

Angela Loccisano

I was born Angela Maria Taverna in 1938 in the Bushhouse Hospital in the little place of Moulamein¹ in New South Wales near the Murray River. My cousins from the Pellegrino family (my mother's side) were also living around there and in Echuca. My father and some other Italian men came to Australia in 1927 and went to work on farms in the Riverina area of New South Wales. They were sent to about 6 families who had different farms in the area. One of the farms was a sheep farm and these Italian men were mainly market gardeners and knew nothing about grazing sheep so they couldn't care for them properly. They were much better at working in the orchards, which is what happened with my

father.



My parents were Domenic and Maria Taverna who were from in Calabria, Italy. My father Domenic Antonio Taverna was born in 1904 in the village of Varapodio. His family were already in the village from the 1850s. My mother Maria Guiseppina Pellegrino was born in 1907 in Varapodio, and her family was also in the village from the 1850s. It happened that two brothers married two sisters. One couple ended up in America and the other couple, my parents, ended up in Australia.

When my father came to Australia in 1927 my mother stayed behind in the village with her yet-to-be-born first child. She came to Australia a decade later, in 1936, with my brother Carmello (Charlie), who by then was aged 10 years and had not yet met his father. I was born in Australia in 1938 and my five younger brothers were also born in Australia. In 1946, two decades after arriving in Australia, my father bought fifty acres of farmland from fellow Varapodio émigré Rossano Marsolino, who had migrated in 1929 and settled at Moulamein. Maybe he was our original connection to the district as a sort of chain migration.

We moved across the Murray River to Swan Hill when I was about 6 or 7 years old and then I went to a little school in Castle Donnington near Lake Boga. We were living about 3 miles south of Swan Hill. (I have a brother who still lives there.) In Moulamein we had lived in a little shack. They just picked it up with a truck and brought it to Swan Hill, because the farm we'd bought did not have a house, it was only the land. The government built an irrigation channel right through the property and dad built near the channel – that way my Mum could wash the clothes in the channel. Then they built the laundry. The dunny was a hole in the ground and they built a little shed around it.

It was very hard out in the country. We were isolated out on the farm and seldom spoke to outside people except when you went into town for some shopping. There was a fear that something might happen.

I went to the Castle Donnington school, which included one teacher and about 20 students. Many of the students were from dairy farms, whereas the Italians were from tomato farms. We were about half-half – half Italians and half Australians. It was the 1940s and there were some tensions because it was wartime and the Italians had to register as civil aliens, which my father did, even though he had been living in Australia for many years and applied for naturalisation in 1939 at the start of the war. Most of us Italian children were born in Australia anyway.

The school was very small. We had one room with a little cloakroom. When the government gave them some more money they built the bike shed. With a bit more money they built a little kitchenette where we could boil some water. At school we would get some milk and the teacher told us to buy Milo to give the milk a chocolate flavour. We didn't know what it was so he brought some and showed to it us. We wrote it down and took it to dad and said the next time you buy groceries you have to buy some.

I only went to grade 6 at school. It was a difficult time and my father pulled me and my brothers out of school after grade 6 because we needed people to work on the farm. I asked my mother if I could go on to higher education. She said "What for? Us women are made to work." We had to work hard because we had no electrical appliances to ease the household chores. I was about 12 or 13 when they brought the electricity to our part of Swan Hill, about 1950.

¹ Moulamien is the oldest town in the Riverina. The school was built in 1866 when the town had a population of 100 people. In 2011 the town had 330 people. Wikipedia.

We used to grow tomatoes. We had contracts with a factory, which were called “cons”, to supply tomatoes for making tomato sauce; that was in the summer. In winter we used to grow peas, broad beans, and late season tomatoes as well. Then the fruit trees started to come in. We had 50 acres and dad proportioned the farm for different produce hoping to provide for a better life. They planted apricot and peach trees.

Charlie was my oldest brother. He was born in Italy in 1927 and was nine or ten when he came out to Australia with Mum. That type of family separation happened often enough with the early Italian migration, with husbands coming out first to establish a home base and the rest of the family joining them later. My in-laws did the same. Rocco Loccisano, the father, came out first in 1938 and other members of the family followed about a decade later.

In 1959 my dad got a place in Woorinen² to the west of Swan Hill; it was growing table grapes. I had 6 brothers and my parents were keen to start them off to be independent in their adulthood, so they would buy a little place for them when it became available. My brother Charlie started like that growing tomatoes, but he hated working on the farm. He asked dad to buy him a truck, but dad said no because you could kill yourself driving a truck. After about eight years when Charlie saved enough money, he bought himself a semi trailer. He'd take fruit to Melbourne and try to get a load coming back, such as delivering furniture.



Taverna family at Swan Hill

Farm work was very, very hard and no wonder people were looking for other live-lihoods. We had our tomatoes growing on the ground so it was back-breaking work bending over to do the picking. With the newer varieties people were using stakes and the tomato plant grew up and that wasn't too bad. But we were still growing peas. Frosts were a problem because they could ruin the crop. Where we were in Keilor it was a bit protected along there in Green Gully so the frost never got in. That's where Joe's family made a few thousand dollars. That is why they could look for something else to do and started their fruit and veggie shops. Joe said to his father don't come here to St Albans, go to Sunshine. They bought places in Hertford Street, Sunshine, and Main Road East, St Albans.

When I was working on the farm the routine in the mornings was to get up and fix your bed, have breakfast, and go and work on the farm. Everything was done by hand. You would get blood and bone and mix it in a bucket and spread it by hand. Dad would cultivate the soil with a horse and plow to prepare the rows and we would make holes in the mound to plant the tomatoes. The horse would pull a big tank of water along the row and from the tap we would gently water the plants. We would cover the seedlings with a timber cover to protect the plants from the frost. That was heavy work for 12 and 15 year olds. As soon as us kids finished grade 6 we were on the farm. That was at Castle Donnington, where we would ride our bikes to and from when we were on the farm. About a year after I completed school they started a bus service that would come along and stop in front of the house and the kids would get on for the schools at Swan Hill.

Picking the peas and the broad beans was hard work, especially in the winter. There were no gloves or anything for protection. Our hands used to get so frost bitten that we used to come home crying. We used to put our feet and our hands in hot water to warm ourselves. Now the cropping is all done by machines.

The only entertainment we had at home was playing cards with dad. The girls used to play hop scotch and that's about it. We used to play a bit of cricket when visitors came. We'd put up some empty bottles for stumps, but that was a bit dangerous because if you hit them they could break. So then we used the cans from corned beef and such. Those were our games. When I left was when the football started coming, so the younger boys could start on that as the football clubs started to form in the district.

²

Woorinen developed as a soldier settlement irrigation area after WW1. In 2011 it had a population of 311.

My father would go to the Swan Hill shop-ping centre to buy the groceries. It was about 3 miles from our farm and I walked that distance a few times. We'd also go to church there.

Sunday was a rest day and visiting day but that was seasonal, because when you started harvesting the tomatoes you worked through the weekend packing and loading the truck for dad to drive down to Melbourne. The drive down to Victoria Market was at least 6 hours. He had to leave about 4 o'clock in the afternoon to get to Melbourne before the market opened in the early morning. He would have a half-hour nap in the truck and people would be knocking on his door saying let's see what fruit you've got.

Dad was the first one in our little district who bought a truck. He would pick up boxes of produce from his cousins and take them with his own to Melbourne. Three men could fit in the cabin. They would head off and would be running out of petrol so would stop at Four Post outside Stawell. It was a little shop selling petrol on the Murray Valley Highway. They would pull up there and the proprietor would get out of bed and fill up the tank. The men would have a drink and off they'd go. I remember when I was there occasionally that he would give us young children some lollies. They were all sheep farmers around there and he didn't mind getting up in the night to help his customers.

Slowly, slowly, people started making some money and started buying their own second-hand trucks. Dad had bought a second-hand truck, and when he made a bit more money he bought a new one. The trucks took a lot of beating on the rough terrain of the farm so after a while this needing fixing and that needed fixing. A few times the truck was left on the side of the road while dad went looking for a mechanic. It was all bush around there so where would you find one? Lucky the man at the petrol place knew about mechanics.

One time I got into an argument about what I was going to do in life. This was when the war had started and we used to see these soldiers coming round.³ I told Mum that I wanted to join the army. She looked at me with such a look that I still remember it. She took to me with the broom and said 'I'll give you the army!'

Girls weren't allowed to do anything; we were housebound. You weren't allowed to go into town by yourself; you had to go with your father and your mother. If you wanted to go to the pictures, you had to be escorted by your brother. You couldn't be on your own. That was still happening when I was 18. Things started to change with the new generation when other things started to change. The parents would go into town to do the shopping and the men wanted to do their own things so the shopping was done by someone else. The son or the daughter would come along to take care of the shopping and was told where and when to meet up with dad to go back home. Slowly, slowly, it changed. The Aussie women were becoming more emancipated because they had worked in lots of jobs with more responsibility when the men were away at war, and many kept that independence after the war.

From my group I was the first one to learn to drive a car, but this was after I got married. I used to drive the tractor of the farm but before then we had the horse. My brother made a sledge that was pulled by the horse. We would sit on this sledge that we called the lorry and hang on for our lives and the horse would trot down to wherever we were working. Then the Ferguson tractor came out and I asked dad if it was hard to drive. Dad said no and I want you to drive, because Mum was starting to get very bad arthritis by then, so dad made her a little trolley that she could sit on the back.

Dad started to teach me how to drive the tractor. There were only two gears, one and two, for going backwards and forwards, but there was a handle on the steering wheel and if you adjusted that you could go a bit faster. I hardly used that because of Mum being on the back trolley. I used to drive that tractor to and from where we were working, but if I had to go back during the day to do a bit of cooking I would ride my bike. At night I would bring the tractor back home. I had a fair idea about driving and when dad bought the car – we used to have a ute – I said to dad can I drive the car. He said yes and showed me what to do. I had fights with my bigger brother who would say "Hah, you went all over the road." My father would say what are you talking about, because my brothers and I would always speak English. I would say he said I was all over the road and my mum would say what are you talking about, we have fifty acres to drive in so don't worry about it.

1956 was a turning point for me because I was matchmade to a distant cousin when I was 18. He was Joe Loccisano. Matchmaking was an old Italian family custom but the girl still had the final say in whether the marriage went ahead. I didn't think I was ready to get married at age 18 and said I was happy working on the farm and didn't want to get married until I was 21.

Joe Loccisano was 27 at that time and had a fruit shop in St Albans in Melbourne which he had established a few years earlier. My brother pointed out that working on the farm was hard work and

³ There was a military presence in the district during WW2. The RAAF had a flying boat base at Lake Boga.

that I would have a better life in town with a shop keeper. I spoke with my mother and she said it was up to me, but I was unsure about leaving the family behind. Joe and I met and talked and we soon became attracted to each other, so we agreed to marry.



I married Joe Loccisano in Swan Hill in 1956. Swan Hill was the main town in the district, and the custom was that you married in the bride's home town.

Giuseppe "Joe" Loccisano was born in 1929 at Reggio Calabria, Italy. His parents were Rocco Loccisano and Marianna Schirripa from Calabria, Italy. Rocco came to Australia in 1938. Joe came to Australia on his own as a single man in 1948. His father had come out earlier and had been working in different parts of Victoria, wherever the government sent him. His brother brought him out on proxy and he was out in Mildura. They sold the business and Rocco couldn't get any more jobs so he went to Shepparton looking for work and ended up picking tomatoes. This bloke, Mr Fox, who was leasing the farm leased another property at Horseshoe Bend in Keilor. Mr Fox asked Rocco to work on that property growing cauliflowers, but prices were not good at the time and wages were low, so the family was not sure what to do. However, there was a cousin selling real estate with some business developers. Joe and his family borrowed the money and bought some farmland and they all worked there growing caulies and tomatoes. They had a good year and repaid the loan as soon as they could.

Joe had come to the Keilor district in 1948 with other family members. They leased a farm property from Mr Fox down at the Keilor Village where the bridge is; they've now turned that land into a park. That's where the Loccisano men were farming. Rocco was the father and the sons were Joe (Giuseppe), Sam (Salvatore – deceased 10 September 2020), Vince (Vincenzo), and Don (Domenic). Marianna was the mother and the daughters were Rose, Janette, Nancy and Catherine (Catarina).

About 1953, Joe had built a shop in St Albans near where the Commonwealth Bank was later built, but at the time it was an empty block. At the back of his shop he built a one-bedroom unit with kitchen, lounge and laundry, which was our first home.

Joe and I ended up buying some of the land near the river but the government took the farm from us when they needed the land to build a road through there. That's when we were back in St Albans. We also had a block of land in Collins Street behind the shops on the Unger's corner and that's where we eventually built our house. We probably would have still been there if Kentucky Fried Chicken hadn't built their shop there next to Unger's and backing onto our property.

1956 was a memorable year because, apart from my marriage, the Olympic Games came to Melbourne and television came to St Albans. From that time of coming to St Albans I remember that the Knowles family and Mr West were in Main Road East. Mr Gross and his pharmacy was on the other side in Alfrieda Street. The Knowles were originally in Alfrieda Street but then moved around the corner to Main Road East. May Knowles had two shops there selling clothing near Mr Potts' store which they also might have built. Her brother Bill Knowles was active with the scouts and started the St Albans St Johns Ambulance first aid group; they would attend the football matches. My son Ron

was involved with that for a while and loved seeing how the first aid people worked. His most dramatic observation was when an ambulance was called urgently to help a pregnant lady having difficulty.

When I first came to St Albans there were not many people around compared to now.⁴ When I was on the farm it was isolated but my brothers were around and there were cousins not far away. In St Albans I felt more isolated at first because I didn't know anyone. St Albans was starting to build up with migrants and their bungalows but there were still lots of empty house blocks. People used to walk from across the paddocks in the east and cut through to Collins Street between the houses to catch the train. Around us it was still paddocks and paddocks.

There were no buildings on the Collins Street corner but Martello's Continental Grocery store was a bit further along; they installed a television set in the front and customers could watch the novelty of local news and American cartoons. Unger's shop was built in the late 1950s by some people who were selling confectionery and I think Mr Unger moved in there about 1960.⁵



St Albans Fruit Supply aka Joe's Fruit Supply



Joe Loccisano at St Albans Fruit Supply

⁴ The population of St Albans grew rapidly in the 1950s. In 1950 it was about 900 people and increased to 7,000 by 1960, and 20,000 by 1970.

⁵ The "Summer and Unger" store was at 304 Main Road East by 1960. It was near the Collins Street intersection which became known as "Unger's Corner" because it was a popular meeting spot. Harry Unger was of Jewish faith and fled to England to escape racist oppression in Germany. He ended up being imprisoned and sent to Australia for internment. He was one of the Dunera boys. Harry and Edith Unger had children Geoffrey and Susan. The family moved to Caulfield in the 1970s and Harry died in 2017.



St Albans Fruit Supply truck in street parade

The Arcade was built in the late 1950s opposite our shop and that was the first arcade in the district with a dozen small businesses. There was a TAB shop in there that was managed by a brother of Mr Victor Gross the chemist. One year the brother went away on holidays and the shop lease came up for renewal when he was overseas. Because of an oversight, the lease was not renewed and when the brother came back he had to relocate the business to the other side of town. There were male and female hair dressers in the arcade so it was easy for Joe and me to pop across. At one stage my hairdresser was a trainee in Marta's Beauty Salon and I could get my hair done for \$1 so I went there every week.

Coles was built in the early 1960s; it was a variety store selling lots of goods and knick knacks but not food. Prior to them building there that was an empty block and sometimes there was a carnival held there. St Albans would also hold a street parade and Joe would decorate his truck and join the other business trucks and groups such as the scouts in their march along Main Road.

Mr George Eisner in Collins Street was one of the men who was building bungalows and I think he might have been one of the first builders in the district.⁶ His home was at 5 Collins Street and my daughter eventually built her child care centre next door to him.

When I came here, Mrs Kepalas was at number 3 Collins Street, Mr Eisner at number 5, and Mr Long at number 7, and that's where the child centre went. My daughter Jessica would have been in her twenties when she established the childcare centre.⁷ My daughter used to work with us in the fruit shop and at that time the next generation of girls wanted to become hair dressers, but she said she wanted to look after children. She looked at that option with a friend and they worked out where to go to get the training. In the meantime my brother-in-law was living in Glenroy. We heard that Mr Long was interested in selling his house because they were moving to Glen Waverley, so we told my brother-in-law, Sam, who had a fruit shop on the other side of St Albans, so he bought that. Later he bought some land in Rowan Street, Kealba, and suggested that Jessica could use the Collins Street property as a child care centre, which is what she did. My husband wasn't that happy because he wanted her to become a hair dresser. She's still there running the child care centre.

At first we were living at the back of the shop but had to move into something bigger because as the kids came we needed more space. The kids were running in and out of the shop as it was extended but the living space was getting crowded. Joe said we could build up-stairs but we had that block of land at number 2 Collins Street and I said I wanted to build there.

The Gross family were living in Main Road East opposite Ungers and between the Hounslows and the Goddards, where Woolworths is now located. They were Victor Gross and his wife Veronica.⁸ He was the chemist and she worked with cosmetics. Later they had some friends arrive from overseas and settled in Caulfield. Mrs Gross wanted to join them because it was a better area with better schools, so that's where they ended up going. Their son ended up becoming a doctor. However, Mr Gross found the daily travel to St Albans a bit of a chore. When they left we wanted to buy their house

⁶ George and Vlasta Eisner were of Czechoslovakian background. They migrated in 1950 and came to St Albans in 1951. Refer to article in *Bungalows of St Albans*, 2018.

⁷ Agitation to start a free kindergarten in St Albans started in 1948. A child minding centre known as the Happy Kiddies Kindergarten was established at the St Albans Youth Club in the late 1950s. The first official kindergarten was started by St Alban The Martyr Anglican Church in 1960.

⁸ Viktor Gross was a pharmacist born in the 1922 in the Czech Republic, married to Veronika Vera Grescheit who was from Slovakia. They were registered as Jewish displaced persons/refugees who arrived in Australia in October 1950.

but the rains came and we saw their block was easily flooded, so we didn't buy it.

At the end of Main Road East near the railway line was there were three railway houses. St Albans was starting to go ahead by then and people were buying land and building homes. We made friends with some Germans two doors from the railway houses when our kids were about 10 and 11. They were buying the house and had two little girls so my kids would go over there after school until 6 o'clock, which is when I finished working at the shop.

In the 1960s there were more fruit and vegetable shops being established. There was one near the chemist in Main Road West run by an Australian but he wasn't there for long. It was later taken over by another Italian family. Beryl and Bert Moffat⁹ were in East Esplanade near the Self Brothers. Bert had the fruit shop and Beryl had the pet shop next door. I think that was the old Self's store before they built the big Self Brothers and Goddard supermarket on the corner.¹⁰

Mr Jim West was also there and he had a type of \$2 shop with clothes and everything. He owned the properties in Main Road East that were later occupied by the butcher (next to Elsa's Fashion House), Mr Gross (St Albans Pharmacy), and the liquor shop (Shand's Foodland). One day Mr West came to Joe and said, "If you want to buy my two shops I'll sell them to you" and Joe agreed to buy them. A week later Mr West was driving home through Maidstone and had a heart attack. The grandson took over and wanted to sell the shops. Joe went across to Mr Gross and said there are two blocks there and that he should buy them. People thought that Alfrieda Street was going to be the main shopping centre but Main Road East was developing quite fast. Mr Gross bought the two properties near us and moved his chemist shop there. Later Mr Gross's brother took over one of the properties and made it into a licensed liquor shop. (A Sparta Licensed Grocery was at 318 Main Road East and St Albans Pharmacy was at 320 in 1970.)

Mr Murray had the shoe shop next to our fruit shop and that was a couple of years after Joe started. That was called the Smart Shoe Store. Rex Webb used to work there for Mr Murray who also had a shop in Footscray. Rex took over the St Albans shop and opened another one with Mr Murray in Niddrie. We bought a block of land in Alfrieda Street and Joe built a shop and Rex moved in there and ran his own business for years and years until he retired. He ended up being Mayor of Keilor Council in the 1960s.

Eric Alan was a Polish immigrant who built his shop in Alfrieda Street.¹¹ He came after Joe, about 1954, and had his bicycle and electrical appliances shop with Mr Kuc who had the watch and jewellery business. There were a lot of people from Poland, Germany and Yugoslavia who settled in St Albans in the 1950s. They often had long surnames that were hard to pronounce and even harder to spell, so we knew many only by their first name. The Greeks came a bit later. Mr Alan was another of the local business who stood for Keilor Council in the later 1960s and was elected mayor.

The Commonwealth Bank on the corner of Collins Street and Main Road East was built after 1956 because it was vacant land when I moved here. Mr Len Matthews was the manager that I remember. They put a little shack on the corner and wanted to buy our place but we said no. Joe was encouraging the bank manager to build their own big office because the migrants were coming to the area and he could see that business would grow. The Italians would come to the fruit shop and Joe would tell them to see the bank manager if they needed some money because the manager would look after them. Joe even acted as interpreter when needed. He helped get a loan for a couple of bricklayers who paid off the loan after a few months because they needed a start but didn't want to be in debt. Many of the St Albans migrants were like that, not wanting to be in debt to anyone. Their first priority was paying the house off.

Mr Matthews was a lovely man but didn't stay very long. I think his wife got cancer and they moved out to Torquay. People move on.

In 1956 a Maltese man started a bakery. Two years later his wife died and he closed the shop. Two years later Mr Romeo opened a bakery in Charles Street, then he also leased a shop in Alfrieda Street so his children could work there; they did bread deliveries. He used to buy and sell land and built the first reception centre in St Albans (maybe in Charles Street).

Mrs Lorna Cameron was another business woman in the street. She and her husband had the Western Suburbs Sports Store near the Erica Street corner. They were very active with the youth club across the road on Errington Reserve. He died in a car accident in the 1960s and Lorna kept that store going until the 1970s. The Youth Club became known as the Tin Shed and Lorna did a lot of

⁹ Refer to article in "St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years 1956-2016."

¹⁰ Lewis and Marion Self came to St Albans in 1922 and over time the family built the biggest supermarket in the district. Refer to chapter in "Stories about St Albans Celebrating 125 Years", 2012.

¹¹ Eric Roy Alan came to Australia in 1950 and married Helen Barbara Osterman. He established his St Albans Cycles shop in 1954. Refer to story in "People of 1950s' St Albans", 2019.

work there including activities for boys and girls. Later she introduced playgroups, recycling programs, and women's groups. She was the leader at the club for 50 years until she retired.¹²

Elsa Blahut was a Czech immigrant who had a store doing drapery and haberdashery and everything.¹³ They came from the Somers migrant camp. She had two daughters and two sons. I never really knew her husband as he died after they came to St Albans. One of the girls, Toni, was a bit of a tomboy who enjoyed a lot of sports. Then one day we heard that she had died in a sky diving accident when her parachute didn't open and she got killed.

Mr Potts was also in Main Road East in one of the Knowles' shops they had built. He sold everything and was the local agent for the State Savings Bank. He was an older man and I think the travelling was a bit too much for him as I don't remember him being there too long. He also was from Somers and I think he and his wife went back to Tyabb. Mrs Blahut was working with him before she took over as the agent for the State Bank and then established her own drapery business near the Camerons' shop.

Joe Bartolo was running the Tye's furniture store near Ungers with a business partner, Lou Stafrace, who later had his own Lewmar RetraVision store in Main Road West. Mr Bartolo stayed in that store next to Ungers for many years before building a bigger furniture depot in McIntyre Road.¹⁴

Gilbertson the butcher was another one who moved to Main Road East not far from Mr Gross. The Gilbertsons were from Essendon and had shops in several suburbs.

Mr Scoble owned the petrol station on the corner of St Albans Road and Percy Street. (There's now a drive-in liquor shop there.) Scoble was there when I came to St Albans. Joe would introduce me to the people he knew and I remember us having a talk about football. Apparently when Joe came to St Albans, Mr Scoble asked him if he was a member of any sports club, which Joe wasn't. "Well, we'll make you a member of Footscray," said Mr Scoble. His daughter, Val Scoble, married Ted Whitten who was the champion Footscray footballer. At first they were working in the same factory and later they had a grocery store in Sunshine.¹⁵ I remember Val and her sister Irene – we would go out together sometimes. Irene married Ossie Opie who was a builder and built their home in Station Road, Deer Park. Val and I had boys and Irene had a girl. Irene would come round and we'd go up and down Main Road West to look at the shops. Pattersons the furniture shop had started up there and my eldest son was working there for a while. That side of Main Road had the first shops in St Albans in its earliest days and started building more in the 1950s. The postal service was run from Mr Perrett's store before the post office was built there on the McKechnie Street corner opposite the railway line.

Vince Stella was a young Italian man who used to work for us. He was only a lad of 15 or 16 and looking for a job. He worked for us until he was about 22 when there was another fruit shop started in Alfrieda Street. There was an Australia couple named Dockey¹⁶ running that for a while then decided to quit. Joe said that Vince should take over. Vince said he had no money to start a business but Joe said he would set him up by buying stock for the shop. Vince started going with Joe to Victoria Market to learn that end of the business – transport, pricing negotiations, packing. That's how Vince started in Alfrieda Street and he stayed there until he retired about 10 years ago. He's also in Keilor off the old Calder Highway. Vince was a member of the Rotary Club for many years and that was his extra contribution to community service.

Joe joined the Keilor Lions Club and was involved for years. They raised money for community purposes. They would set up a raffle wheel in front of the shop on Mondays and sell tickets for prizes. Whatever money they raised they would use for charitable causes. If a family fell on very hard times they would provide food and help with cleaning up after a disaster. They held their meetings on a Monday night at Westfield's Skyways pub in Airport West. Joe would get really tired driving out all that way, coming home late, and having to get up early to go to the Melbourne market, so he could not continue with them.

The Rotary Club and the Lions Club were good for business networks and people became good customers. They were supporters of good causes. There was a lady working for us who lived in Percy Street whose house caught fire and they lost pretty much everything. The Lions Club took that on and

¹² Lorna Cameron's story is included in "St Albans Oral History from the Tin Shed Archives", 2004.

¹³ Elsa Blahut's story as told by her children Peter and Olga, is included in "St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years 1956-2016"; St Albans Secondary College, 2016.

¹⁴ Joseph Bartolo was a Maltese migrant who came to Australia in 1951 and settled locally in 1953. Refer to article in "People of 1950s' St Albans", 2019.

¹⁵ Ted Whitten's Foodland store was at 72 Hampshire Road, Sunshine. Val and Ted's story was written by Jim Main and published as "EJ – Ted Whitten", Wilkinson Books, Melbourne, 1995.

¹⁶ Thomas and Doreen Dockey's shop was at 16 Alfrieda Street.

helped clear everything. The family had a couple of young kids so we helped out with groceries for some months. They were originally from Queensland and went back there when the husband found a job. The Lions Club did a lot of work like that in their area.

The Martellos had a grocery shop near Unger's. There was also Mr Silvagni who was another local grocer for a while. We would order our groceries from them and they would deliver to our shop. Then one day Mrs Silvagni said they were leaving to open a bigger store. I'm not sure where they moved to but it might have been Carlton. Their son used to play football and I believe he married an Australian girl and their son also became a footballer.¹⁷

People on the other side of Melbourne would look down on people who came from St Albans because of its low status and all the different people. People turned their nose up when you said you came from St Albans, because there was nothing here. They were obsessed with the dunnies of St Albans, ignoring the fact that most of Melbourne had been unsewered for a long time. I would say all those different people in St Albans may have started tough, but they now have a nice home and are working hard. I would tell my children that many migrants came out here with only a suitcase, and some without a suitcase, and they built a successful life.

Joe was 18 when he came to Australia and ended up in Shepparton doing the same thing as we were – market gardening. Or you would go to Gunbower where he was growing tobacco with his brother Vincent. They leased a property in Shepparton and then found this property in Keilor and leased that from Mr Fox. Mr Fox took in Joe and his family and gave them a horse and some land along the river at Green Gully. They started growing tomatoes and peas and that. Joe would cut across from his farm to St Albans. It was mostly empty paddocks and the land was covered in rocks and the poor little truck would be going up and down. Then one day he went home and said St Albans will end up a town. His father laughed at him. Joe said there were trains going through there so it had to be a place that would grow, and eventually it did. Out of empty paddocks a town was built. Joe would come back and say another shop is going up. Then one day he said I want to build a shop there. That's why he ended up buying the land where he built the fruit shop. £100 the land cost him, which he borrowed from his father. That was a fair bit of money at the time because the weekly wage was probably about £10. The family ended up building three shops: two in St Albans and one in Sunshine.

When Joe started establishing the fruit shops, his father said how are you going to do it. When Joe was taking the fruit to the market he met his bloke who said he would help set up the shop. When they started in Sunshine they wanted a woman to work there. First they had the younger sister Olive and then Doreen came. The father-in-law helped in building the shops because everyone had had enough of the farm. The work was too hard and you had no time for yourself. The shop became available and Joe told his father to buy it. Olive showed them how to run the shop, how to order things and things like that. They were there for quite a while in Sunshine and that was started by my father-in-law. Olive was an Australian woman who worked for Joe. When my father-in-law bought the Sunshine shop he said to Joe you made me buy the shop but I don't know how to run it. Joe said don't worry I've got that organized, and asked Olive to go over there. She showed my father-in-law how to do the buying and packing.

Joe had left the farm but his father was still there for at least two years after they bought the shops. When I married Joe his father was at the shop in Hertford Street Sunshine.

When I had my first son, Doreen who used to work for us, said you should learn to drive. I said what for, because when we go anywhere we go together. She said I had to plan forward, because if Joe was at the market and something happened I would have to get the baby to the hospital. The Melbourne hospital was in the city and Footscray hospital was also a fair distance away and the one at Sunshine was only a house. Joe at first wasn't happy with the idea of me getting a licence and asked who would teach me. There was a brother and sister in St Albans who were teaching people to drive and the sister came over to gave me a lesson. She made me so nervous with telling me that I was doing everything wrong that I decided to have a lesson with the brother. He was so good because he was so calm and placid. Reverse parking was a nightmare. For practice, Joe took me to one of the paddocks at Green Gully and put out a few stones as markers. My son was only two and was sitting on another rock saying "Are you finished yet? I want to go home." Anyway, after half an hour I mastered reverse parking. My son was so happy that we were going home that he started clapping. I took five lessons with the driving instructor and then applied for my licence, which was

¹⁷ Sergio Silvagni was a grocer. His father Giacomo Silvagni came to Australia in 1924 and settled in Canning Street Carlton. Giacomo worked as a cement worker. He married Antonia Valentina and their children were Milena (1935) and Sergio (1938). Serge Silvagni played for Carlton Football Club 1958–1971 and was coach in 1978. Serge married Rita Ida in 1963: he was a grocer, she was a hair dresser; their son Stephen played for Carlton 1985-2001.

done at Maidstone. I was nervous when I went for my test at Maidstone and apart from a few minor mistakes I passed. My driving instructor was as pleased as I was.

By that time my mother-in-law, Marianna, was unwell and had moved to Glenroy. We would catch a taxi to visit each other or go together to the city. The next time she came around I said I'll call a taxi to take us to town but she insisted I drive now that I had a licence. That's what we did. It meant I was able to help with the long drive to Swan Hill. Previously Joe drove all the way and that was a problem when he was tired. One time Joe was driving as usual and the rest of us had fallen asleep when we were pulled over by the police about Gisborne for his erratic driving. The police questioned him about drink driving then decided that he was overtired and warned him of the dangers of that. From then on he would drive up to Gisborne and then I would take over the driving.

Buying our first car was interesting. Joe was asked to take a truck up to Swan Hill but it broke down at Diggers Rest. Joe decided he was going to buy a car there and then. He was dressed in what I would call swagman's clothes, because that's what he looked like. They used to come down to ask for some food and boil the billy; in return they chopped wood for us while the billy boiled. Joe was dressed like them when he walked into a car yard unshaven with his shirt hanging out and in his broken English he said he wanted to buy a car. The salesman didn't believe him and ignored him. Next day Joe went to a car yard in Footscray and said he wanted to buy a Desotto, which was a heavy car. At first they treated him like the guys from Diggers Rest had. Joe said he wanted the Desotto and when could he get it and they said next week. They said it cost £1,000 and Joe said he would bring cash with him, which is what he did. After that they were very good to us and said they'd never judge anyone by their clothes again.

Living in the Collins Street house became unpleasant in the 1980s when the Kentucky Fried Chicken store opened up next to Ungers. Our bedrooms were on the laneway and the smell of the kitchen exhausts and the noise of truck deliveries at night became unbearable. That was a bit of a wonder how they could build there because there was no car parking on site. Then I heard there had been an arrangement made for their customers to use the Woolworths car opposite. We decided to sell the Collins Street house and build a new home in Keilor, where we have lived ever since.

Joe and I had three children: Ron, Jessica, and Donald. Ron used to work for the Pattersons furniture store in Main Road West, and at night he was studying electrical and plumbing at RMIT in the city. He ended up installing computer cabling. He was with a group retrofitting cables into old buildings but the new buildings had that cabling installed up front so they lost some of that work. He then worked as a fruit agent for the Victoria Market based at Footscray. He got sick in his sixties and decided to retire.

Jessica started out working in the fruit shop but decided to go into business looking after children. She's a clever woman and worked out for herself where to get all the training. We bought a property in Collins Street from my brother-in-law and Jessica started one of the first private childcare centres in St Albans and is still running that. It is known as Bella Bambini Pre-School and Day Care.

Donald studied management and leased a pub in Preston. The pub was demolished to make way for a bigger shopping and entertainment complex. Then Donald worked with his sister in the child care industry. We had a block of land in Sydenham and Donald built there and expanded elsewhere with about five centres. He did that for 25 years and accepted an offer from a bigger business group to take over the centres. He retired and was doing some gardening for recreation but his health suddenly deteriorated. He ended up with serious heart problems and diagnosed with a blood clot. They operated and it was touch and go for a while but he's survived. That was two years ago.



Some years ago I went back to Moulamein and discovered that everything had shrunk. I remember the town hall as being enormous and when I saw it again I said they must have cut it down. It appeared to me that nothing had been done in the old town and everything was still the way it was many years ago. Although some things may have improved, the younger generation have moved on. Now there's nothing there for young people and its more of historical interest for the retired folk.

Angela Loccisano, August 2020