hold Authority to Enter Australia for an Unlimited Period of Residence (Yes or No)? Yes
21. Whether Passage Money Provided—

Self: +

Under United Kingdom Free Passage Scheme.
Under United Kingdom Assisted Passage Scheme.
Under Ex-servicemen's Assisted Passage Scheme.
Entries other than United Kingdom.

Address in Australia: C/O M. Della Franca
Resident in Australia State:
Previously Registered (Yes or No): Yes
Registration Certificate No.

Physical Description—
Height: 5 ft. 7 ins.
Colour of Hair: Fair
Colour of Eyes: Blue

Della Franca, Egidio
Signature of Passenger
Giovanni’s Story

Giovanni near Mount Barker, 1952

Name: Giovanni Marinelli

Date and place of birth
Born 1926, Castignano, prov. Ascoli Piceno, Marche

Date and place of arrival in Australia
March 1952, Fremantle aboard the Castelbianco Ship

Type of migration
Government Assisted (Assisted Passage Migration Scheme)

Date of Interview & Interviewer
Interviewed 15 & 16 September 2005 by Susanna Iuliano

Summary

Giovanni Marinelli was born on 29 September 1926 in the agricultural town of Castignano in the province of Ascoli Piceno in the Marche region of Italy. Giovanni’s family lived with his uncle and aunt’s family and together they share-cropped land (mezzadria) in Castignano and later in Appignano giving a portion of their produce to the landowner (padrone).

Giovanni decided to apply to migrate despite knowing very little about Australia after posters appeared in town encouraging Italians to migrate under the Italy-Australia Assisted Passage Migration Scheme. Under this scheme both governments assisted migrants with the cost of the voyage and provided work for them for two years in specific industries in Australia.

In 1952, at the age of 25, Giovanni left Italy from Genoa on the Castelbianco ship and arrived in Fremantle in March. After staying at a migrant reception camp in Belmont for about a fortnight, Giovanni was fortunate to find work in the South-West. His first job was clearing land with a
bulldozer on a farm at Congelin Park near Williams. The silence of the Australian bush, its different plants and the stories about dangerous animals all made an early impression on Giovanni. He also remembers that Italians often experienced discrimination in the period following World War Two.

Giovanni later worked clearing land for the War Service and Land Settlement Scheme near Mt Barker. Under this scheme, the government gave ex-servicemen cleared land for them to farm. Giovanni travelled all around the South-West living in a caravan and clearing land. He saved hard so he could help support his family back in Italy and was eventually able to buy land in Italy and build a house for his parents.

In 1958, Giovanni returned to Italy for three months to see his fiancée/girlfriend and got to know her sister, Maria, whom he married in 1962 during another visit to Italy. Giovanni and his new wife Maria settled in Merredin where they later had two sons. In the early years, they lived in a caravan park. While there were many Italians living in Merredin, Maria felt isolated living out of town and Giovanni was also often away for work. Maria also disliked the hot and dusty environment as well as the snakes that would enter their house!

In 1970, Giovanni and Maria returned to Italy with their sons with the intention of resettling. They stayed for just under a year but then returned to Australia for good. After living briefly in Perth, they returned to Merredin for a few years. They eventually built a home and settled in Kalamunda where they now live. An Australian citizen since 1958, Giovanni has been back to Italy 11 times since migrating to Australia.
Interview

Giovanni clearing land near Mount Barker early 1950s

Life in Italy

Giovanni Marinelli was born on 29 September 1926 in the town of Castignano in the province of Ascoli Piceno in the Marche region.

*Castignano is a country town, there is only agriculture, there's no industry. The town depended solely on agriculture for work, and that's how they lived. You could say that almost everyone [worked] with share-cropped land. Perhaps 10% had their own small property, the rest share-cropped.*

*Castignano è un paese di campagna, c’è soltanto l’agricoltura, non c’è industria. Il paese dipende soltanto sugli agricoltori per i lavori, e vivono così...Si può dire quasi tutti [lavoravano] col mezzadria. Forse il 10% aveva una piccola proprietà sua, il resto tutto col mezzadria.*

Giovanni’s family lived and worked with his uncle and aunt’s family. Giovanni’s father and his father’s brother had married two sisters. Together the two families share-cropped land (mezzadria) in Castignano and later in Appignano giving a portion of their produce to the landowner (padrone).
In Castignano we had a small field of about 80 or more ‘tables’ (every thousand metres is a ‘table’), it wasn’t a lot. After we had gone to Appignano, we had 120 ‘tables’ there and it was a lot bigger. [...] We grew wheat, corn, potatoes, peas, tomatoes, all the vegetables. Our landowner was far away [...] . He used to take the chickens, the eggs. When there was fruit we would take him some. It wasn’t like you had to go there. He arranged his share-cropping in such a way that when he sold the wheat, the cooperative paid him for it directly.

A Castignano avevamo un piccolo terreno da 80 o più tavole (ogni mille metri è una tavola), non era tanto. Dopo quando siamo andati ad Appignano, lì avevamo 120 tavole ed era molto più grande. [...] Crescevamo grano, granturco, patate, piselli, pomodori, tutti i vegetali. Il nostro padrone era lontano [...]. Allora prendeva i polli, le uova. Quando c’era la frutta si portava la frutta. Non è che si doveva andare di obbligo. La sua mezzadria se la scuoteva lui la moneta in modo che quando vendeva il grano, il consorzio lo pagava direttamente a lui.

Giovanni’s wife Maria (née Albertini) was also born in the province of Ascoli Piceno in the town of Castel Di Lama. Her family also share-cropped land and their padroni lived in Rome.

*Our landowners lived in Rome and they had their jobs – they were lawyers, engineers and they came down only in the holidays. You could kind of do what you wanted because our landowners didn’t have to eat off the land but then a lot of times even they had to eat and they weren’t very good about it. In those instances it wasn’t very good for the farmer....*

*I nostri stavano a Roma e avevano le loro attività - erano avvocati, ingegneri e venivano giù soltanto in ferie. Si faceva un po’ come si voleva perché i nostri non dovevano mangiare sul terreno ma tante volte i padroni dovevano mangiare anche loro con sul terreno e non è che facevano dei signori. In quei casi per il contadino non era tanto buono...*

Planning to migrate

In 1952, posters began to appear in town encouraging Italians to migrate to Australia under the new Italy-Australia Assisted Migration Scheme. Under this scheme the governments assisted migrants with the cost of the voyage and provided work for them in Australia.

*[Before 1952] no-one said anything, we didn’t know. [...] There was my uncle who had gone to America at 17 years of age...he went at the request of a cousin, I believe that he paid himself. [...] Then all of a sudden posters came out from the Shire Council [...] . [...] [The posters] they put them on the ‘news’. They explained that the government had made an agreement and that they would pay the travelling expenses and you could pay back the £20 within 20 years. [...] Then from there two of my friends left on a ship. [...] Once the idea was in my head, that was it.*

*[Prima del 1952] nessuno diceva niente, non sapevamo. [...] C’era mio zio che era andato in America a 17 anni...lui è andato con la richiesta da una cugina, credo ha pagato lui. [...] Tutto ad un tratto sono venuti fuori i manifesti dal Shire Council [...] . [...] [I manifesti] l’hanno messo sul ‘news’. Spiegavano che il governo aveva fatto un accordo e che le spese per andare le pagavano loro e il pagamento di £20 si poteva...*
Giovanni Marinelli

Section 2: Migrant Stories

Giovanni knew very little about Australia before he migrated.

*We didn’t know about Australia. At school when you talked about the world you would nominate some place, but you never talked about Australia, never. You talked about France, Germany, England and America, but never about Australia. I didn’t know how far Australia was from Italy until I put in my application [to migrate]. [...] We went to Genoa to have a medical check and there they explained to us a bit about Australia, about the states, where the sugar cane grows, where there were poisonous snakes...in the west there were kangaroos etc. and they explained to us all these things. You could choose where you wanted to go in Australia. I thought, “I’ll choose WA, if it doesn’t suit me there, we’ll go somewhere else”. This was a decision that you really couldn’t make because until you go to a place...They said that there were woods and forests but not that we would have to chop them down...*

Giovanni’s family were not very happy about him migrating as they needed his help on the farm. As well as the farm work, Giovanni did other jobs to earn extra money, which he used to help him migrate to Australia.

*Well, the truth was if I had said, “I want to go”, you couldn’t stop me. [...] I had a bit of money that I had saved from breeding and selling pigeons for sauce, roasts, however you wanted them. And then in Summer I used to collect seeds from the countryside, Chamomile flowers, etc.. [...] While everyone used to sleep after lunch, we were there sorting out flowers. So I had accumulated a bit of money and my father gave me 30 thousand lire. Back then it was quite a bit, today it’s a joke...*

*Beh, la verità era se io dicevo, “Voglio andare”, non poteva fermarmi. [...] Io avevo un po’ di soldi che ho risparmiato dall’allevare e vendere i piccioni per sugo, arrosto, come vuoi. E poi in estate andavo a raccogliere i semi di campagna, i fiori di camomilla, ecc... [...] Mentre tutti dormivano dopo pranzo, noi eravamo lì a sorteggiare i fiori. Così ne avevo accumulato un po’ di soldi e mio padre mi ha dato 30 mila lire. Allora era un bel po’, oggi è una miseria...*

Journey
In 1952, at the age of 25, Giovanni left Italy from Genoa on the Castelbianco ship.

The ship was a military ship. There were 400 of us in every section. You would sleep in bunks of three, one above the other and when someone felt sick the one above would vomit on the one underneath. When the weather was good there was a pool, there was ping-pong and other games, there were parties. We celebrated crossing the Equator...there were Italians from all the regions. There were also women but with their families. They would sleep separately [...]. [...] The ship stopped in Naples, in Messina, in Malta and then in Port Said.

La nave era una nave militare. Eravamo 400 in ogni camerone. Si dormiva a castelli di tre, uno sopra l’altro e quando si sentiva male quello sopra vomitava su quello sotto. Quando il tempo era buono c’era la piscina, c’era ping-pong e altri giochi, c’erano le feste. Abbiamo fatto la festa dell’Equatore...c’erano italiani da tutte le regioni. C’erano anche donne ma con le loro famiglie. Dormivano separate [...]. [...] La nave si è fermata a Napoli, a Messina, a Malta e poi a Port Said.

Arrival

Giovanni arrived at Fremantle on 28 March 1952. From there he and the other migrants were taken to a reception camp in Belmont.

We arrived at five in the evening and we disembarked. They took us to Belmont in little buses. At the Causeway there was a wooden bridge and you could see the water underneath (not like it is today). At the camp we found dinner ready – steak and eggs. I had seen white eggs, but never seen them so white and yellow. Then they assigned us to a dormitory where there were two beds in each cabin, with a shower and everything. That night we had a party, there was dancing, there was drinking. All those who had arrived before, Poles, Yugoslavs, Italians, said to me, “Drink the beer” but it wasn’t beer, it was cool drink.

Siamo arrivati alle cinque di sera e siamo sbarcati. Con i piccoli autobus ci hanno portato a Belmont. Al Causeway c’era un ponte di legno e si vedeva l’acqua sotto (non come quello di oggi). Al campo abbiamo trovato la cena pronta – le uova e bistecca. Ho visto le uova bianche, mai visto così bianco e giallo. Poi ci hanno assegnato al dormitorio dove eravamo due letti in ogni baracca, con doccia e tutto. Quella sera si faceva festa, si ballava, si beveva. Tutti quelli che erano arrivati prima, polacchi, jugoslavi, italiani, mi dicevano, “Bevi la birra” ma non era birra, era cool drink.

Early settlement experiences
While staying at the camp in Belmont, Giovanni was able to venture out and see the city of Perth.

_In 1952 the Italians were in Northbridge. We were a group and we went around to explore the city. In Hay Street we looked for ‘l’idrolitina’ – do you know what that is? It’s a drink more or less like lemon that you dissolve in water. We didn’t know what it was called in the chemist, we didn’t know the language. So there in Hay Street we saw a shop that we thought could be a chemist, so we went in. The pharmacist asked us, “What do you want?” but we couldn’t speak. We picked up a box and what was it? It was ammunition – it wasn’t a chemist! The laughs..._

_In 1952 gli italiani erano a Northbridge. Eravamo un gruppo e andavamo in giro ad esplorare la città. In Hay Street cercavamo ‘l’idrolitina’ – sai cos’è? È una bevanda più o meno come limone che si scioglie nell’acqua. Non sapevamo che in farmacia si chiamava, la lingua non sapevamo. Allora lì in Hay Street abbiamo visto un negozio che noi pensavamo fosse una farmacia, così siamo entrati. Il farmacista ha chiesto, “Cosa volete?” ma noi non potevamo parlare. Abbiamo preso una scatola e cos’era? Erano munizioni - non era una farmacia! Le risate..._

Giovanni remembers that Italians often experienced discrimination in Australia in the period following World War Two.

_In that period Italians were not well-regarded because of the war. People believed or thought that Italians were fierce, cruel. [...] Because of the influence of Mussolini and all the troubles that had happened.... Here people who had lost a son didn’t regard us well._

_In quel tempo, l’italiano non era ben visto a causa della guerra. Credevano o avevano in mente che l’italiano era feroce, crudele. [...] Perché l’influenza di Mussolini e di tutti i guai che avevano passati.... Qui gente che ha perso un figlio non ci vedeva bene._

When the first group of assisted passage migrants arrived in Australia, there was a downturn in the economy making it difficult for the government to meet its promise to find work for them.

_You didn’t know that there were all these problems with work, otherwise you wouldn’t have come. It was a big surprise for everyone. In fact lots of people went straight back. Without work what are you going to do here wasting time? [...] In Western Australia [...] there were a lot of sawmills, work in the forest, the railway, the water pipeline that went to Kalgoorlie, etc.. Many accepted that they had to go away to work and many also worked in Perth. On the railway they were all Italians, the Water Supply also. [...] If [I] hadn’t found a job, I would’ve gone back immediately._

_Non si sapeva che c’era tutto questo problema con il lavoro, se no non si veniva. È stato una grande sorpresa per tutti. Infatti tanti se ne sono tornati indietro. Senza lavoro cosa stai a fare qui a perdere tempo? [...] Nel Western Australia [...] c’erano tante segherie, lavoro di bosco, la ferrovia, acquedotto che andavano a Kalgoorlie, ecc.. Tanti hanno accettato di andare fuori a lavorare e tanti hanno lavorato anche in Perth. Nella ferrovia erano tutti italiani, il Water Supply anche. [...] Se [io] non avessi trovato lavoro, me ne sarei tornato subito indietro._
After staying at the reception camp for about a fortnight, Giovanni began working in rural areas in the South-West. His first job was as a machinery driver on a farm at Congelin Park in Williams. Giovanni’s first impressions of the Australian bush were that the plants were all different and that one needed to watch out for dangerous animals.

_The plants were different. Then they told us to look out for the ferocious animals. In Italy we didn’t have any of them but here you knew that apart from the snakes, there weren’t any ferocious animals. Kangaroos could be ferocious if you annoyed them – I wasn’t afraid but there was that feeling that you think that maybe…. But it was all different. Different plants, the silence of the forest._

_Le piante erano diverse. Poi ci hanno detto di fare attenzione alle bestie feroci. In Italia non ne avevamo ma qui si sapeva che all’infuori dai serpenti, le bestie feroci non ci stavano. Il cangaroo può essere feroce se gli dai fastidio - non avevo paura ma c’era quell’impressione che tu pensi che forse…. Ma era tutto diverso. Le piante diverse, il silenzio del bosco._

Giovanni had many Italian workmates at Congelin Park and they found the living conditions difficult especially the different diet.

_At Congelin Park there were more than 20 Italians. [The boss] was an Australian, Tom Aubrey. They looked after us well, especially Tom Aubrey, because the second manager was Italian and he had been there for years…. [...] No-one was happy. Eating was impossible. There was a Polish cook and we asked him for maccheroni. He said, “Yes, I’ll make you maccheroni” and we were happy. When we went to eat, he got the maccheroni and he put them in cold water to cook! He didn’t have the utensils for pasta and he pulled it out with his hands – no-one ate it. [...] The cook lived in a house. We lived in a hut, like a shed with 25 beds inside attached with straps._

_A Congelin Park eravamo più di 20 italiani. [Il padrone] era un australiano, Tom Aubrey. Loro ci guardavano bene, specialmente Tom Aubrey, perché il secondo manager era italiano ed era lì da anni…. [...] Nessuno era contento. Il mangiare era impossibile. C’era un cuoco polacco e gli abbiamo chiesto per i maccheroni. Lui, “Si, vi faccio i maccheroni” e noi eravamo contenti. Quando siamo andati a mangiare, lui ha preso i maccheroni e li ha messo a cuocere nell’acqua fredda! Non aveva le attrezzze per la pasta e lì ha tirato fuori con le mani – nessuno l’ha mangiati. [...] Il cuoco abitava nella casa. Noi in una baracca, come un shed con dentro 25 letti attaccati con straps._

Giovanni lost his job at Congelin Park after being encouraged by his Italian workmates to go to Perth to try and find alternative work for them because he could speak more English than them.

_I felt really bad because there was no work, but I’ve always had courage (I don’t get discouraged easily) and so I took all my stuff, my pay, and I left. I was angry and I didn’t attach the suitcase properly to the motorcycle. When I arrived in Wandering [...] my suitcase was open and all my stuff had been lost on the road. I was even angrier._
Mi sono sentito veramente male perché il lavoro non c’era, ma il coraggio l’ho sempre avuto (non mi perdo nell’acqua) e così ho preso tutta la roba mia, la paga e sono partito. Ero arrabbiato e non ho attaccato bene la valigia sulla motocicletta. Quando sono arrivato a Wandering […] mi si apre la valigia e tutta la roba persa per la strada. Ero ancora più arrabbiato.

Work and family

Continuing on his way to Perth, Giovanni met a Slav migrant who found him work at the sawmill where he was working near Jarrahdale. After working at the sawmill for a couple of weeks, Giovanni found other work clearing land in Cannington. However, he liked being ‘on the move’ and after a few days began working for the Main Roads Department in Albany. They used to live in tents which would get blown away during storms.

Restless and in search of higher pay, Giovanni found work clearing land for the War Service and Land Settlement Scheme in Mt Barker. Under this scheme the government gave ex-servicemen cleared land for them to farm.

At the War Service and Land Settlement I got up to £24 a week because there you worked ten hours a day and six days a week, instead of eight hours at Main Roads. At Land Settlement it was ‘deforestation’ – clearing the forest with a chain between two machines. […] I was at Rocky Gully and I went all around travelling many kilometres. […] They sent me around from one property to another so I had been in many places. […] I went to Nannup, Manjimup with the bulldozer. […] At that time I went to Boyup Brook, to the virgin forest where you don’t even see the stars. I was alone felling trees. I had a caravan and a radio that didn’t work well. The person who brought me fuel (for the diesel tank), brought the money for expenses and when he returned another time he brought me some food… […] It’s a story that would take a year to write.

Al War Service and Land Settlement ho preso fino a £24 alla settimana perché li si lavorava dieci ore al giorno e sei giorni alla settimana, invece di otto ore al Main Roads. Al Land Settlement era ‘sboscamento’ – pulire il bosco con la catena tra due macchine. […] Stavo a Rocky Gully e andavo in giro per chilometri. […] Mi mandavano in giro da una proprietà a un’altra così sono stato in tanti posti. […] Sono stato a Nannup, Manjimup con la bulldozer. […] A quei tempi sono stato a Boyup Brook, nel bosco vergine dove non si vedevano neanche le stelle. Ero solo a buttare giù alberi. Avevo una carovana e una radio che non funzionava bene. Quello che mi portava il carburante (per il serbatoio di nafta), si prendeva i soldi per la spesa e quando tornava un’altra volta mi portava da mangiare… […] È una storia che ci va un anno per scrivere.

Giovanni recalls how one year he got to drive a D4 caterpillar to fill in rabbit burrows for the Agricultural Department.

One year it rained a lot and the bulldozers were all bogged and they couldn’t work, so Land Settlement closed down for three months. The boss went to Perth […] and […] said to me […] “Do you want to come and drive a ‘D4’?”. The ‘D4’ is the smallest caterpillar that there is. I asked, “To do what?”…. “To level all the rabbit warrens”. […] I said, “But I’ve never done this”…. “No problem, when you get here, you’ll see what to do”. […] On the front there was a pitchfork that went under the
earth and as it went along it broke down all the holes and four or five rabbits would come out of them – it would kill about half of them....

In un anno ha piuvuto tanto e i bulldozers erano tutti sommersi e non potevano lavorare, così il Land Settlement si è chiuso per tre mesi. Il boss è andato a Perth [...] e [...] mi ha detto [...] “Vuoi venire a guidare il ‘D4’?” .... “A spianare tutti i rabbit warrens”.... “Ma io non l’ho fatto mai questo” .... “Non fa niente, quando arrivi là, vedrai cosa fare”. [...] Davanti c’era la forca che andava sotto terra e mentre camminava sfondeva tutti i buchi e ne venivano fuori quattro o cinque conigli - li ammazzava metà e metà....

Giovanni loved his work in the South-West so much that union members tried to have him sacked because he would always be the last to leave at the end of a day’s work.

I was the last to finish all the maintenance because I liked it and the others didn’t care about it. [...] There was a union there that used to come to hold meetings. [...] It was decided there that Marinelli was doing this and everyone complained but no-one told me anything. They did it all behind my back. [...] The boss liked me and he was happy with me. [...] He saw that I knew how to work and [...] he told [them], “Marinelli is a good driver, he looks after his machine well and he’s staying here.” [...] So from that day on [...] when the workday was finished, I left. With that I therefore had to learn to be lazy, to not do things like they should be done. [...] I accepted what happened to me because I knew that I was in a country that wasn’t mine. [...] As a new Australian I was well regarded because I kept quiet

Io ero l’ultimo a finire tutto il maintenance perché mi piaceva e gli altri non se ne importavano. [...] Lì c’era un’unione che veniva per fare i meetings. [...] Lì si era deciso che Marinelli faceva questo e tutti hanno reclamato ma nessuno mi ha detto niente. Hanno fatto tutto dietro le mie spalle. [...] Il boss mi voleva bene ed era contento di me. [...] Ha visto che sapevo lavorare e [...] gli ha [detto], “Marinelli è un bravu autista, guarda bene la macchina e rimane qui.” [...] Allora da quel giorno in poi [...] quando era l’orario, andavo via. Con la parola dunque ho dovuto imparare a fare il lazy, a non fare le cose come si devono fare. [...] Ho accettato quello che mi è capitato perché sapevo che ero in un paese che non era il mio. [...] Come nuovo australiano io ero ben visto perchè tenevo il silenzio.

As a result of Giovanni’s experience, knowledge of machinery and ability to understand and speak English, he was later invited to manage some land clearing work near Esperance. He used to have to teach any new workers how to use the machines. Giovanni later became involved in the construction of small dams or weirs on farms. He was often called upon to advise on suitable sites for dams as he had a very good knowledge of the land.
If you fly in an aeroplane over the Wheatbelt you’ll see all these dams. [...] We used to find salty water, not too often, but you would find it. [...] I had a good name because the tests that I did didn’t fail. You see the land and you have to know it, if not, the water doesn’t hold and it trickles away.

Se tu voli in aereo sul wheatbelt vedi tutte queste dighe. [...] Trovevamo acqua salata, mica sempre, ma la trovavi. [...] Avevo preso un buon nome perché i test che facevo non fallivano. La terra la vedi e la devi conoscere, se no, l’acqua non regge e se ne va via.

Language

One of the things Giovanni found most difficult about living in Australia was understanding and speaking English. He began studying English by correspondence when he was working at Congelin Park.

You had to write to an organisation that would send you papers explaining the words to you. You sent the papers back, they would correct them and then send them back to you with new papers. It wasn’t very easy [learning that way]. [...] Later down at the Land Settlements, there was an Australian who helped me a lot and sometimes I would buy him a packet of cigarettes. In those days an Italian license wasn’t recognised, now yes. He said to me, “Come with me” and he spoke to me but I didn’t understand anything. Anyway we went to see the sergeant at the police station and he said to him, “This man’s a good fellow, can you give him his driver’s licence?”. The sergeant, “Yes, yes, come inside. You have to fill in some papers for him”.... They did it all. “What do you want a licence for? A motor car, truck?”. Perhaps they would have also given me one for a bus!

Si doveva scrivere ad un organizzazione che ti mandava le carte con i pupazzi e li ti spiegava le parole. Mandavi le carte indietro, te le corregevano e te le mandavano indietro con le carte nuove. Non era tanto facile [imparare così]. [...] Dopo giù al Land Settlements, c’era un australiano che mi ha aiutato tanto e ogni tanto gli compravo un pacchetto di sigarette. In quei tempi la licenza italiana non era riconosciuta allora, adesso sì. M’ha detto, “Vieni con me” e lui mi parlava ma non capivo niente. Comunque siamo andati dal sergente al police station e gli ha detto, “This man’s a good fellow, can you give him his driver’s licence?”. Il sergente, “Yes, yes, come inside. You have to fill in some papers for him”.... Hanno fatto tutto loro. “What do you want a licence for? A motor car, truck?”. Forse mi davano anche quella per l’autobus!
Family
Giovanni saved hard so he could help support his family back in Italy. He was eventually able to buy some land in Italy and have a house built for his parents.

At first I sent back the money that my father had given me - £50 which was more than he had given me. Then bit by bit I sent some more to Italy and the rest I put in the bank.

Prima ho mandato indietro i soldi che mi ha dato mio padre - £50 che era di più di quello che mi aveva dato lui. Poi man mano in Italia si mandava qualche cosa e gli altri li mettevo in banca.

In the mid-1950s, Giovanni’s cousin joined him in Australia and Giovanni found him work in a local sawmill. However, he returned to Italy, where he had a girlfriend, just 31 days after receiving a letter from home, the contents of which remain unclear, despite Giovanni’s efforts to persuade him to stay.

I told him, “Come on, Filippo, go to work. Don’t be ashamed, these things have also happened to me being so far away. Go back to work, talk with your friends there, talk with the Italians”. Then he says to me, “I can’t stay here, I want to go back to Italy”.


In 1958, Giovanni himself returned to Italy for three months to see his Italian fiancée/girlfriend (Maria’s sister). He did not end up marrying her but got to know Maria whom he married in 1962 during another visit to Italy.

Merredin
In 1962, Giovanni returned to Australia with his wife and moved to Merredin where they later had two sons, Cristoforo and Marco. For the first year they lived 5km out of the town after which they spent a year living in a caravan park before moving to an old house in Merredin. Maria recalls that there were similarities between living in rural Australia and rural Italy.

There was electricity there at the caravan park but it was a low current. By law then you could only use it for lights, not even for the refrigerator. The little refrigerator
went into a box. I used to work at a dressmaker’s and I used to heat the iron over the gas – those heavy irons. [...] In those days in Italy we didn’t have running water in the house yet, there wasn’t a bathroom in the house. [...] And when you had to wash, you would have to go to the spring. There still weren’t any water pipes that brought the water from the mountain to supply those little towns. [...] To do washing [in Merredin] I used to get the water from the public tap because there weren’t any taps in the caravan.

C’era l’elettricità lì al caravan park ma era quella bassa. Per legge allora potevi usare soltanto per la luce, neanche per il frigorifero. Il frigorifero piccolo andava in cassa. Io lavoravo da sarta e scaldavo il ferro sopra il gas – quei ferri pesanti. [...] In quei tempi in Italia non avevamo ancora l’acqua dentro casa, non c’era il bagno in casa. [...] E quando dovevi lavare, dovevi andare alla sorgente. Non c’era ancora l’acquedotto che portava l’acqua dalla montagna per fornire tutti quei paesetti. [...] Per lavare [a Merredin] prendevo l’acqua del tappo pubblico perché nella carovana non c’era il tappo.

Giovanni and Maria lived in Merredin for ten years in total during which time Giovanni would work until late at night or be absent from home during the week when he was away working in remote places living in a caravan. Maria found their time in Merredin quite a difficult experience.

If he had brought me to the South-West, it would have been different perhaps, like in Albany. But in Merredin it was too hot, dry, dust...the dust storms. [...] When my son was born at St John of God hospital, the lady who was in the room next to me showed me in the ‘Daily News’ a photo of a house that a willy willy had taken the roof off of – it was my house!

Se mi avesse portato al South-West, sarebbe stato diverso forse, come in Albany. Ma a Merredin era troppo caldo, asciutto, polvere...i dust storms. [...] Quando è nato mio figlio all’ospedale di St John of God, quella che stava nella camera affianco a me fece vedere sul ‘Daily News’ una fotografia di una casa che il willy willy aveva portato via il tetto – era la mia casa!

They even had to deal with snakes in their house in Merredin.

When Marco was little, she [Maria] was in the kitchen and he was there on the ground. I had just got back from work, I picked up Cristoforo and we went to have a wash in the bathroom that was over there, you had to go across the room. Then when I heard Marco shout, “There’s a snake!”, I grabbed Cristoforo, naked, under my arm and I ran out of there. She had grabbed Marco and had put him on the table.

Quando Marco era piccolo, essa [Maria] era in cucina e lui era lì per terra. Io ero appena arrivato dal lavoro, ho preso Cristoforo e siamo andati a fare il bagno che stava di là, dovevi attraversare il locale. Allora quando ha gridato Marco, “C’è un serpente!”, ho preso Cristoforo così, nudo, sottobraccio e sono scappato fuori da essa. Lei aveva preso Marco e l’aveva messo sul tavolino.

Maria found some enjoyment in looking after a small garden which had fruit trees previously planted by Italian prisoners of war.
In that house there had perhaps been some prisoners of war who had planted almonds, olives, fruit – there are lots of these places in Merredin. [...] I liked to walk around a bit, apart from the large number of flies that were there. There were many nectarine plants and other fruit that the people had left because they had moved and no-one looked after them. The fruit was very good.

In quella casa c’erano stati forse i prigionieri di guerra che avevano piantato mandorle, olive, frutta – ci sono tanti di questi posti a Merredin. [...] Mi piaceva andare in giro un po’, a parte le mosche che erano troppe. C’erano tante piante di nectarines e altra frutta che la gente lasciava andare perché si spostava e nessuno le guardava. La frutta era tanto buona.

Community

There were many Italians living in Merredin at the time but Maria found it difficult to make many friends because they lived out of town and people often only stayed for a few months of work.

In Merredin there were many Italians, all relatives but I didn’ t know them. There were many farms that were rich because they’d been there for a while, but most of them worked at the Water Supply and the railway and the hospital. There was just that. The women worked at the hospital, there were a couple of Greek restaurants, and an Italian who sold vegetables. But there was nothing to do, they would get work but...there was CBH, the station for wheat. [...] There were people who were always passing through because at that time they were building a new railway... [...] I began to meet a few Italians but there was never the chance to go out for a coffee with the next door neighbour, we were a bit excluded.

A Merredin c’erano tanti italiani, tutti parenti ma io non li conoscevo. C’erano tanti farms che erano ricchi che erano qui da un po’, ma la maggior parte lavorava al Water Supply e la ferrovia e l’ospedale. C’era solo quello. Le donne lavoravano all’ospedale, c’erano un paio di ristoranti greci, e un italiano che vendeva verdura. Ma non c’era niente da fare, il lavoro lo prendevano ma...c’era il CBH, la stazione per il grano. [...] C’era gente che passava sempre perché a quei tempi facevano la ferrovia nuova... [...] Ho incominciato a conoscere un po’ di italiani ma non c’era possibilità di andare a fare un caffè con il vicino di casa, eravamo un po’ fuori.
Return visits

In 1970, Giovanni and Maria decided to return to Italy with the intention of remaining there. They stayed for just under a year but then returned to Australia.

_We wanted to stay [in Italy]. [...] Things were not like they are now.... There wasn’t any work, he [Giovanni] wasn’t young anymore either (by now he was 45 years old). He began with the land and the land didn’t take off, you couldn’t see it. The house had already been started but it wasn’t finished.... The money wasn’t coming in every day to be able to live._

_Volevamo restare [in Italia]. [...] Le cose non erano come adesso.... Il lavoro non c’era, lui [Giovanni] non era più giovane neanche (ormai aveva passato 45 anni). Ha incominciato con la terra e la terra non stava, non si vedeva. Già c’aveva la casa incominciata ma non era finita.... La moneta non veniva dentro per vivere ogni giorno._

Giovanni has been back to Italy 11 times since migrating to Australia. Maria explains that she has been back by herself to visit her mother and later to accompany their son who wanted to visit Italy.

_When my older son finished university, before starting work, he said that he wanted to go to Italy. By then it had been ten years since he’d been there and he didn’t want to go alone because he didn’t know how to speak. At that point he understood Italian but not very well. He studied at the Dante Alighieri and everything however he didn’t speak it, but after being there six weeks he was already getting it._

_Quando mio figlio più grande ha finito l’università, prima d’incominciare il lavoro, ha detto che voleva andare in Italia. Ormai erano dieci anni che non andava più e non ha voluto andare da solo perché non sapeva parlare. A quel punto capiva l’italiano ma non l’ha seguito. Ha studiato dal Dante Alighieri e tutto però non l’ha parlato, ma dopo sei settimane che era lì già si trovava._

Moving to Perth

After returning from their stay in Italy in 1970, the family moved to the suburb of Rivervale. Afterwards, they returned to Merredin for a few years while they built a house in Kalamunda. Now retired, they keep themselves busy looking after their orchard.

_There’s a bit of everything: plums, only pears we don’t have, but olives, lemons, oranges, mandarins, walnuts, almonds, macadamias, kiwi fruit.... We like greenery, the satisfaction of growing our own stuff._

_C’è un po’ di tutto: prugne, solo le pere non ci sono, ma le olive, limoni, arance, mandarini, noci, mandorle, macadamia, kiwi.... A noi ci piace il verde, la soddisfazione di crescere la nostra roba._
Citizenship

Giovanni became an Australian citizen in 1958.

It’s a piece of paper...here no-one forces it but I got it because you never know – with the coming and going. I could always come back with no problem, but you never know.

È un pezzo di carta...qui nessuno ti forzava ma l’ho presa perché non si sapeva mai – con l’andare e tornare. In tanto potevo tornare lo stesso, ma non si sa mai.

Maria explains that she took Australian citizenship in 1986 after Giovanni had had to re-sponsor her to return to Australia after they had spent a year in Italy in 1970, and in case not being an Australian citizen would prevent their children from getting a job.

I had been here for some time, so I decided to do it. I lost [Italian citizenship], I didn’t renew it. I would have had to have made an application again I believe but then I thought, “What am I going to do with Italian citizenship?”. The children have it though...

Ero qui da tanto tempo, così ho deciso di farlo. Io ho persa [la cittadinanza italiana], non l’ho rinnovata. Avrei dovuto fare l’applicazione di nuovo credo ma poi ho pensato, “Cosa ne faccio della cittadinanza italiana?”. I figli ce l’hanno però...

Giovanni is proud of the contribution of Italian migrants to Western Australia.
If there weren’t the Italians, Australia wouldn’t be as it is today – in the sense that Italians work hard and know how to organise things. Italians took Australia, which was in bad shape, and raised it up.

Se non c’erano gli italiani non ci sarebbe l’Australia come adesso – nel senso che l’italiano lavora e sa organizzare. Ha preso l’Australia che era per terra e l’ha alzata in aria.
Interview Excerpts

The following passages are excerpts from Giovanni’s interview. The excerpts are in the original Italian and also translated into English. To hear Giovanni telling his story (in Italian) go to: http://www.italianlives.arts.uwa.edu.au/stories/audio#marinelli

Interview Excerpts: Italian
I – Intervistatore
G – Giovanni Marinelli
M – Maria Marinelli (wife)

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – Share-cropping land
I Oggi è 16.9.05 e questa è la seconda prova per questa intervista che abbiamo incominciato ieri. Puoi spiegare un po’ com’è il paese di Castignano? Ieri abbiamo parlato un po’ del sistema di mezzadria, puoi spiegare un po’ come campavano i contadini in quei tempi?

G Castignano è un paese di campagna, c’è soltanto l’agricoltura, non c’è industria. Il paese dipende soltanto sugli agricoltori per i lavori, e vivono così.

I Di solito la gente lavorava col sistema del mezzadria oppure aveva terreni?

G Si può dire quasi tutti col mezzadria. Forse il 10% aveva una piccola proprietà sua, il resto tutto col mezzadria.

I Hai detto ieri che tua famiglia aveva proprietà che lavorava per mezzadria – 120 tavole?

M Sì, ogni mille metri è una tavola.

G A Castignano avevamo un piccolo terreno da 80 o più tavole, non era tanto. Dopo quando siamo andati ad Appignano, lì avevamo 120 tavole ed era molto più grande. Quando siamo andati giù ad Appignano il più piccolo della famiglia aveva 10-12 anni e noi eravamo grandi.

I Eravate in cinque nella famiglia?

M C’erano i nonni.

I Anche i nonni abitavano lì?

M I nonni stavano sempre lì, non si lasciavano mai.

Excerpt Two: Journey – Assisted migration
I Quando hai visto questi manifesti per emigrare in Australia, cosa significava l’Australia per te? In quei tempi sapevi dov’era l’Australia?

G Non si conosceva l’Australia. A scuola sarà stata nominata quando si parlava di carta geografica, però non se ne parlava dell’Australia, mai. Si parlava della Francia, la Germania, l’Inghilterra e l’America, ma mai dell’Australia.
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Giovanni Marinelli

I Sapevi che distanza era dall’Italia?

G No, non l’ho saputo fino a quando ho fatto la domanda.

I Hai dovuto andare a Genova?

G Sì, siamo andati a Genova per fare la visita e lì ci hanno spiegato un po’ dell’Australia, delle state, dove cresce la canna di zucchero, dove c’erano dei serpenti velenosi…all’ovest c’erano i canguri ecc. e ci hanno spiegato tutte queste cose.

I Potevi scegliere dove volevi andare in Australia?

G Sì, si poteva scegliere.

I Perché hai scelto il Western Australia?

G Perché pensavo, “Scelgo il WA, se non mi va bene lì, andiamo [?]”. Questa era una decisione che non potevi prendere perché fino che non stai sul posto…

Excerpt Three: Journey – Ship

I Puoi descrivere com’era la nave?

G Era una nave militare. Eravamo 400 in ogni camerone. Si dormiva a castelli di tre, uno sopra l’altro e quando si sentiva male quello sopra vomitava su quello sotto.

I Cosa si faceva durante il giorno?

G Quando il tempo era buono c’era la piscina, c’era ping-pong e altri giochi, c’erano le feste. Abbiamo fatto la festa dell’Equatore.

I Erano tutti uomini?

G No, c’erano anche donne ma con le loro famiglie. Dormivano separate ma erano con famiglie.

M C’era qualche cabina forse per gli ufficiali.

G Le cabine più piccole erano per gli ufficiali e i marinai. La nave si è fermata a Napoli, a Messina, a Malta e poi a Port Said.

I Sempre per far salire altri uomini?

G Sì, c’erano italiani da tutte le regioni.

M E c’erano anche polacchi e gente dell’Europa dell’est.

I Erano più italiani che non gli altri europei?

G Sì, erano di più gli italiani.
Interview Excerpts: English

I – Interviewer
G – Giovanni Marinelli
M – Maria Marinelli

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – Share-cropping land

I Today is 16.9.05 and this is the second try for this interview that we began yesterday. Can you describe a bit what the town of Castignano is like? Yesterday we talked a bit about the system of share-cropping, can you explain a bit how the farmers got by in those days?

G Castignano is a country town, there is only agriculture, there’s no industry. The town depends solely on farmers for jobs, and they live like this.

I Did people usually work with the share-cropping system or did they have their own land?

G You could say almost everyone did share-cropping. Perhaps 10% had a small piece of their own land, the rest share-cropped.

I You said yesterday that your family had land that they share-cropped – 120 “tables”?

M Yes, every thousand metres is a “table”.

G In Castignano we had a small piece of land of about 80 or more “tables”, it wasn’t much. Later when we went to Appignano, there we had 120 “tables” and it was much bigger. When we went down to Appignano the youngest in the family was 10-12 years old and we were older.

I There were five in the family?

G There were five of us but there was my Dad and my uncle, so it was two families together. My uncle had two, a boy and a girl, and Dad had two boys and one girl.

M Your grandparents were there.

I Your grandparents also lived there?

G My grandparents were always there, they never left.

Excerpt Two: Journey – Assisted migration

I When you saw these posters about emigrating to Australia, what did Australia mean to you? In those days did you know where Australia was?

G We didn’t know about Australia. At school when you talked about the world you would nominate some place, but you never talked about Australia, never. You talked about France, Germany, England and America, but never about Australia.

I Did you know how far it was from Italy?

G No, I didn’t know until I put in my application [to migrate].
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Giovanni Marinelli

I You had to go to Genoa?

G Yes, we went to Genoa to have a medical check and there they explained to us a bit about Australia, about the states, where the sugar cane grows, where there were poisonous snakes…in the west there were kangaroos etc. and they explained to us all these things.

I Could you choose where you wanted to go in Australia?

G Yes, you could choose.

I Why did you choose Western Australia?

G Because I thought, “I’ll choose WA, if it doesn’t suit me there, we’ll go somewhere else”. This was a decision that you really couldn’t make because until you go to a place…

Excerpt Three: Journey – Ship

I Can you describe what the ship was like?

G It was a military ship. There were 400 of us in every section. You would sleep in bunks of three, one above the other and when someone felt sick the one above would vomit on the one underneath.

I What did you do during the day?

G When the weather was good there was a pool, there was ping-pong and other games, there were parties. We celebrated crossing the Equator.

I They were all men?

G No, there were also women but with their families. They would sleep separately but they were with their families.

M There were a few cabins perhaps for the crew.

G The smallest cabins were for the crew and the sailors. The ship stopped in Naples, in Messina, in Malta and then in Port Said.

I Always for other men to come on board?

G Yes, there were Italians from all the regions.

M But there were also Poles and people from Eastern Europe.

I Were there more Italians than other Europeans?

G Yes, there were more Italians.
Photographs & Documents

The following photographs and documents can be used to help explore Giovanni’s story.

1. B & W Landscape photo of family property in Appignano IT
2. B & W photo of Giovanni on a D4 Caterpillar in Mt Barker WA
3. B & W photo land-clearing with ball and chain near Esperance WA
4. Colour photo of Giovanni
5. Colour photo of Giovanni with the accordion he used play on board the Castelbianco ship on his way to Australia – Photo: Franco Smargiassi
Angelina’s Story

Name: Angelina Martini

Date and place of birth
Born 1921, Gallesano, Istria

Date and place of arrival in Australia
February 1950, Sydney aboard the Gen. Blatchford ship

Type of migration
Displaced Persons’ Resettlement Scheme

Date of Interview and Interviewer
Interviewed 4 July 2005 by Susanna Iuliano

Summary

Angelina Martini (née Moscarda) was born on 24 August 1921 in Gallesano, a small village near Pola (now Pula) on the Istrian Peninsula. Pola had become part of Italy after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. Angelina’s parents were farmers. After five years of primary school, Angelina went to work as a maid at age 14. During World War Two, Angelina and her sister worked in the kitchen at a hotel in Pola which became the British and American Allied Headquarters. It was here that she met her husband, Radoslav Martini, who was working as a chef.

Despite the occupation of Pola by British and American Allied forces in May 1945, instability continued until 1947 when Istria was handed over to Yugoslavia (now Croatia) under the terms of the post-war peace treaty. Many Italians chose not to stay and fled to refugee camps in Italy as exiles or esuli. Some left for patriotic or ethnic motives as they
considered themselves of ‘Italian’ nationality not Slavic. Fighting between communist partisans supportive of Yugoslav leader Marshall Tito (titini) and Italian fascists and Allied sympathisers had created a climate of fear among Italians in the area. In September 1947 Angelina and her sister fled Pola.

After being evacuated to an Italian refugee camp in Grado, Angelina married Radoslavo in October 1947. Their first child Hermes was born in June 1949. Discouraged by the high level of unemployment in Italy and fearful that another war could break out in Europe, Angelina and Radoslavo saw emigration overseas as a way to secure a better future. Through the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), ‘displaced persons’ (DPs) in refugee camps across Europe were offered the opportunity to resettle in countries like Brazil, Argentina, Canada and Australia.

In 1950, Angelina and her husband were selected to come to Australia. They disembarked in Sydney in February 1950 and were taken to the Bathurst Migrant Camp. In return for paying the cost of their voyage and settlement, DPs had to sign a contract with the Australian Government to work for two years wherever their labour was needed. Radoslavo was sent to work on construction of the Warragamba Dam in New South Wales. Radoslavo could only visit his family once a week, so he and Angelina wrote letters to each other.

On 31 October 1950, eight months after arriving in Australia, Radoslavo was killed in a rockslide while working on construction of the Warragamba Dam. Two months pregnant, Angelina was left to care for her young son Hermes with no family support and no steady source of income. The editor of Sydney’s Italian-language newspaper La Fiamma published an appeal to raise funds to help send Angelina to Perth to join her sister who had settled with her husband in Western Australia.

Heavily pregnant, Angelina and son Hermes flew from Sydney to Perth arriving on 11 May 1951. Her second child, Claudio, was born on 29 May. With the money she eventually received from the insurance payment from Radoslavo’s accident, she was able to buy a home in North Perth where she lived alongside many other Italians. To make ends meet, she took in boarders and later worked as a cleaner and a cook. Now a retired aged pensioner, Angelina keeps active cooking gnocchi, lasagne and crostoli for her family and friends.
Interview

Angelina Martini was born on 24 August 1921 in Gallesano, a small village near Pola (now Pula) on the Istrian Peninsula. Pola became part of Italy after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and remained so until after World War Two when it became part of Yugoslavia (now Croatia).

Angelina’s parents, Giusto Moscarda and Anna Sferco, were farmers. Angelina was the eldest child of five. Her mother and youngest sister died when Angelina was eight years old. Her father remarried and had another three children with her stepmother. Angelina completed the compulsory five years of primary school. It was common for Italians to begin working at a young age; Angelina began working as a maid at age 14.

Lots of people [from Gallesano] worked in Pola, most of them however were farmers. My Dad was a farmer and he had cows and you lived off the farm produce but we had to be very frugal because there were seven of us children. [...] I had just finished primary school and I started working as a maid. [...] I used to board there with those people – people that had a lot of money in Gallesano. [...] I remember that I didn’t even know how to do the washing because there weren’t washing machines like today, and so my mistress taught me. My Dad would come and collect the thirty lire they gave me each month.

In her early 20s, Angelina worked as a kitchenhand in a hotel in Pola which became the Allied Headquarters during WWII. It was here that she met her husband, Radoslavo Martini, who was working as a chef. Radoslavo was from Castelnuovo d’Arsa, another town in Istria. Before they married, Radoslavo worked as a chef in the Italian navy and as a stone-cutter.
After the death of Mussolini, the English came to help us and I worked [...] in a club with the English. [...] I used to help in the kitchen, I was the assistant cook. I was young and all I had to do was count the pastries and bring them upstairs where there was a café. [...] It was called ‘NAFI’. They gave it the name of the English people but before, under Italy, it was called ‘Casa Savoia’. [...] ‘Savoia’ means ‘the house of the King’. [...] It was a place where Mussolini used to go, artists, only important people could go there. [...] [I worked there] for almost two years, the whole time that the English occupied Pola.

Dopo la morte di Mussolini, gli inglesi sono venuti ad aiutarci e io ho lavorato [...] in un club con gli inglesi. [...] Aiutavo in cucina, ero assistente cuoca. Ero giovane e mi facevano solo contare i pasti e portarli sopra dove c’era il caffè. [...] Si chiamava ‘NAFI’. Gli hanno messo il nome degli inglesi però prima, sotto l’Italia, si chiamava ‘Casa Savoia’. [...] ‘Savoia’ vuol dire ‘la casa del Re’. [...] Era un posto dove andava Mussolini, gli artisti, solo gente grande poteva andarci. [...] [Ho lavorato lì] per quasi due anni, tutto il tempo che gli inglesi hanno occupato Pola.

In September 1947, Angelina and her sister Anna Maria fled from Pola with help from the English following widespread fighting between fascists and communist partisans who were targeting Allied sympathisers.

They would call those who followed Tito, ‘osna’, because they were those who did bad things, you know like a kind of mafia. One of these people was from my town and we used to go to school together. One day I went to Gallesano and he was also there on the bus and he sat near me. He said to me, “I heard that you’re going to Italy”. [...] I told him, “No, it’s not true, I’m not going to Italy” because I was afraid. He said to me, “Remember that you’re written in the black book”. Do you know what that was? It meant that even I was going to die if I stayed there. And my husband was even working there. Then my Dad also told us, “Go, daughter, so you will be saved because here...”. It was terrible...

Just me and one of my sisters [we went away]. [...] Dad had heart problems and he didn’t move. [...] Another younger sister had married one of these policemen who supported Italy and they also had to run away. But always with the help of the English. It wasn’t that we really ran away on our own. [...] The English found us
homes and also brought us to Italy by ship, from Pola to Trieste. [...] There was no danger because we were on an Italian ship and the English were our protectors, we were safe. [...] Each one of us had to fill out papers for ourselves. [...] We believed that there would be another war against the partisans and that then we could return.


Solo io e una mia sorella [siamo andate via]. [...] Il papà soffriva di cuore e non si è mosso. [...] Un’altra sorella più giovane ha sposato uno di questi della polizia che teneva per l’Italia e hanno dovuto scappare anche loro. Ma sempre con l’aiuto degli inglesi. Non è che siamo proprio scappati soli. [...] Gli inglesi c’hanno trovato le case e anche portato in Italia con la nave, da Pola a Trieste. [...] Non c’era pericolo perché eravamo sulla nave italiana e gli inglesi erano i nostri protettori, eravamo sicuri. [...] Ognuno di noi abbiamo dovuto fare le carte per se. [...] Noi credevamo che fosse un’altra guerra contro i partigiani e che poi si ritornava.

Refugee camps

After fleeing to a refugee camp in Grado, Angelina married Radoslavo on 18 October 1947. Their first child Hermes was born in Italy on 11 June 1949. While Angelina found work in a sardine factory, Radoslavo had difficulty finding work in Grado and they began to think about leaving Italy.

[In these camps] there were all kinds of people. [...] I slept with the baby on a camp bed. [...] It was a big camp, closed, and so that our neighbours wouldn’t always see us, my husband put up a long wire and then hung a cover. You could hear though – whoever was fighting, whoever was crying, whoever was shouting, you could hear everything. [...] We were free, we weren’t watched, but you couldn’t go anywhere because we didn’t have anything. [...] I remember that they had given us a blanket and a pot, like the soldiers, and in that they would give you soup or pasta. Sometimes it was so disgusting that you couldn’t eat it but there wasn’t anything else.

The newspapers all talked about emigration, not just to Australia but also to Argentina and to Perù. As it was my husband wanted to go to Argentina. After filling out the papers to go to Argentina, we were in the camp in Italy. In fact we had been in three camps – in Versa, Cinecittà and another one that I don’t remember the name of. [...] Hermes was sick with bronchitis when everything was ready to go to Argentina. We had to refuse because the baby was in hospital [...] . [...] The next convoy was to come to Australia by ship [American] ‘General Blatchford’. [...] For this reason we came to Australia.
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Angelina Martini

In these camps there were people of all qualities. [...] The boy and I slept on the bunks. [...] It was a big closed field, and to make sure the neighbors who didn’t see us, my husband put up a long wire and put up some blankets. [...] It could be heard - who was fighting, who was crying, who was shouting, everything was heard. [...] We were free, we weren’t observed, but you didn’t go anywhere because you had nothing. [...] I remember they gave us a blanket and a pot, like soldiers, and in that they gave you soup or pasta. Sometimes it was so disgusting you couldn’t eat it but there was nothing else.

Newspapers were talking all about immigration, not just for Australia but also for Argentina and Peru. So my husband wanted to go to Argentina. After he did all the papers for Argentina, we were in the camp in Italy. In fact we were in three camps – Versa, Cinecittà and another one that I don’t remember the name. [...] Hermes got bronchitis when we were ready to go to Argentina. We had to cancel because the boy was in the hospital. [...] The next convoy was to come to Australia on the American ship ‘General Blatchford’. [...] For this reason we came to Australia.

Radoslavo's suitcase from Italy

Journey

In 1950, Angelina, Radoslavo and their son migrated to Australia as ‘displaced persons’ with the assistance of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO).

We were there from September until November and then we were on the ship for more than a month because the ship passed through Suez Canal. At that time ships didn’t come directly [...] . [...] The men all slept in one area, like a large hall [...]. The women and children had beds in threes – I slept underneath because the baby was five months old, then an older one above, and then another woman above that. In that hall four families slept.

I never imagined that Australia might be so far away. My husband kept telling me, “You’ll see you’ll be happy because it’s a hot place”. They would talk about kangaroos and those things. He would say, “When we’ve made a bit of money, we’ll return to Italy”. This was my husband’s dream. We made those plans without knowing what was ahead of us. We were young and we dreamed. [...] Besides, when you have a person who you love, it doesn’t matter what happens, you know.

Siamo stati lì da settembre fino a novembre e poi siamo stati sulla nave per più di un mese perché la nave è passata per Suez Canal. In quel periodo le navi non venivano
direttamente [...]. [...] Gli uomini dormivano tutti da una parte, come una grande sala [...]. Le donne e i bambini avevano i letti in tre – io dormivo sotto perché il bambino aveva cinque mesi, poi un’altra più grande sopra, e ancora un’altra donna sopra. In quella sala dormivano quattro famiglie.


First impressions

I remember when we arrived in Fremantle. I was very impressed by the houses that were all small and they seemed to me like the ones on postcards, not really houses. [...] However what I did like when we arrived in February, which I will never forget, was the heat because I left Italy where it was cold. [...] I remember that you couldn’t sleep at night because it was so hot. We were also happier because we didn’t have the fear we had in Yugoslavia, we felt free.

Mi ricordo quando siamo arrivati a Fremantle. Sono stata molto impressionata delle case che erano tutte basse e mi sembrava quelle sulle cartoline, non proprio case. [...] Però quello che mi è piaciuto quando siamo arrivati a febbraio, che non dimenticherò mai, era il caldo perché ho lasciato l’Italia dove c’era il freddo. [...] Mi ricordo di notte che non si poteva dormire per il tanto caldo. Poi si era più contenti perché non avevamo la paura che avevamo in Jugoslavia, ci sentivamo liberi.

Early settlement experiences

Angelina, Radoslav e six-month-old Hermes disembarked in Sydney via Fremantle in February 1950 and were taken to the Bathurst Migrant Camp (Migrant Reception and Training Centre). As part of his compulsory two-year work contract, Radoslav worked on construction of the Warragamba Dam. On account of the distance, Radoslav could only visit his family in Bathurst once a week, so he and Angelina used to write letters to each other. On 31 October, Radoslav was killed in a rockslide at the age of 28. Angelina was two months pregnant with their second child.
A big four hundred foot mountain collapsed. With the noise of the [jackhammer] he didn’t hear the collapse. The ones near him shouted but when you saw this mountain collapse, it happened like that and a rock killed him. [...] So I was left alone with a sixteen month old baby and another that was born seven months after my husband died.

È crollata una grande montagna di quattrocento piedi. Col rumore del [jackhammer] lui non ha sentito il crollo. Quelli vicino hanno gridato ma quando si è visto questa montagna crollare, si è messo così e il sasso l’ha ammazzato. [...] Così sono rimasta sola con un bambino di sedici mesi e un altro che è nato dopo sette mesi che mio marito è morto.

Radoslavo’s death was reported in the local press, including Sydney’s Italian-language newspaper La Fiamma which arranged a collection to send Angelina to Western Australia so that she could be with her sister. In the meantime, she went to live in Mulgoa with an Italian family they had met on the ship.

It was difficult because I was crying and I didn’t even want to eat. The baby, you know, didn’t have his Dad anymore and he became a bit spoilt, everyone would spoil him. I remember that I wanted to die, I did not even want to live and then I said, “but I have two little ones. For the love of my children I want to live.” [...] I was hoping to go back but it was difficult to go to Italy. My sister who was in Perth [...] told me, “Angelina, someone promised me that they will give me a house when you come here. Come so that we can be together.” [...] The people from ‘Fiamma’ paid my travel expenses because I didn’t have any money. [...] I came because at that stage I didn’t have anyone there. In the beginning we were all close, but then everyone moved away so I thought about coming to Western Australia.

Era difficile perché io piangevo e non volevo neanche mangiare. Il bambino, sai, non aveva più il papà ed è diventato un po’ viziato, tutti lo viziavano. Mi ricordo che volevo morire, non volevo neanche vivere e poi ho detto, “Ma, c’ho due creature. Per l’amore dei bambini io voglio vivere.” [...] Io speravo di tornare però era difficile andare in Italia. La mia sorella che era a Perth [...] mi ha detto, “Angelina, qualcuno mi ha promesso che mi dà la casa quando tu arrivi qui. Vieni che staremo insieme.” [...] Questi qui della ‘Fiamma’ mi hanno pagato il viaggio perché non avevo soldi.
Moving to Perth

Angelina and Hermes arrived in Perth on 11 May 1951. An arrangement to rent a house with her sister fell through when the landlord became worried that Angelina would not be able to pay the rent as she had not yet received the workers’ compensation insurance payment from Radoslavo’s accident. Angelina used to eat at her sister’s on James Street in Perth and spent the nights in a sleep-out at the home of an Italian family in East Perth. Her second child, Claudio (Peter), was born on 29 May.

When I arrived in Perth, I had the baby and I was in hospital and I didn’t have anyone. At night I covered my face because all the other ladies had a husband and I didn’t have anyone because my sister was looking after my other child (Hermes). [...] I didn’t know any English [...] Near me there was a dear lady from Kalamunda who was Italian and [...] we spoke in Italian. [...] It was very difficult. I remember that I always cried, day and night.

While in hospital after giving birth to Claudio, Angelina met Father F. L. Kearnan from Kalamunda. After hearing Angelina’s story, he found a family in his parish who could provide some accommodation. However, this family expected Angelina to do all the housework, which was difficult with two small children. Hermes was two years old at the time and used to play with the youngest child in the family.

He used to play with a little plastic wagon and he threw it at the head of the other child who went home crying. [The father] came outside, he took off his belt and he beat Hermes. His body was covered with belt marks. [...] I heard him crying “Mamma”. When I came outside, I saw that he was holding him by the arm and beating him. I didn’t know any English but I pushed him and I said to him, “You are cow”, a word that I knew, and he raised his hand to hit me but his wife stopped him. Then I went crying with my son to the neighbours and they told me, “It’s better if you go to the police and show them your boy”. [...] I said, “Before going to the police I want to go to the priest”. [...] [The priest] said to me, “Angelina, you can’t go to the police. Don’t forget that I preach from the altar that if someone wrongs you, you have to forgive them.” I listened to him and I went back to the house. They had thrown all of my things onto the veranda.

Giocava con un caretto di plastica e l’ha tirato in testa all’altro bambino che è andato a casa piangendo. [Il signore] è venuto fuori, ha tirato la cinghia e ha battuto Hermes. Il suo corpo era pieno di macchie di cinghia. [...] Ho sentito il pianto che chiamava “Mamma”. Quando sono venuta fuori, ho visto che lo teneva per il braccio e lo picchiava. Io non sapevo l’inglese ma l’ho spinto e c’ho detto, “You are cow”, la
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Angelina Martini

Work and family

Following the death of her husband, things were difficult for Angelina financially. She was not eligible for a widow’s pension as she was unnaturalised and one had to have been living in Australia for at least five years to become an Australian citizen. However, she did receive some government assistance which had to be paid back once she started receiving the workers’ compensation insurance payments from Radoslavo’s accident. After staying with her sister again for a while, Angelina found a house to rent in Bassendean through a friend and began to take in boarders. Using the money from the compensation payment, Angelina was able to put a deposit on a house in Kadina Street, North Perth in 1952. During this time, she was working as a cleaner at the medical practice of Dr Milne.

Mrs Milne had a girl who used to work as a ‘receptionist’ her name was Jennifer. Her mother was a wonderful woman. Every week a letter would arrive [...] with a little written note [“Bless you”] [...] with a pound inside. [...] Mrs Milne told me that this lady absolutely did not want me to know that it was her. She had a soft spot for me, because she knew that I had two children and that I had a hard life, so every week she would send me money. All together there were seventy two envelopes. [...] It was a great help and in the holidays she would send me a bit more. [...] I remember that I worked for four pounds a week in those days. [...] I don’t know if this woman is still alive but I would really love to send her a bunch of flowers and tell her a big ‘thankyou’ for what she did for me because I really needed it.

La Mrs Milne aveva la ragazza che lavorava come ‘receptionist’ che si chiamava Jennifer. La sua mamma era una brava donna. Ogni settimana arrivava una lettera [...] con un piccolo foglio scritto [“Bless you”] [...] con dentro una sterlina. [...] Mrs
Milne mi ha detto che questa signora assolutamente non voleva che io sapessi che fosse lei. Lei aveva una cosa per me, che sapeva che io avevo due bambini e che avevo la vita dura, allora tutte le settimane mi mandava i soldi. Tutti insieme ci sono settantadue buste. [...] Era un grande aiuto e nei holidays mi mandava un po’ di più. [...] Mi ricordo che lavoravo per quattro sterline all’ora a quei tempi. [...] Non so se questa donna è ancora viva ma avrei tanto piacere mandarle un mazzo di fiori e di dirle un forte ‘grazie’ per quello che lei ha fatto per me perché avevo proprio bisogno.

Note given with money

Angelina had two mortgages during this period but a friend, Mr Toohey, helped her pay off one of them. She was also grateful for support given by Fr Kearnan and other clergy. When both her children were at school, Angelina worked in the kitchen at the Parmelia Hotel for nine years. She later worked at the Redemptorist Monastery in North Perth cooking for up to 20 priests at a time. In March 1954, Angelina’s sister’s husband, Arno Ive, also died in a work-related accident in Perth.

Language

At home, Angelina spoke the dialects of Gallésano and Trieste with her husband Radoslav but she spoke Italian, which she had learnt at school in Italy, with her children who now speak it well. One of the greatest challenges Angelina faced in Australia was understanding and speaking English.

It was difficult because I didn’t know the language, I didn’t have a house, with two children, no money [...]. [...] I remember when in Penrith [in NSW] I wanted some garlic and I went to the shops [...] which was not like it is today with everything on display and even if you don’t know how to speak, at least you can see what you want, get it and pay. Back then they had all the stuff behind the counter. [...] The lady said to me, “Can you spell it?”. I didn’t even know what ‘spelling’ meant. She gave me a pencil and paper and I drew her some garlic and she gave it to me straight away.

When the baby turned one, I wanted to make him something from wool because I knew how to knit, and I needed some wool. [...] There were two girls who were talking in each others’ ears and laughing. I don’t remember what I said but it was difficult to explain and seeing them laughing like that made me feel bad so I left without the wool. I ended up buying it in another shop, how I did it I don’t know, but I bought it.

When I was working for Dr Milne, they had four children [...]. Mrs Milne told me to change the bed sheets. We were at the table eating and she told me, “Change this bed”. So [...] I said to her, “Can you give me the sheets to change the bed”. Instead
of saying in English ‘sheets’, I said it badly...and the children started laughing like crazy. I will never forget it, so that even today if I have to say the English word for sheets, I don’t say it!

Era difficile perché non sapevo la lingua, non avevo casa, con due bambini, niente soldi [...]. [...] Io mi ricordo quando a Penrith [in NSW] volevo dell’aglio e sono andata in bottega [...] che non era come oggi con tutto esposto e anche se non sai parlare, almeno vedi quello che vuoi, prendi e paghi. Allora avevamo la roba tutto di dietro. [...] La signora mi ha detto, “Can you spell it?”’. Io non sapevo nemmeno cosa voleva dire ‘spelling’. Lei mi ha dato una matita e una carta e io le ho fatto un disegno dell’aglio e subito me l’ha dato.

Quando il bambino ha compiuto un anno, volevo fargli qualche cosa di lana perché sapevo lavorare con gli aghi, e avevo bisogno della lana. [...] C’erano due ragazze che parlavano l’una con l’altra nell’orecchio e ridevano. Non mi ricordo cosa ho detto ma era difficile spiegare e vedendo loro ridere sono rimasta così male che sono andata via senza la lana. L’ho comprata poi in un’altra bottega, come ho fatto non lo so, ma l’ho comprata.

Quando lavoravo dal Dr Milne, avevano quattro bambini [...]. La signora mi ha detto di cambiare le lenzuola del letto. Eravamo a tavola che si mangiava e mi ha detto, “Cambia questo letto”. Allora [...] io c’ho detto, “Mi dai le lenzuola per cambiare il letto”. Invece di dire in inglese ‘sheets’, ho detto male...e questi bambini si sono messi a ridere come matti. Non lo dimenticherò mai, che ancora oggi se io devo dire la parola inglese per lenzuola, non lo dico!

In the 1970s, Angelina began classes to improve her English.

I had a friend who was older than me [...] and she was going to learn English. So I said, “If she, who is older than me is learning, why can’t I do it too?”. And I also had the desire to know a bit more because my boys were getting older and sometimes they brought girlfriends home and I felt embarrassed when I spoke English, like I do even now.

Avevo un’amica più vecchia di me [...] e lei andava ad imparare l’inglese. Allora io ho detto, “Se lei, più vecchia di me impara, perché non posso farlo anch’io?”. Poi mi è venuto un desiderio di sapere un po’ di più perché i miei ragazzi venivano grandi e alle volte portavano a casa le amiche e io mi sentivo imbarazzata quando parlavo l’inglese, come anche adesso.

Re-marriage

In 1984, Angelina married Narciso Baci, a Tuscan widower who had two children. Narciso’s mother was ill at the time and he wanted Angelina to live with them and help look after her.

Before getting married I loved this woman, his Mum, and I felt sorry for her, I felt for her. So I accepted and in six months we were married, to help his Mum [...].

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Angelina Martini
Prima di sposarmi ho voluto bene a questa donna, la sua mamma, e mi ha fatto pena, 
I felt for her. Allora ho accettato e in sette mesi ci siamo sposati, per aiutare la 
mamma [...].

Following Narciso’s death in 2002, Angelina moved into a property in Yokine which she had 
purchased as an investment prior to her second marriage.

I miei figli volevano che io vendessi questa casa per andare a vivere vicino a loro. 
[...] Poi dopo si sono rassegnati e adesso che mi vedono che sono contenta, dicono, 
“Sai, mamma, che hai aggiustato bene la casa”.

Children and grandchildren

Angelina and Radoslav’s two sons completed high school at Christian Brothers’ College in 
Leederville. Hermes then studied film and television production at the National Institute of 
Dramatic Art in Sydney. Claudio studied in Italy and qualified as a chef before returning to 
work in restaurants in Perth. Angelina now has four grandchildren.

I take such a great joy in my sons – it’s the payment for how much I suffered when 
they were young. They’re both so talented. [...] It’s better [to raise a family] here 
because there are more work opportunities and the people here are very independent. 
In Italy the old people still rule. For example if you marry a man (and he doesn’t have 
a lot of money), the daughter-in-law has to live with her in-laws for years and years. 
[...] You know, it would please me [if they were to marry Italian women] but I have 
always been a bit more Australian in that regard because if I went against it, I would 
lose my sons. [...] Claudio’s wife is from Busselton, her ancestors were amongst the 
first to come to Australia.

Io ho una grande gioia con i figli - e la paga per quanto ho sofferto quando erano 
giovani. Sono tanto bravi tutti e due. [...] È meglio [far crescere una famiglia] qui 
perché c’è più possibilità per lavoro e poi la gente qui è molto indipendente. In Italia 
i vecchi comandano ancora. Per esempio se si sposa il figlio (e non ha tanti soldi), la 
nuora deve abitare con i suoceri per anni e anni. [...] Sai, fa piacere [se sposavano 
italiane] ma io sono stata sempre un po’ con l’australiana perché se andavo contro, 
perdevo i figli. [...] La moglie di Claudio è di Busselton, i suoi vecchi sono dei primi 
che sono venuti in Australia.

Community and return visits

Angelina lived near many Italians when she was in North Perth.

In those days, the old Australians wouldn’t see us and they were still a bit mean 
towards the Italians who had arrived before us. They said that we had come with 
‘piatto pronto’ (everything given to us). I remember that in Kadina Street I had some 
‘boarders’ – men for whom I would cook, wash, I did everything [...]. I had three 
boarders that I’ve stayed good friends with. [...] The father and son were Luccarini 
and the other Fogliani. [...] Fogliani was Sicilian and the Luccarini’s were Tuscan.

They were almost all Italian and they still are. There was a family, Falcone, I was 
godmother to their son and we are still great friends. Then there was another family,
Olvi Paganin. She is Tuscan and her husband is Venetian. Her mother-in-law, Mrs Paganin, lived in Kadina Street and I used to clean the house for her too. There was the Raspa family, all Italians and almost all of us had boarders. [...] On the corner of Scarborough Beach Road and Charles and Palmer Streets, there was an Italian shop. [...] Then further on there was an Italian butcher and a food shop that was Macedonian.

In 1969, Angelina made her first return visit to Gallesano then part of Yugoslavia.

Angelina keeps in touch with her sister by letter and some of these letters have been published.¹

I returned to Italy after twenty two years, in ’69. [...] It was wonderful but after a week I wanted to come back to Australia [...] because life was more beautiful. The people there stayed as they were. My sister said to me, “How is it, Angelina, that you were born in this country like me and yet you have changed so much?” [...] And both my sons tell me, “Mum, we thank you and Dad for coming to Australia.” Claudio has come to know his roots in Italy and Hermes has also been to Italy three times and even he says that life is a bit difficult.

Sono tornata in Italia dopo ventidue anni, nel ’69. [...] Era una grande gioia però dopo una settimana volevo tornare in Australia [...] perché la vita era più bella. La gente lì è rimasta com’era. Mia sorella mi diceva, “Come mai, Angelina, sei nata in questo paese come me ma tu sei tanto cambiata?”. [...] E tutti e due i miei figli mi dicono, “Mamma, ringraziamo te e papà di essere venuti in Australia.” Claudio ha conosciuto i suoi radici in Italia e Hermes è andato anche lui tre volte in Italia e anche lui dice che la vita è un po’ difficile.

Life today

Now a retired aged pensioner, Angelina is well-known for her crostoli, gnocchi and lasagne and has given cooking demonstrations and won a sweets baking competition during Italian Festival Week.

The saddest memories of Australia that I have are naturally the death of my (first) husband so that I wanted to die too, then when I had the baby and I was alone […]. That was something that really broke my heart and I think of it every day, but at times these things come to me, because soon I’ll be 84 years old and I still do my own thing. Every fifteen days the Silverchain comes to clean the house and sometimes I do babysitting for Claudio because he still has little ones […]. So every day that passes, I thank the Lord, Our Lady, and I pray the rosary every night. I watch the news a bit, and the time passes.

I ricordi più tristi dell’Australia che ho sono naturalmente la morte di mio marito (primo) che io volevo morire anch’io, poi quando ho avuto il bambino che ero sola […]. Quello è stato proprio una cosa che mi ha rotto il cuore e ci penso giornalmente, però alle volte mi vengono dei momenti, perché fra poco avrò 84 anni e faccio ancora le mie cose. Ogni quindici giorni viene il Silverchain a pulire la casa e qualche volta vado a fare babysitting da Claudio perché lui c’ha ancora i bambini piccoli […]. Allora ogni giorno che passa, ringrazio il Signore, la Madonna, e prego il rosario tutte le sere. Guardo un po’ il news, e il tempo passa.

Angelina reflected on her experiences of living in Australia as an assignment for an English class.

“I felt like I was a black sheep and many times was called spaghetti eater and garlic muncher. I hated these words but couldn’t defend myself. Why? Because I couldn’t speak English. In those times we didn’t have help that new Australians have today and it was hard to find an interpreter. I’ll never forget the girls in the shop…the wool. To tell you the truth I found Australia to be an ugly place and very different to how I see it today. I suppose this is because I now understand the language and feel at home. I like this country better than my own. […] It doesn’t matter how old you are, it’s very important to learn English. I, too, am going to school after 33 years in Australia. I feel so happy that after a long time I can now read the ‘West Australian’ and the ‘Sunday Times’ and other magazines. With a little goodwill you can enjoy beautiful Australia because now I can say that my past has just been a dream.”
Angelina in 2007
Interview Excerpts

The following passages are excerpts from Angelina’s interview. The extracts are in the original Italian and also translated into English. To hear Angelina telling her story (in Italian) go to: http://www.italianlives.arts.uwa.edu.au/stories/audio#martini

Italian

I – Intervistatore
A – Angelina Martini

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – First job as a teenager

I A che età hai incominciato a lavorare?
A Fino a tredici sono andata a scuola e poi a quattordici anni ho incominciato a lavorare.
I Tuo padre aveva un po’ di terreno?
A Aveva un bel po’ di terreno però con tanti bambini, lavorava lui solo e non faceva moneta.
I Il terreno era fuori del paese?
A Sì, un paio di chilometri fuori.
I Allora da quattordici anni hai incominciato a lavorare.
A Sì, andavo da questi signori e facevo tutti i lavori di casa.
I Abitavi a casa e andavi al lavoro?
A No, dormivo lì da questi signori – gente che aveva tanta moneta a Gallesano. Ho lavorato lì credo, per tre anni e poi sono andata a Pola e ho servito per cinque anni in una casa di un dottore. Lui veniva a Gallesano una volta alla settimana. Mio papà che soffriva dal mal di cuore gli ha detto, “Io c’ho la famiglia grande”, e lui ha detto, “Io ho bisogno di una ragazza perché c’ho una moglie e tre figli”. Così sono stata per cinque anni da loro.

Excerpt Two: Journey – Refugee camps

I Prima hai detto che il IRO ha assistito con l’emigrazione, come hai saputo che era aperto l’emigrazione per l’Australia?
A I giornali parlavano tutti dell’emigrazione, non solo per l’Australia ma anche per l’Argentina ed il Perù. Tanto sta che mio marito voleva andare in Argentina. Dopo fatto le carte per andare in Argentina, siamo stati nel campo in Italia. Infatti siamo stati in tre campi – a Versa, Cinecittà e ancora un altro che non ricordi il nome. Quando noi eravamo al campo di Cinecittà, Hermes si è ammalato di bronchite quando si era pronti per partire per l’Argentina. Abbiamo dovuto rifiutare perché il bambino era all’ospedale.
con la bronchite. Per questo motivo siamo venuti in Australia. Il prossimo convoglio era per venire in Australia con la nave ‘General Blackford’.

I In questi campi, Versa, Cinecittà e l’altro vicino Napoli, com’era la vita? C’era tanta gente?


I Quante persone c’erano? Cento, duecento?

A Io non so quante ma tante perché quando c’era un convoglio la nave era piena e tutti andavano lì.

I Essendo vicino alla città, potevi andare e venire quando volevi?

A Oh sì, eravamo liberi, non eravamo osservati, ma non andavi a nessun posto perché non avevamo niente. Mio marito non lavorava e ci davano da mangiare nel campo. Mi ricordo che c’avevano dati una coperta e una pentola, come i soldati, e in quella ti davano la minestra o la pasta. Qualche volta faceva così schifo che non potevi mangiare ma non c’era altro. Siamo stati lì da settembre fino a novembre e poi siamo stati sulla nave per più di un mese perché la nave e passata per [Bonis…]. In quel periodo le navi non venivano direttamente e così siamo stati sulla nave più di un mese.

Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – Language

I Cosa pensavi degli australiani in quei primi anni?

A Era così duro che…volevo farti vedere la lettera di cosa io ho pensato…non so se c’hai tempo. Questa è una lettera che io scritto, ‘Le mie memorie di Sydney’, proprio del passato.

I Questo l’hai scritto in inglese?

A Si, perché quando io andavo a scuola la maestra mi ha detto di scrivere la mia storia. Guarda, qui la maestra ha corretto…[showing document]…In quella lettera c’era tutto quello che io pensavo dell’Australia, nei primi anni. Se hai tempo leggi, se no la porti a casa.

I Comprare le cose nel negozio era molto difficile…Cosa intendevi con…“I found Australia to be an ugly place and very different from the way I see it today”. Qual’erano le cose più brutte all’inizio?

A La lingua. Una volta sono andata in bottega, che non era come oggi con tutto esposto e anche se non sai parlare, almeno vedi quello che vuoi, prendi e paghi. Allora, avevano la roba tutto di dietro. Io mi ricordo quando a Penrith volevo dell’aglio e sono andata in bottega. La signora mi ha detto, “Can you spell it?”. Io non sapevo nemmeno cosa voleva dire ‘spelling’. Lei mi ha dato una matita e una carta e io le ho fatto un disegno dell’aglio
e subito me l’ha dato. Quando il bambino ha compiuto un anno, volevo fargli qualche cosa di lana perché sapevo lavorare con gli aghi, e avevo bisogno della lana. Non so come ho chiesto. C’erano due ragazze che parlavano l’una con l’altra nell’orecchio e ridevano. Non mi ricordo cosa ho detto ma era difficile spiegare e vedendo loro ridere sono rimasta così male che sono andata via senza la lana. L’ho comprata poi in un’altra bottega, come ho fatto non lo so, ma l’ho comprata.
Excerpt One: Life in Italy – First job as a teenager

I  How old were you when you started working?

A  Up until thirteen I went to school and then at fourteen years of age I started working.

I  Your father had a bit of land?

A  He had a lovely piece of land however with lots of children, he worked alone and he didn’t make money.

I  The land was outside of the town?

A  Yes, a couple of kilometres outside.

I  So then from fourteen years old you started working.

A  Yes, I used to go to these people and I did all the housework.

I  You lived at home and went to work?

A  No, I used to board there with those people – people in Gallesano that had a lot of money. I worked there I believe, for three years and then I went to Pola and I worked for five years in a doctor’s house. He would come to Gallesano once a week. My Dad who suffered from heart problems said to him, “I have a big family”, and he said, “I need a maid because I have a wife and three children”. So I was with them for five years.

Excerpt Two: Journey – Refugee camps

I  Before you said that the IRO assisted with your emigration, how did you know that emigration was open to Australia?

A  The newspapers all talked about emigration, not just to Australia but also to Argentina and to Perù. As it was my husband wanted to go to Argentina. After filling out the papers to go to Argentina, we were in the camp in Italia. In fact we had been in three camps – in Versa, Cinecittà and another one that I don’t remember the name of. When we were at the Cinecittà camp, Hermes was sick with bronchitis when everything was ready to go to Argentina. We had to refuse because the baby was in hospital with bronchitis. For this reason we came to Australia. The next convoy was to come to Australia by ship ‘General Blackford’.

I  In these camps, Versa, Cinecittà and the other one near Naples, what was life like? Were there a lot of people?
There were all kinds of people. Susanna, I slept with the baby on a camp bed. My husband on another. It was a big camp, closed, and so that our neighbours wouldn’t always see us, my husband put up a long wire and then hung a cover. You could hear though – whoever was fighting, whoever was crying, whoever was shouting, you could hear everything.

How many people were there? A hundred, two hundred?

I don’t know how many but a lot because when there was a convoy the ship was full and everyone would go there.

Being close to the city, could you come and go when you wanted?

Oh yes, we were free, we weren’t watched, but you couldn’t go anywhere because we didn’t have anything. My husband wasn’t working and they gave us food in the camp. I remember that they had given us a blanket and a pot, like the soldiers, and in that they would give you soup or pasta. Sometimes it was so disgusting that you couldn’t eat it but there wasn’t anything else. We were there from September until November and then we were on the ship for more than a month because the ship passed through [Bonis…]. At that time ships didn’t come directly and so we were on the ship for more than a month.

Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – Language

What did you think about Australians in those first years?

It was so hard that… I wanted to show you a letter about what I thought… I don’t know if you have time. This is a letter that I wrote, ‘My memories of Sydney’, just about the past.

You wrote this in English?

Yes, because when I went to school the teacher told me to write my story. Look, here the teacher corrected me… [showing document]… In that letter was everything that I thought about Australia, in the early years. If you have time read it, otherwise take it home.

Buying things in the shop was very difficult… What did you mean by… “I found Australia to be an ugly place and very different from the way I see it today”. What were the ugliest things in the beginning?

The language. One time I went to the shops, which was not like it is today with everything on display and even if you don’t know how to speak, at least you can see what you want, get it and pay. So, they had all the stuff behind the counter. I remember when in Penrith I wanted some garlic and I went to the shops. The lady said to me, “Can you spell it?”. I didn’t even know what ‘spelling’ meant. She gave me a pencil and paper and I drew her some garlic and she gave it to me straight away. When the baby turned one, I wanted to make him something from wool because I knew how to knit, and I needed some wool. I don’t know how I asked. There were two girls who were talking in each other’s ears and laughing. I don’t remember what I said but it was difficult to explain and seeing them laughing like that made me feel bad so I left without the wool. I ended up buying it in another shop, how I did it I don’t know, but I bought it.
Photographs & Documents

1. B & W photo of Angelina and Radoslavo
2. B & W photo of Radoslavo and son Hermes
4. B & W photo document of Angelina’s ‘Carta D’Identita’
5. B & W photo document of ‘Incoming Passenger Card’ completed on arrival in Sydney NSW
6. Photocopy of a handwritten letter to Angelina
7. Photocopy of W & S Gazette documenting ‘report of accident’
8. Photocopy of Newspaper article in “La Fiamma” of Radoslavo death
9. Photocopy of Angelina’s recipe for ‘Crostoli’
10. Colour photo of Radoslavo’s suitcase from Italy
Maria Pisconeri’s Story

Name: Maria Pisconeri

Date and place of birth:
Born 1928, Salvi, prov. Reggio Calabria, Calabria

Date and place of arrival in Australia:
April 1950, Fremantle aboard the Sebastiano Caboto ship

Type of migration:
Sponsored by fiancé

Date of Interview and Interviewer:
Interviewed 18 January 2006 by Susanna Iuliano

Summary

Maria Pisconeri (née Panetta) was born on 16 March 1928 in the small village of Salvi in Siderno in the province of Reggio Calabria in the Calabria region of Italy. Maria’s parents were farmers and she was born into a large family of ten children.

After completing the three years of primary school available in their village, Maria had to persuade her parents to continue her schooling in Siderno because it was expensive for their large family. Maria used to walk by herself almost 7km to get to school in Siderno. She later boarded with nuns so that she could attend high school in the next town of Locri. With only one year left to qualify as a teacher, Maria had to leave school when she became engaged to Giuseppe (Joe) Pisconeri, from the neighbouring town of Agnana, who planned to migrate to Australia.

After Maria and Joe’s engagement in June 1948, Joe and one of his brothers, Domenico, left for Australia in October sponsored by their brother Nicola. Joe’s parents had earlier moved to the United States. During this time, Joe’s mother became ill with cancer so the sons arranged for their parents to join them in Australia where the weather was warmer. For the next 18 months, Maria and Joe wrote letter to each other.
In March 1950, Maria left Italy from Messina on the Sebastiano Caboto ship to be reunited with her fiancé in Western Australia. Maria arrived in Fremantle on 17 April 1950 where all the passengers had to go through a customs inspection as people used to try and smuggle food into Australia such as figs, oil and seeds.

Maria and Joe got married one month after she arrived in Australia. Joe’s mother was in a wheelchair and they were not able to have a party. Maria’s sister-in-law lent her her wedding dress so that Maria could have a photograph taken to send to her mother in Italy. After they married, Maria cared for her mother-in-law, who was living with them, until she died a few months later.

During this period, Joe was working in the Paolini’s fruit shop in Leederville and the owners used to teach Maria the English names for products and how to serve customers. Later when Maria was pregnant with their first son Alberto, she and Joe ran Previtali, a delicatessen in what is now the suburb of Northbridge, while its owners were on holiday in Italy for nine months.

Before Maria migrated to Australia, Joe and his brother Nicola had bought a business together on the corner of Lake and Newcastle Streets with the intention of opening their own shop. After six months of difficulties with the previous tenant who refused to leave when his lease ended, the Pisconeri’s set up their own shop. For many years, the two brothers and their wives and families lived and worked together supplying the growing Italian population in the area with the familiar tastes of ‘home’ – olive oil, pasta, tomato sauce, cheese, olives, salami, fruit and vegetables. Many of the products were imported from Italy and the fresh produce came from local markets. Pisconeri’s fed a generation of single Italian working men with their famed panini rolls.

Maria used to work long hours in the shop. The Pisconeri’s went out of their way to serve their customers, even those who would arrive at closing time despite the risk of prosecution by regulatory authorities. They also filled food orders from rural areas across Western Australia. In 1954, the Pisconeri’s expanded their business and opened a very popular coffee and gelato bar next to their grocery store. They used to make their own gelato and roast their own coffee. In the early 1960s, the Pisconeri’s also began operating a wholesale business across the road, which supplied specialty Italian produce to supermarkets, continental delis and restaurants in Perth. They then leased and later sold the store but continued to run the wholesale business.

During this period, Maria and her family continued to live with her brother-in-law’s family above the store. Maria had to juggle looking after their four children with working in the family business. In the 1960s, the two sons were sent to boarding school and a nanny was employed to assist both families with childcare and housework. Eventually, the families needed more space and so built their own homes.

The area in which the Pisconeri’s ran their business had many Greek and Italian residents. Later Maria saw more Australian customers coming into the store. Maria and Joe became Australian citizens themselves in 1960. Now retired, Maria gains much enjoyment from seeing her grandchildren and tending her rose garden. Her eldest son Albert runs Pisconeri Fine Food and Wines in Mount Hawthorn which is a continuation of the Pisconeri wholesale business. Maria finds it difficult to visit there as it brings back many memories of Joe who died in 1991.
Interview

Maria and husband Joe c. 1948

Life in Italy

Maria Pisconeri (née Panetta) was born on 16 March 1928 in the small village of Salvi in Siderno in the province of Reggio Calabria in the Calabria region of Italy. Maria’s parents were farmers and she was born into a large family of ten children, five girls and five boys.

[Siderno] is a lovely place with a nice beach. [...] There were lots of farmers. [...] I was in a little village called Salvi, una frazione, and there were lots of families and kids. [...] There were ten of us and most of the brothers helped my father on the farm. We girls used to help Mum with sewing, needlework. Everybody helped because we had to live. We made our own oil, wine, grew our own wheat, fruit and vegies for our family. We owned our own land. We had donkeys, cows, and sheep so we had milk that mamma made, ricotta and cheese, for the family. (English only)

Schooling

Maria had to persuade her parents to let her attend school.

It was hard because we were a big family and I wanted to go to school but my family couldn’t afford it. I cried so many times, “I want to go to school” but in my little town, school only went until grade 3. Anyway, my mother and father said, “Okay” and I did grade 4 and 5. I had to get up early in the morning to walk to school in Siderno. It was a very long walk, on my own. When I came out of school, I would run home. I did three years of lower school and then after the 3rd and 4th I did the exams. [...] I did the exams and passed but I thought, “I can’t afford it…. I can’t walk there [to the secondary school in Locri]”. [...] There were no buses at that time. Anyway, I stayed with the sisters [nuns] until the school holidays when I’d go home.

Engagement

By 1948, Maria had almost qualified as a teacher but then became engaged to Giuseppe (Joe) Pisconeri, from the neighbouring town of Agnana, who planned to migrate to Australia.

I did up to my 3rd year liceo [high school] and [...] I only needed another year to qualify as a teacher. [...] Anyway, Joe said, “No more school because we’re leaving
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Maria Pisconeri

for Australia” [...] [...] I was upset because I couldn’t finish my schooling. [...] I would have been a teacher, but only if I had a chance to go and teach, but that wasn’t easy. [...] Everybody said to my father, “See how much money you spent on your daughter and now...?” [...]”. But I didn’t mind because when I got here I could write, I could understand and could do anything when I started work.

After Maria and Joe’s engagement in June 1948, Joe and one of his brothers, Domenico, left for Australia in October sponsored by their brother Nicola. Joe’s parents had earlier moved to Michigan in the United States. During this time, Joe’s mother became ill with cancer so the sons arranged for their parents to join them in Australia where the weather was warmer. For the next 18 months, Maria and Joe wrote letters to each other.

Journey

Maria left Italy in March 1950 to be reunited with her fiancé in Western Australia.

I left from Messina and my father and uncle came with me. [...] It was really sad leaving your whole family when you’re young...for a better place, for a better life. [...] Everyone said [Australia] was all bush and “Your fiancé is in the bush digging”, which wasn’t true. Maybe because [they knew] some people there. But everybody said it was a bad place. I didn’t know what to think.

We were on the ship, Sebastiano Caboto, it was terrible. I didn’t eat for 23 days because I was so sick – the smells of the diesel, beer, cigarettes.... For a while I was on my own and then I found a girl about my age. We held hands and went outside for a bit. [...] To eat we had to go downstairs, which was really steep. I couldn’t go because of my stomach. [...] My mother had given me some almonds saying, “When you feel sick, eat some.” Eventually we went down and saw people eating some plates of pasta or vegetables and I thought, “How can these people eat?” When I reached Fremantle my dress didn’t fit me because I’d lost so much weight.

Arrival

Maria arrived in Fremantle on 17 April 1950 and had to go through a customs inspection.

Two days before we reached Fremantle a man I didn’t know started talking with me. [...] He said he just wanted to be friends, but I said I wasn’t interested. He asked me if I would carry some cigarettes for him when we go off the ship but I said, “No way, I can’t do that”. So he put them into his pants with string tied at the bottoms. Anyway, he didn’t put it on properly because when he came down, the cigarettes just fell everywhere, into the water. Everybody laughed.

I looked around for somebody I knew and saw only my fiancé, Joe, who had come to pick me up. Nobody, not my sister-in-law or any other woman, only my brother-in-law [...] [...] When we got there [customs], there was fruit, figs, oil, rubbish all over the floor that they had to throw out. [...] [The customs inspector] told us that one man had a tin of oil and he said, “Do you know what we found in there? A pistol!” [...] That was why they looked for things like that, like peanuts, honey...people bought seeds in stockings. I was surprised. [...] I had my big case [trunk] there with all my stuff which they began to open. They asked me, “What have you got in here?” I said,
“I’ve got all my corredo”. Anyway, they started to look through stuff that was all ironed neatly. He asked me again if I had anything at the bottom and my husband said, “You can look” but he didn’t touch anything else and closed it.

Early settlement experiences

Maria and Joe got married on 13 May 1950 one month after she had arrived in Australia.

The first night I arrived a relative came to visit me to say hello. The second night we went to talk to the Monsignor at St Kieran’s Church. [...] Two weeks later we got married. There was no party, I had nobody. My mother-in-law was in a wheelchair. I [...] didn’t mind about not having a party but I just wanted a wedding photo to send to my Mum. We went to Lafayette and had a proper one done. [...] We had no time to buy a dress so [my sister-in-law] said, “Why do you need to buy a dress? You can have mine”. It fitted me perfectly. I bought new shoes, stockings and my sister-in-law bought me a double-stranded pearl necklace.

After they had married, Maria had to care for Joe’s mother who was living with them in Osborne Park. Maria’s mother-in-law died a few months later. During this period, Joe was working in the Paolini’s fruit shop in Leederville.

They said, “Bring your wife here some Saturday and she can learn”. [Joe] said, “But she can’t speak English”. They said, “Oh we speak Italian”, because they were toscani. [...] They’d show and tell me... “This is called that, that’s what this is...when you serve people this is what you say...”

Maria and Joe later worked together at Previtali, a delicatessen in what is now the suburb of Northbridge.

I was already expecting Albert [in 1951]. [...] They said to Joe, “I trust you and I want you and your wife to look after my business for nine months”. [...] So for nine months we
looked after the shop while he went to Italy for holidays with his wife. [...] It was a fruit shop and delicatessen – half grocery and fruit and we built it up. [...] Next door there was an Italian man, Nizzola. He was so jealous... “[...] You pinched my customers... “. [...] We sold fruit, drinks, ice-cream and we had St Brigid’s school [nearby] at the time and kids wanted frozen coca-cola, lunch, toffee apples which we used to make at night. It was good.

Work and family

Before Maria migrated to Australia, Joe and his brother Nicola had bought a business together on the corner of Lake and Newcastle Streets with the intention of opening their own shop but they had some difficulties with the previous tenant who refused to leave when his lease ended.

The laws were hard at that time, you couldn’t get people out. [...] We had no lights upstairs because, would you believe it, the main switch [board] was in his shop. [...] At night when he closed the shop, he switched off the main lights. [...] Albert was six or seven months old. [...] using only candles - I was so upset. [...] One day I said, “I can’t speak properly, but I’m going to the Department for Electricity”. So with Albert in my arms and Betty [sister-in-law] had her little girl Cathy, we went there. [...] I said, “Come on Betty, you can speak English, you were born here,” but she said, “I don’t know, I’m scared”. I said, “Listen, it’s our property and we’ve got two young kids under six months and no lights. Do you think he’s right?” They said, “I’m sorry, I can’t do anything”. But after six months exactly, one morning the police came. [...] The police broke the door and threw out all the rubbish he had...

Daily routine

Maria used to work long hours in their shop.

At first the customers were Italian men. They’d come there in the morning for their lunch and then they’d go to work. It was a rush. In the morning you’d give them fresh bread with mortadella, prosciutto or salami. At 6am my husband had to go and get the bread from the bakery because they weren’t allowed to bring it to us because it was too early, but we were in the shop at 5.30am. We’d say to the customers, “Come back tonight and get some pasta, tomatoes and oil to cook with”. Afterwards when their families came they’d send their wives... “Go to Pisconeri’s shop” and the wives would say, “But I can’t count the money”. The husbands would say, “You give the money to the lady and she’ll know how much change to give you. You can trust her”.

I did everything. I would do the orders for the lunches because there was a shoe factory [nearby] and someone would bring the orders in for lunches. [...] In the early 1950s there was myself, my sister-in-law, my husband and we had two girls and sometimes two boys working at the shop [...]. [...] Mio marito faceva il banking ma io preparavo tutto, ogni giorno. Some nights we had to fix the fruit, you know, take out the old ones and move the fruit, clean up, etc., and some nights Joe contava la moneta mentre dormiva. It was 11.00, 12.00 and I’d say, “Joe, come on, we have to got to sleep” but he’d say, “Tomorrow it’s the same, we have to do exactly the same thing tomorrow”.
Customer service

Despite various legal restrictions on opening hours and products, the Pisconeri’s went out of their way to serve their customers. They also filled food orders from rural areas across Western Australia.

Lots of people came shopping. Some people walked from Leederville to do their shopping because there weren’t many shops there – this was in 1951/52. […] Our customers came from everywhere - from lots of different paesi. I made olives, melanzane…and they all said, “Beautiful, can you make some more?” I’d make them at night. I made olives with chillies and oregano, melanzane…I see Alf Barbagallo sometimes and he says, “Signora, I’ll never forget your panini”. Panini? They were half loaves of bread! […] At night they’d pick up a bottle of oil, pasta, pomodori freschi […], Cirio paste che portavano a casa e cucinavano loro.

At 6pm we had to close up the grocery section [because we weren’t a supermarket]. […] It was hard because some people at the last minute… “Signora, please…..” You’d go there and open the lock at the back…. […] Ma la gente doveva mangiare perché veniva tardi, poveracci. […] Si andava di nascosto, senza luce a prendere la pasta. At that time there were no packets, it was all loose and had to be weighed. Most of the time the inspector would come…. “What’s the lady doing over there?” “She’s doing the cleaning” e io dovevo chiedere col locchetto la porta e facevo finta che preparavo la roba, perché dovevo preparare gli ordini. Prendevo un chilo di pasta, un po’ di questo…ma quello non se ne andava mica. Era a real nuisance perché la legge era così.

We had people sending orders from country areas like Wittenoom. We’d send things like pasta, oil, Cirio, cheese and that sort of stuff by train […]. […] If people lived in Armadale or Fremantle, they’d ring up and place their orders […] and we would do home deliveries - perché qualcuno non aveva mezzi. […] Noi organizzavamo le casse in metà di una pasta e metà di un’altra. Una signora […] mi diceva, “Signora, ma io voglio tre tipi di pasta, […]”. Allora si faceva [ogni tanto] ma la legge era così perché il costo era per quello. Dovevo aiutarli e ancora oggi quando ti vede quella gente… “I’ll never forget what you did for me”.

Many of the products sold in the Pisconeri’s shop were imported from Italy. The fresh produce came from local sources.
We used to order by letter. Adesso si fa col telefono ma allora con le lettere. Importavamo torroni, cioccolati, uova di Pasqua (ma era un po’ pericoloso quando faceva caldo), confetti, gianduiotti, tutto. [...] Per la frutta, Joe andava ogni giorno al mercato. Il mercato si faceva ogni lunedì, mercoledì e venerdì ma lui andava tutte le mattine a prendere verdura fresca. We had stuff from farms – insalata, carciofi, fagioli, meloni...venivano dalla farm. [...] Anche olives. [...] We had eggs from the farm, nascosti a causa del Egg Board. Lo stesso con il Potato Board, Onion Board...it was shocking.

Opening of the coffee and gelato bar

In 1954, the Pisconeri’s expanded the business and opened a coffee and gelato bar next to their grocery store.

We opened in summer, December 1954. [...] We sold gelati, coffee, cakes but not alcohol. [...] We were so busy with so many people. [...] We never used the mop, but used a hose to wash the floor because there were that many people. [...] There was no other bar like it. The other one was in Fremantle. [...] [The bar] was separate from the deli, with a window in between which we’d close at night. But some people would say, “Hey, can I have a panino?” It was 10pm and you’d go inside to wash the dishes or eat something, iron or whatever else and someone would call you. [...] We were open everyday, seven days a week from 5am until about midnight.

We were the first [to sell gelato]. [...] My husband and my brother-in-law went to Italy to get the machines [...] We brought a man out from Italy who made gelati. [...] We’d sell ice-cream to the customers and to the shops. [...] We [...] had a factory where we made cones, confetti and roasted coffee. I roasted so much coffee. [...] We’d import the coffee green and then mix three to five different qualities of coffee. We’d sell ground coffee which we would pack, coffee beans and machines too. The brand we developed was called ‘Supermiscela Pisconeri’. [...] We’d have Jewish people coming in at night to have a Vienna coffee - that was when television just came out and we bought one of the first ones and put it into the bar. Facevamo cappuccino, caffelatte [...]. Avevamo tutto là.
Business expansion

In the early 1960s, the Pisconeri’s began operating a wholesale business across the road, which supplied specialty Italian produce to supermarkets, continental delis and restaurants in Perth. They then leased and later sold their store but continued to run the wholesale business.

_I didn’t work in the wholesale but I still worked in the shop [...], and I was still roasting the coffee. Afterwards we leased the shop out but these people didn’t do well. [...] Poi con il delicatessen non hanno fatto niente – lavoravano con i guanti.... Abbiamo lavorato altroché, ma le mie mani sono pulite. Non ho mai usato guanti. [...] I never stopped working because after we leased the shop we used to pack things like nuts. They made me nuts!_

Family

For many years, Maria juggled looking after their four children with working in the family business.

_I’ll never forget when I came home with baby Frank. I was in hospital for 12 days and one afternoon Joe came to pick me up. I went inside because it was time to feed him and my milk had just come in. It would have been about 5pm and the shop was full of people. Do you know I had to leave my baby in the pram with all my milk pouring out and I had to go into the shop. I was crying and serving people. [...] It was hard because they didn’t understand. [...] When Frank was born, Albert was two years old and I’d say, “Come on Albert, look after Frank”. One day he came to me..., “Mum, Frank’s tipped over in the pram”. It was a big pram but after that I got blanket and used a big box and put him in there because it was safer.

I don’t know how I managed, I worked so hard, washing in the night...After two years I brought my brother out here and he worked with us in the shop. We had no washing..._
machines, nothing at that time still. I washed the kids’ things in the bath and when they were ready to be hung out, we had to bring them upstairs because all our stuff was up there. I couldn’t manage the heavy washing and the stairs. My brother would leave the shop to bring it upstairs.

One day, a lady [...] came and said, “Can I ask you something?” I said, “Yes, what?”. “How can you have children when you’re working all the time?” and I said, “That’s my business”. I never saw her again. [...] With the arrival of my two girls [Anna and Lilliana], the workload was getting heavier [...]. [We] made a decision to employ a nanny for the children and also to cook and clean for the two families sharing the work at the shop. The nanny, Signora Del Carlo, worked for us over a period of seven years bringing up my two young children and my sister-in-law’s daughter Rose.

During this period, Maria and her family continued to live with her brother-in-law’s family above the store.

We lived together for 16 years. La sera si cucinavo per tutti. Ogni tanto, chi si lamentava che c’era troppo sale o troppo...until one day I said, “I want my own home”...At that time, the shop was getting crowded for two families with all the children and so the families bought a property across the road which eventually became the wholesale section of Pisconeri. All this happened in 1960. [...] The wholesale business began to expand and it was starting to get overcrowded in the house across the road so another decision was made to separate our residence and build two homes [...]. These houses were built over a couple of years and completed in 1966. This was an achievement and the greatest satisfaction after fifteen years of hard work to finally have a house of my own.

In the meantime I had to bring my kids to school so I had to learn to drive. I could speak English by then but in those days you had no chance to touch any cars for practice. We had trucks and vans. I said, “I have to leave everything and go and learn to drive”. [...] It took me a while because I was nervous, always thinking of work, of the kids. I did it though and I had an Italian car, a Fiat 28.

In the 1960s, Maria’s sons Albert and Frank attended boarding school at Aquinas College.

When they finished at St Brigid’s I was fed up and couldn’t manage anymore, so we booked them into boarding school at Aquinas College. Albert went first and two years later, Frank. [...] I wanted them to have a different life. Albert studied to be an accountant and when he finished university he said, “Dad, do you want me to work for you?” but his Dad said, “It’s better for you to work with someone else, you’ll learn more”. So he worked for someone else for a year and then joined us. Frank studied civil engineering for five years and now he says, “I studied hard for my job”.

Community

The area in which the Pisconeri’s ran their business had many Greek and Italian residents.
[Working in the shop] you’d learn English and you’d learn Greek. Lots of customers were Greek and couldn’t say a word of English. [...] They’d take you by the hand and take you to what they wanted. [...] Newcastle Street was more a Greek area. Lake Street was more Italian, it was ‘Little Italy’. There were a lot of single people that came and [...] they made sacrifices and eventually brought their families out and lived in Lake Street.

Eventually Maria saw more Australian customers coming into the store.

The Australians would buy and wanted to learn too. They’d ask me how I’d do this or that. They liked prosciutto and provolone. They didn’t know what it was and they’d ask, “What’s this?”. When I came in 1950 you couldn’t even buy a coffee in the shops! [...] Oggi è cambiato tutto, la gente, come mangiano, tutto. You see Australians now cooking something e tanti cercano di cucinare all’italiana...Noi siamo sforzati ad imparare l’inglese, a conversare a stare con questa gente, ma loro, qualcuno non sa neanche una parola [d’italiano].

Return visits

Maria and Joe became Australian citizens in 1960. Maria still has some siblings in Italy as well as in Canada and the United States, and she keeps in touch with them on the telephone.

In 1960 we became Australian citizens, mainly for the business and then because we went back to Italy and it would be easier. I think it was more for the bank and other stuff. [...] I’ve been back to Italy three times. The last time I went with Joe was in 1980 and we did all the rounds of the cheese, Milano, Roma. We had ten days in all different restaurants etc.. [...] The firm paid for his trip in first class. [...] Era un buona opportunità per andare anch’io, se no, non c’andavo più, così mi ha pagato il viaggio anche in prima classe...beautiful! Dopo siamo andati in Calabria e da lì siamo andati in Canada, a Michigan.

Life today

Now retired, Maria gains much enjoyment from seeing her grandchildren and tending her rose garden.

I want my grandchildren to know everything about my life. One of Albert’s little ones – la piccola che ha fatto 14 anni, she never met Joe because she was born three months after he died. Anyway, at Christmas she wrote a poem...“I never met my
nonno because he died before I was born...” and everyone cried. [...] All my grandchildren love me and I’d do anything for them.

Maria’s eldest son Albert now runs Pisconeri Fine Food and Wines in Mount Hawthorn, which is a continuation of the Pisconeri wholesale business. Maria finds it difficult to visit there as it brings back many memories of Joe who died in 1991.

Sometimes I’d like to go there [today], not to work because I’ve worked too much, just to look after things...When people talk and ask for Joe I get so emotional, so I don’t go. He died - it’ll be 15 years in May - on 28 May 1991. I don’t go because everyone tells me... “Joe was such a...” and I get emotional, so I don’t go.

Tante vorrei andarci [oggi], non per lavorare perché ho lavorato troppo, just to look after things...When people talk and ask for Joe I get so emotional, perciò non ci vado. He died - it’ll be 15 years in May - on 28 May 1991. Io non ci vado perché tutti mi dicono... “Joe era una persona...” e io mi emoziono, così non ci vado.
Interview Excerpts

Interview Extracts: English (with some Italian)

I – Intervistatore
M – Maria Pisconeri
A – Albert Pisconeri (one of Maria’s children)

Excerpt One: Journey – Ship

I What year did you come to Australia?
M On the 17 April 1950.
A Mum’s not very good with dates.
M No, I’ll never forget when I saw Fremantle for the first time, never.
I Tell me, how was it?
M We were on the ship, Giovanni Caboto, it was terrible. I didn’t eat for 23 days because I was so sick – the smells of the diesel, beer, cigarettes…For a while I was on my own and then I found a girl about my age. We held hands and went outside for a bit. She was going to Melbourne because her father was there. To eat we had to go downstairs, which was really steep. I couldn’t go because of my stomach.

Excerpt Two: Life in Italy – Engagement

I How did your parents feel about you leaving when you were engaged? Would they have preferred it if you were married first?
M Well, in one way yes, because people would talk…Everybody told my parents, “You did the wrong thing because it’s far away”.
I Was there any thought of getting married by ‘procura’?
M No, at that time it wasn’t really done. I think it was before that because one of my sisters-in-law got married by ‘procura’, but not at that time. We were engaged and we wrote to each other for nearly two years. Joe left in October 1948 and travelled for 63 days on the Toscana which took a different route. He was on the ship for his birthday in November.
I Can I ask, how did you meet if he was from Agnana and you were from Siderno?
M Well, people talking and he’d come to see me at school but I wouldn’t come out. I was so scared of the ‘monache’ [Maria boarded with nuns to attend high school in Locri]. They’d say, “Hey, it’s your friend, your fidanzato…”.
I How old were you then?

M I was 18 ma io scappavo perché avevo paura. Lui veniva con la bicicletta quando la scuola finiva e io neanche mi giravo. He was upset and he’d go home on his bike, from Locri to Agnana.

I How far is it from Locri to Agnana?

M It’s very far.

I 20km?

M No, I think it’s more.

A Locri’s on the coast and Agnana’s further in…

M Well anyway, afterwards when my sister got married my Mum invited two brothers to the wedding and after he asked for my hand in marriage. After that I couldn’t go to school anymore. I was upset because I couldn’t finish my schooling. Everybody said to my father, “See how much money you spent on your daughter and now?…She never finished the course”. But I didn’t mind because when I got here I could write, I could understand and could do anything. I started work.

Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – Work

I So you were open hours when people were coming home from work?

M Yes, but it was hard for the groceries. At 6pm we had to close up the grocery section. We had a glass door and had to lock it.

A Because we weren’t regarded as a supermarket, it was illegal to trade in supermarket items as we were a deli.

M It was hard because some people at the last minute…“Signora, please…” You’d go there and open the lock at the back…We had eggs from the farm, nascosti a causa del Egg Board. Lo stesso con il Potato Board, Onion Board…it was shocking. Ma la gente doveva mangiare perché veniva tardi, poveracci.

A If the inspector saw you open that area that was supposed to be locked…

M Si andava di nascosto, senza luce a prendere la pasta. At that time there were no packets, it was all loose and had to be weighed. Most of the time the inspector would come…“What’s the lady doing over there?”. “She’s doing the cleaning” e io dovevo chiudere col locchetto la porta e facevo finta che preparavo la roba, perché dovevo preparare gli ordini. Prendevo un chilo di pasta, un po’ di questo…ma quello non se ne andava mica.
Interview Excerpts – English only

I – Interviewer
M – Maria Pisconeri
A – Albert Pisconeri (one of Maria’s children)

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I How did your parents feel about you leaving when you were engaged? Would they have preferred it if you were married first?

M Well, in one way yes, because people would talk…Everybody told my parents, “You did the wrong thing because it’s far away”.

I Was there any thought of getting married by proxy?

M No, at that time it wasn’t really done. I think it was before that because one of my sisters-in-law got married by proxy, but not at that time. We were engaged and we wrote to each other for nearly two years. Joe left in October 1948 and travelled for 63 days on the Toscana which took a different route. He was on the ship for his birthday in November.

I Can I ask, how did you meet if he was from Agnana and you were from Siderno?

M Well, people talking and he’d come to see me at school but I wouldn’t come out. I was so scared of the nins [Maria boarded with nuns to attend high school in Locri]. They’d say, “Hey, it’s your friend, your boyfriend…”.

I How old were you then?
M: I was 18 but I would run away because I was afraid. He would come on his bicycle when school finished and I wouldn’t even go out with him. He was upset and he’d go home on his bike, from Locri to Agnana.

I: How far is it from Locri to Agnana?

M: It’s very far.

I: 20km?

M: No, I think it’s more.

A: Locri’s on the coast and Agnana’s further in…

M: Well anyway, afterwards when my sister got married my Mum invited two brothers to the wedding and after he asked for my hand in marriage. After that I couldn’t go to school anymore. I was upset because I couldn’t finish my schooling. Everybody said to my father, “See how much money you spent on your daughter and now?…she never finished the course”. But I didn’t mind because when I got here I could write, I could understand and could do anything, I started work.

Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – Work

I: So you were open hours when people were coming home from work?

M: Yes, but it was hard for the groceries. At 6pm we had to close up the grocery section. We had a glass door and had to lock it.

A: Because we weren’t regarded as a supermarket, it was illegal to trade in supermarket items as we were a deli.

M: It was hard because some people at the last minute…“Signora, please…”. You’d go there and open the lock at the back…We had eggs from the farm, hidden because of the Egg Board. The same with the Potato Board, Onion Board…it was shocking. But the people would have to eat because they came late, poor things.

A: If the inspector saw you open that area that was supposed to be locked…

M: You would go secretly, without the light on to get the pasta. At that time there were no packets, it was all loose and had to be weighed. Most of the time the inspector would come…“What’s the lady doing over there?”. “She’s doing the cleaning” and I had to lock the door and I would pretend that I was preparing the stuff, because I had to get the orders. I would get a kilo of pasta, a bit of this…but he would never leave.
Photographs & Documents

5 photos as follows;

1. B & W Copy of handwritten note by Maria
2. B & W Wedding Photo
3. B & W Photo in Pisconeri’s shop
4. B & W Photo of Joe
5. B & W Photo of Maria and her four children – Anna, Lilly, Frank, Albert.
Section 2: Migrant Stories

Maria Raffaele
Maria Raffaele’s Story

Maria as a young woman

Name: Maria Raffaele

Date and place of birth:
Born 1941, Raffadali, prov. Agrigento, Sicily

Date and place of arrival in Australia:
July 1955, Fremantle aboard the Oceania ship

Type of migration:
Family migration, sponsored by father

Summary

Maria Grazia Raffaele (née Lo Pilato) was born on 13 July 1941 in the town of Raffadali in the province of Agrigento in the Sicily region of Italy. Maria’s parents had an arranged marriage and were farmers. Maria completed five years of primary schooling in Italy. At home, her family spoke dialect and she learnt Italian at school.

After World War Two, many people in Raffadali found it difficult to make ends meet and they left for other countries. Maria’s father’s sister and her husband migrated to Australia. Maria’s uncle had been a prisoner of war captured by Allied Forces in Africa and was brought to Manjimup in WA as a prisoner of war (POW) to work on a farm for several years. After the war he was repatriated to Italy but decided to migrate to WA with his family when the farm owner offered him further work. Maria’s aunt then offered to sponsor Maria’s father to migrate. He took the opportunity in order to give Maria and their two other daughters a future.

Migrating to Western Australia in 1952, Maria’s father worked on the railways in Beverley. It took him three years to save enough money to sponsor his family to join him. In July 1955, 14 year old Maria and her five year old sister Giuseppina travelled to Fremantle with their mother aboard the Oceania. Nine months before they were due to migrate, Maria’s older sister Giovanna had eloped on the day she turned 17 and so stayed in Italy with her husband.
After living with her uncle and aunt’s family for three months, Maria’s family moved to the Wheatbelt region because her father, who could not find work in Perth, was offered work fixing the railway line at Calingiri. Maria and her sister attended primary school in Calingiri. They could not speak much English at first and they used to get teased by the other children who were all Australian.

Maria’s family found it difficult living in Calingiri and in 1957 they moved to Perth. At 16 years of age, Maria was required by law to become an Australian citizen or otherwise register as an ‘alien’. Maria became naturalised in 1958. Maria then left school and went to work for Kakulas Brothers in Northbridge. Maria remembers there were many Italian stores and single Italian men in the area. Maria’s parents were very strict and she was not allowed to socialise much, which made her feel lonely. In 1959 they moved to Fremantle and Maria worked at Ruggiero’s General Store selling Italian products to the large number of Italians living in the area. Maria helped her parents to pay off their house. She later worked at Dreske Sports Shoes in North Lake with many other Italians.

In November 1962, Maria met her husband, Vincenzo Raffaele, who had migrated to Australia in 1955 from the town of Castell’Umberto in the province of Messina. Maria’s parents had wanted her to marry an Italian but Maria was still not allowed to go out with him until her father knew him and a bit about his family. After marrying in December 1963, Maria and Vincenzo moved into their own house and Maria worked at Mills and Wares biscuit factory to help pay the mortgage.

Maria and Vincenzo had two children and Maria left work to look after them. Before their second child was born in 1970, Vincenzo hurt his back working at Electric Power Transmissions in Kwinana. Maria returned to paid work when their children began primary school.

In 1991 at the age of 59, Maria retired from paid work because she had to have a hip replacement. She had been working at the Pelliccione’s supermarket in Coolbellup for fourteen years. Her husband was later diagnosed with lymphoma and Maria has spent many hours visiting him in hospital and caring for him at home. She also used to look after their two grandchildren when her daughter was working, and she cared for her father who died two years ago at the age of 92.

After retiring from paid work, Maria joined her mother at the ‘Amicizia’ Friendship Cllyb which began in the late 1980s associated with the National Italian-Australian Women’s Association of WA. Italian women in the ‘Amicizia’ club met regularly in Fremantle for social activities. It was through this group that the ‘Gioie delle Donne’ (Joys of the Women) choir was born. Most of the women in the choir are Italian but there are also a couple of Australians. Maria and her mother have travelled across Australia with the choir to perform their large repertoire of Italian folk songs, most of which Maria learnt as a girl in Italy.

Maria first went back to Italy in 1973 for three months to visit family and because her husband wanted to see if they could return to Italy permanently. However, they decided their children would have a better future in Australia. They last visited Italy in 1999 to appear on ‘Carràmba che fortuna’, an Italian television variety show featuring music, dance, celebrity guests and reunions. Maria was invited on the show for a surprise reunion with her older sister who she had not seen in over 20 years. The show even paid for Maria’s sister to visit Australia for the first time in 2000. It was a very emotional reunion for them both.
Life in Italy

Maria Grazia Raffaele (née Lo Pilato) was born on 13 July 1941 in the town of Raffadali in the province of Agrigento in the Sicily region of Italy.

My name should have been Grace, Grazia, but because I was born on [the] feast day [of Maria Santissima degli Infermi, the patron saint of Raffadali], my nonna said to my Mum, “Put Maria first as a name, then Grazia”.

Maria’s parents, Antonino Lo Pilato and Filomena Plano, were farmers.

Our town is an agricultural town, growing wheat, almonds, grapes, walnuts, and pistachio. It’s very rich [fertile] countryside and town but after the war there was no money, so my Dad migrated here. [...] [We lived] in the town and Dad had a bit of land in the countryside. We had lots of fruit, grapes, pears, figs, etc. In the Summer we used to go to a little place called ‘suzza’ in dialect. We had a little house in there with a basic oven where my mother used to bake bread. We had fun picking grapes, nuts, etc. When we were hungry we never asked for food, we just picked fruit.

Maria completed five years of primary schooling in Italy. At home, Maria’s family spoke dialect and she learnt Italian at school.

At that time I had no raincoat, and rain, hail or shine I had to walk a fair bit to school. Our mothers didn’t take us there, we had to walk. I had a girlfriend, my best friend and we’d walk to school. We were happy. [...] The teacher wanted us to speak Italian and everybody did well. We tried our best.

Maria’s family did not have much money.

Things got bad because if the weather was bad and we didn’t harvest enough there was no money. Dad had to pay people back for the wheat and they couldn’t pay it back and went into debt, so they had to do something. There were three sisters in our family, my
older sister married at seventeen, before we came here. [...] Every little lira counted for us. I wasn’t allowed to have luxuries, I had no doll or anything when I was small and I used to cry to my grandmother, “I want a doll, nonna”.

Journey

After World War Two, many people left Maria’s hometown of Raffadali for Germany, France, Belgium and England. Maria’s father’s sister, Giuseppa, and her husband, Domenico Burgio, migrated to Western Australia.

My uncle was a prisoner of war for the English. He was a POW in Africa and they brought him here to Manjimup. He spent ten years here [...] When my uncle came back from the war [he] said he was going back to Australia because the farmer where he used to work said, ‘I’ll give you a job if you come back. Call your wife and I’ll pay the fare for you and everything’. So he decided to go and afterwards my aunty said to my Dad, “If you want to come here, I’ll get the papers ready for you”, and Dad thought, ‘Well, that’s the only way. [...] We have to give the girls a future because they don’t have one here, what are we going to do?’. My mother was broken-hearted because of her family.

In 1952, sponsored by his sister, Maria’s father migrated to Australia. He worked on the railways in Beverley and he used to send money back to his family in Sicily for them to live. It took him three years to save enough money to sponsor his family to join him. In 1955, 14-year-old Maria and her five-year-old sister Giuseppina travelled to WA with their mother on the Oceania ship.

My grandparents were against it saying, “Oh you stay here, why are you going to an unknown land? What will you find?” etc.. My mother said, “Well, I’ve got to follow my husband wherever he goes and whatever happens, happens”. [...] I remember going to say goodbye [...] and they cried and cried, saying, “We’ll never see you again”. [...] They died before we went back in 1973. [...] [My sister wanted] to migrate here but her husband didn’t want to and his family was against it. [...] My mother was upset, I was upset and I was thinking that I’d have nobody there to talk to, no one that I would know, no language.

We had never travelled or been anywhere so that was my first trip. [...] Twenty two days wasn’t easy and I was seasick all the time. [...] We were in a large room, ‘camerone’, with 25 people in it, you can imagine. Some people had blotches on their skin which they’d treat with some purple stuff to try to get rid of it. [...] There were people we’d never met before, some from Calabria, some from Napoli, some from Catania and us. [...] We were the only ones from our area. [...] We met this lady from Napoli who also came to Fremantle and we’re still friends. [...] Everybody ate together. We were in the ‘primo turno’ to go for breakfast, lunch and dinner. [...] The food was quite good actually. They had pasta, meat, mashed potato - which I’d never had before. [...] One day we got the fright of our lives when they said, “The ship’s going to sink, put your life jackets on”. It was just a drill, to get you ready just in case something happened, but everybody panicked so much and I thought, ‘We’re all going to die’.
Early settlement experiences

Maria, her sister and their mother arrived in Fremantle on 31 July 1955.

*When we got here it was pouring that day. We arrived at the E Shed and a man checked all our luggage - the big trunk. I was worried that he was taking everything out and I said to my Mum, “How are we going to put everything back?”*. He said, “Don’t worry”, and put everything back. [...] I felt lost, looking around and thinking, ‘Oh my God, where do I go from here?’ Everything seemed strange, you couldn’t talk to people, then my aunty and uncle came to get us [...]. They lived [...] in Fremantle [...]. My uncle [has] passed away but my aunty is still there. [...] I used to sleep in the lounge and Mum had another room with my sister, but we were glad to have somebody we could talk to.

After living with her uncle and aunt and their three children for three months, Maria’s family moved to the Wheatbelt town of Calingiri.

*Maria and sister, Calingiri c. 1956*

*I won’t forget one hot day in 1955, the 4th November, when Dad was working on the railway and we had no electricity, no running water, no fridge, no language. [...] [My Dad] didn’t know anybody and that time they used to send all the newcomers to the bush, wherever there was work and you couldn’t refuse. [...] There [were] about ten houses all spread out because everybody lived on farms. [...] We had a house, not painted, out of wood. [...] [The house] had a rainwater tank and a wood stove which we had to cook on whether it was cold or hot and in summer it was so hot. We had no fridge because Dad didn’t want to stay there for too long [...]. If we wanted something cold we had to go to the shop and get it. [...] One day my Mum asked me to get a dozen eggs. I must have said ‘l’eggs’ and they started laughing and then realised what I wanted and got it for me. I was so embarrassed.*

Maria used to help with some of the chores.

*I had to fetch the water from the spring - there was like a small oval with a tap from the spring where everybody used to go to get the water. It used to run non-stop, night and day, and my mother used to send us with a container and we used to go and get the water*
because everything was done by hand. We had to wash on a board. I didn’t do any washing, [...] but I used to fetch the water, help my mother with house chores.

Schooling

Maria attended upper primary school in Calingiri. She could not speak much English at first.

I managed okay because the teacher liked me. [...] She used to teach me embroidery and because I already knew [as I’d learnt in Italy], she’d say, “You’re very clever”.

All the other children at the school were Australian.

It was hard because they used to call me ‘potato’ because I was a bit chubby. [...] My sister was in the other room and they used to call us names and she would cry and so would I. [...] The teacher tried to make us understand what was going on and said, “I’m sorry, it will never happen again” and it never happened again. But I don’t blame them because we were strangers to them.

There were not many other Italians in Calingiri. Maria’s family used to get their groceries delivered by the Italian stores Rifici and Erichetti on Lake Street in Northbridge, as there were not many stores in the town.

The baker would bake when he felt like it, sometimes we had no bread. No butcher - we had to get meat from another little town. We would order it at the post office and they would send it on the train. They had a garage, a community hall, a doctor that would come once a week and a little church. Not only for Catholics, but everybody.

Maria’s mother found it difficult living in Calingiri.

Oh she cried saying, “I didn’t know it would be like this”, no English, no friends. One of the farming ladies felt sorry for us and one day she came to pick up Mum to take her to the hall and said, “You can sing some songs with us”. They used to pick her up every week and she’d mix in well. [...] But as I said, Mum didn’t really want to live there and we were there until 1957 and then we came to Perth.

Work and family

About six months before Maria’s family moved to Perth, Maria started living with her aunt and uncle again in Fremantle so she could attend St Patrick’s School although she went back to Calingiri because her mother missed her. When Maria was 16 years old, she left school and went to work for Kakulas Brothers in Northbridge.

They were a Greek family and they were nice to me. One day I was walking with my Dad and he said, “Let’s go in there and ask if they’ve got a job for you”, so I went and asked and he said I could start tomorrow. I wasn’t too flash with the language but because a lot of Italians used to come there I had no problems.

Maria remembers there were many Italian stores on William Street in Northbridge at the time.
There was Franchina - they sold everything, pasta, oil, Cirio, you name it, all the Italian stuff. There was a cake shop, Fiorentina, on the corner of Roe Street. There was a restaurant though I can’t remember the name it was a long time ago. It was on the other side of William Street, could have been the Romany, right opposite Kakulas. They had Forti Shoe Shop further up and there was another Italian shop too [...] There were a lot of Italians. [...] Lots of single men especially around Lake Street there were lots. They called it ‘Little Italy’.

Maria’s parents were very strict and she was not allowed to go out much.

There was one fellow that used to chase me but because of our tradition, which was very bad, nothing happened. [...] I didn’t want to show any emotions because I was too scared. [...] There weren’t many other Italian girls around. When we were in the bush they used to come there as well and my Dad would say, “Don’t talk to these people”. I was so miserable. [...] We didn’t have that many friends because Dad didn’t own a car and we never went to dances because he was a bit jealous. I was brought up in a very strict way, not allowed to go here, not allowed to go there.

In 1959, Maria’s family moved to Fremantle where there were many Italians living at the time. For the next three years, Maria worked at Ruggiero’s General Store selling Italian products to mainly Italian customers.

We struggled with everything on our own. My aunty was here, but financially she had a house to pay off too and she couldn’t help us so we had to do it ourselves. I was working at Ruggiero’s while my Dad was paying off the house and I helped them to pay it off.

Maria then worked at Dreske Sports Shoes in North Lake alongside many other Italians.

Marriage
In November 1962, Maria met her husband, Vincenzo Raffaele, who was from Castell’Umberto in the province of Messina in Sicily. He had also migrated to Australia in 1955 where he had some cousins.

[My parents] [...] said, “It’s better for you to marry somebody Italian”. [...] It didn’t matter to me. [...] Oh, I probably would have been a bit hesitant about an Australian because we didn’t mix much with Australian people. We hardly knew their ways and customs and of course their customs are different from ours. If I had met an Australian for instance, I would have had to go out with them and of course I wasn’t allowed to, so I had no choice.

During the weekends I was bored because we didn’t go anywhere, so Joe Pasqua who used to own the shop here where the pizza shop is now and used to live opposite us, said, “Maria, do you want to work weekends?”. [...] I went there and one day my husband came to buy some fruit. The next day he came in again and asked me out. I said, “I’m not allowed to go out”. I was about twenty one at that stage. He then said, “What if I come to your place with my friend, with some excuse”. [...] So he came with Mr Paparone with the excuse that he was looking for work and my Dad said okay he could come and ask the boss. [...] Then [Mr Paparone] said to my Dad, “You know that young chap I brought here that night would like to have your daughter as a girlfriend, what do you think?”. Dad wasn’t sure, he said, “I don’t know this man, I don’t know his family, his background, I don’t know anything about him”. [Mr Paparone] said, “You can ask me, take my word for it, he’s a good boy”.

Maria thinks her father was so strict because they didn’t know many people in Australia whereas in Raffadali everyone knew each other. Once Maria’s father knew Vincenzo, Maria was allowed to go out with him. Maria and Vincenzo did not get engaged until 12 months later because Vincenzo’s brother sustained serious injuries in an accident while working at the North Fremantle Wheat Silo. On 28 December 1963, Maria and Vincenzo married.

The wedding was very plain. We went to church, at Christ the King in Beaconsfield [...]. Then we took some photos at the Marcia Glyn Studio in Adelaide Street. [...] Of course she didn’t want the whole family there, saying, “Oh there’s too many of you in the photo, I can’t fit too many”. [...] We had one hundred and five [guests] [...]. [...] We didn’t have a big wedding – we couldn’t afford it.
After they married, Maria and Vincenzo moved into the house that Vincenzo had already had built. Vincenzo worked as a groundsman on a golf course and later at the blast furnace at BHP.

*My husband had this house when we met. He’d just built it and had to pay it off. It was hard. [...] I said to him, “I’ll work”, because we had [...] the car to pay off and a few other things. When I came home I used to do the cooking and I managed everything on my own. [...] I didn’t expect too much then because life was pretty sad, from work to home, home to work and that was all I did.*

Maria worked at Mills and Wares with many other Italians.

*I was on the cellophane wrapper - it was fast but it was easy and the boss used to call me because I was probably the only Italian that could make themselves understood. [...] I had a good job and she would change me around to different parts because she wanted me to learn everything.*

**Children**

Maria and Vincenzo’s first child, Charles (Dino), was born in 1967 and their second, Linda, in 1970, and Maria left work to look after them.

*I asked my Mum to look after them and she said, “No, it’s too much responsibility, I’ve got no patience”. [...] So my husband said, “Well, you stay home and look after the kids”.*

Before their second child was born, Vincenzo had hurt his back working at the Electric Power Transmissions in Kwinana and he has not been able to work since then. Maria returned to paid work when both their children began primary school.

Maria and Vincenzo speak in dialect together. Maria’s children understand Italian and dialect but Maria usually speaks in English with them and her husband speaks in Italian.

*Maria's children, Linda & Dino, 1971*
I spoil them too much. Actually, my husband is not as strict as me. I didn’t want my daughter to go out when she was around twenty and she wanted to go out a lot. I said, “Well, you’ve got to be home by a certain time”, but my husband said, “It doesn’t matter”. I thought it did matter to have rules about what time she came home. He was easier on them though my daughter always says to me, “Mum, your upbringing was good”, so it must have been okay.

Maria’s daughter married an Italian.

He was born here. His mother is from Roma and his dad from Calabria, and my daughter is Sicilian - what a combination! […] In truth, I always wanted my daughter to marry an Italian […] because of the way we were brought up and I’d like her to do the same. Not in the strict way, of course not, that will never happen, but in the way of close family bonds. […] She said, “Mum, I’ll never marry an Italian because they’re too fussy”. So what happens, she marries an Italian, second generation! My son is more traditional, he wants an Italian.

In 1991 at the age of 59, Maria retired from paid work because she had to have a hip replacement. She had been working at the Pelliccione’s supermarket in Coolbellup for fourteen years. Her husband was later diagnosed with lymphoma and Maria has spent many hours visiting him in hospital and caring for him at home. She also used to look after their two grandchildren when her daughter was working. Maria’s father died two years ago at the age of 92. He and Maria’s mother were still living in the house they bought when they first moved to Fremantle. Maria looked after her father and looks after her mother today who will turn 90 in August.

Community

Before Maria’s husband became sick, they used to go to dances at the Italian Club in Fremantle and other functions organised by different Italian community groups in Perth and Fremantle such as the Blessing of the Fleet. After retiring from paid work, Maria joined the ‘Amicizia’ (Friendship) club. Italian women in the club met regularly in Fremantle for social activities. It was through this group that the ‘Gioie delle Donne’ (Joys of the Women) choir was born.

My mother and another lady [Kavisha Mazzella] started the choir. […] Kavisha was busking in the Fremantle Markets and one of the ladies was having a function and
said to her, “You come home and play something for us.” They all started singing and [Kavisha] said, “That’s what I want to do, get a group together”.

Most of the women in the choir are Italian but there are also a couple of Australians. Maria has travelled across Australia with the choir to perform their large repertoire of Italian folk songs, most of which Maria learnt as a girl in Italy.

My mother used to send us to dressmaking classes and we used to play around a bit because the lady wouldn’t let us do much, so we used to sing together. When we were working, going to the shops, just to be happy.

Values

Maria thinks that people of Italian origin have different values to other Australians.

The Italians are very strongly family-oriented. I reckon sometimes though our ways are a bit too strict in some ways, but I like to be very close to the family because when you have a family bond it’s great. You don’t want anything else - health, family, what else do you want? [...] We care about our family and stick together, helping our kids if we can. We can’t help them financially like I said but when my daughter was working I used to get the kids. Even though my husband was sick and I struggled a bit, I managed and that’s very important for us.

Maria recalls experiencing discrimination from Australians during her early years here.

Australians think that we are money grabbers, just think about money, money, money all the time. Some of them understand and say, “I like Italian people because before you get married you own a house, your own block and you save up, you’re very close to the family etc.”, but others say, “Oh look at these dings, they come here, get work and they have more than us”.

We used to go to the supermarket with my Mum and she used to talk in Italian. They would say, “Talk in English, don’t talk in Italian, go back to your own country”. But it wasn’t everyday, only certain times and it depends on who you mixed with. [...] [This] has changed [...] they wouldn’t dare say that to you now. [...] I think they got used to our traditions, lifestyle and another thing is the food. They love our food. [...] When I was working at Mills and Wares this lady used to ask me, “What are you cooking tonight?”. I’d say, “Oh, I’m cooking Italian sausages” and she’d say, “Ughh, sausages!”. [...] One day I was there and I said to her, [...] “Carol, what are you cooking tonight?”. “Oh, I’m cooking sausages” and I said, “Ughh sausages!” and we all started laughing. [...] They look at us in a different way now [...]. In a way the Italians did more than anybody else here – work-wise, food, business, you name it. The Italians have done well here.

Return visits

Maria first went back to Italy in 1973 for three months to visit family and because her husband wanted to see if they could return to Italy permanently.
He said to me after we went there and came back, “I don’t think the kids are going to have any future, we’d better stay here”.

They visited Italy again in 1979 for six months and they last went in 1999 to appear on ‘Carràmba che fortuna’, an Italian television variety show featuring music, dance, celebrity guests and reunions. Maria was invited on the show for a surprise reunion with her older sister Giovanna who she had not seen for decades. The show even paid for Maria’s husband to fly with her and for her sister to visit Australia for the first time in 2000. Giovanna died in Italy in 2003.

I call myself Italian, I feel I’m Italian but I spend most of the time here. […] We’re in this country and we live here, we’re comfortable and to live in this place you’ve got to adapt to the people. I like it, I mix with everybody. […] Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I was in Italy. Would I have been okay or had a different life…?

Postscript: Maria’s husband, Vincenzo Raffaele, and her mother, Filomena Lo Pilato (née Plano), have died since Maria was interviewed for the ‘Italian Lives’ project.
Interview excerpts

(English Only)

I – Interviewer
M – Maria Raffaele

Excerpt One: Life in Italy – The family farm

I Talk to me about your hometown of Raffadali.

M Our town is an agricultural town, growing wheat, almonds, grapes, walnuts, and pistachio. It’s very rich [fertile] countryside and town but after the war there was no money, so my Dad migrated here. I went to school there and at that time I had no raincoat, and rain, hail or shine I had to walk a fair bit to school. Our mothers didn’t take us there, we had to walk. I had a girlfriend, my best friend and we’d walk to school. We were happy.

I Did your parents live in the town or outside?

M Yes, in the town and Dad had a bit of land in the countryside. We had lots of fruit, grapes, pears, figs, etc.. In the Summer we used to go to a little place called ‘suzza’ in dialect. We had a little house in there with a basic oven where my mother used to bake bread. We had fun picking grapes, nuts, etc.. When we were hungry we never asked for food, we just picked fruit. My parents owned a little farm and we sold some things and we would live on that. Things got bad because if the weather was bad and we didn’t harvest enough there was no money. Dad had to pay people back for the wheat and they couldn’t pay it back and went into debt, so they had to do something. There were three sisters in our family, my older sister married at seventeen, before we came here.

Excerpt Two: Life in Australia – Living in the Wheatbelt

I Tell me about Calingiri in 1955. Was it a wheat and sheep town?

M Yes, wheat and sheep farms. Well, there about ten houses all spread out because everybody lived on farms. Dad worked for the railways.

I What was he doing? Building the line? Fixing it?

M He was fixing the line. They [the railways] had an office at Calingiri.

I Did they give you a house?

M Yes, we had a house, not painted, out of wood. It had a rainwater tank and a wood stove which we had to cook on whether it was cold or hot and in Summer it was so hot. We had no fridge because Dad didn’t want to stay there for too long, so he didn’t buy one. If we wanted something cold, we had to go to the shop and get it. It wasn’t too far to walk. One day, my mum asked me to get a dozen eggs. I must have said ‘l’eggs’ and they started laughing and then realised what I wanted and got it for me. I was so embarrassed.
Excerpt Three: Life in Australia – Customs and values

I  Going back to the question of marriage, do you think it was important for you to marry someone of similar background?

M  It didn’t matter to me.

I  Would you have considered marrying an Australian?

M  Oh, I probably would have been a bit hesitant about an Australian because we didn’t mix much with Australian people. We hardly knew their ways and customs and of course their customs are different from ours. If I had met an Australian for instance, I would have had to go out with them and of course I wasn’t allowed to, so I had no choice.

I  Do you think Italians have a different idea about marriage than other people?

M  Yes, the Italians are very strongly family oriented. I reckon sometimes though our ways are a bit too strict in some ways, but I like to be very close to the family because when you have a family bond it’s great. You don’t want anything else - health, family, what else do you want?
Photographs & Documents

5 photos as follows;

1. B & W scan of Birth Certificate (‘Certificato di Nascita’)
2. Colour scan of ‘Certificate of Naturalization as an Australian Citizen’
3. B & W photograph of Maria and her parents (year)
4. Colour photograph of Maria in ‘Gioie delle Donne’ choir
5. Colour photo of Maria and her daughter Linda Gangemi pointing at Maria’s name on the Welcome Walls at the Maritime Museum. The Welcome Walls commemorate a large number of migrants who arrived in Western Australia through the port of Fremantle.
6. Photo: University of Western Australia (Italian Lives)