CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY

PRECINCTS

Name: Giovanni Lo Surdo

Date: 2 April 2009

Place: Haberfield

Interviewer: Margo Beasley

Recorder: Marantz PMD 620

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **MB:** **This is an interview with Mr Giovanni Lo Surdo – he's also known as John. It's taking place in his home in Haberfield on the 2nd of April 2009. I'm Margo Beasley. The project is the Precincts Oral History Project which is being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme and I think that's the finish of the introduction.**

So, I'll call you Giovanni.

GLS: Yes, Giovanni.

MB: So, Giovanni thanks for talking to me today. We're mainly here to talk about fishing in Woolloomooloo, particularly Italian fishermen. And you were telling me a little while ago that you went to school at St Mary's.

GLS: St Mary's Cathedral, yes.

MB: And were you living in Woolloomooloo at the time?

GLS: Yes, I lived in Woolloomooloo; I lived in 74 Bourke Street, Woolloomooloo. That house doesn't exist any more. It's on the corner of Charles Street, now I think, or Charles Lane, with the overhead crossing of the eastern suburbs railway.

MB: I should just ask you what year you were born.

GLS: I was born in 1954, 5th of the 8th, 1954.

MB: And were you born in Australia?

GLS: I was born in Paddin'ton.

MB: At the Royal Womengs Hospital?

GLS: Royal Womengs Hospital, yes, first generation Italian, Sicilian/Italian in this country, I s'pose from those types of years, first birth years. Went fishing with my father of the age of five, six and every time I wasn't at school I'd be out fishing with my father in Sydney Harbour and his boat was moored in Woolloomooloo Bay.

MB: And your father, how did he come to be fishing in Woolloomooloo?

GLS: My father came out to Australia in 1951, fished with his brother-in-law – and he was obviously here and my grandfather. They were here in early – well, my grandfather came out a couple of times in 1897 or something like that.

2.05 He came back as one of the first to come out to this country and fish Iron Cove and also Sydney Harbour. And then they moved up, they went to Nambucca Heads and they travelled; they were seeking to find a new lifestyle after the Word Two – is it?

MB: Or One.

GLS: One, two. What is it? '45, what is it?

MB: That's your father.

GLS: Yes, my father. No, that's my father was '40, yes. After the WWI they also came out – that was in the 1800s – and then my father came out here after the WWII. He was a prisoner in war for some time, then got a boat - - -

MB: Could I just straighten this out? Your grandfather came out to Australia but went back?

GLS: That's correct, yes, and then went to America.

MB: So, he came here after WWI?

GLS: One, yes.

MB: And then went to America?

GLS: Well, he went to America, then he came here and then he went back to his home town, back in Spadafora, Sicily, which a lot of the fishermen that came out to this country are all from Spadafora which is a province of Messina. It's, you know, like a suburb like as in we're all provinces here in Sydney: the Sydney City and Haberfield province of Sydney type of thing. And there was also fishermen from an island called Lipardi, which is a bunch of islands in, say, the Strait of Sicily, Mediterranean Sea in between Reggio Calabria which is part of the boot of Italy and the boar - which they call "the boar" - which is Sicily. And there was the Calabrians also came out to this country and become fishermen as well as like – prawn fishermen - wasn't as many but there were a lot more deep sea fishermen and they were like bigger trawlers, you know, and they were a lot more on the Calabrese world than the Sicilian people; Sicilian more sort of did set lining, haul netting and prawn trawling.

4.12 In the early days – I'd like to show that type of …….. – in the early days it was all done by hand, it was all pull the ropes up that had their otter boards. The otter boards are an item that sits at the end of the net and the net goes down and the otter boards bring it down like weights.

MB: Otter board?

GLS: They're called otter.

MB: How is that spelled?

GLS: I think it's O-U-T-E-R, I think, something like that. Like, they're an apparatus made of timber with some weights in the bottom like a sled and the net was connected to that. And the nets also had weights on the bottom part of the net to keep the bottom part down and the top part of the net had floats, floaties, which open up the net; it's like a mouth while it was down and then as they get trawled around, they

used to probably do a little bit of damage to the kelp as in – well, you can cut grass but it keeps coming back. I believe it was always a good thing because any soot that was sort of stagnant on the seabed would be chopped up a bit and moved and the tides would take it out, even though they talk about these dioxins that happen at Homebush and everything and blaming trawlers and everything. Maybe over the years that stuff might've been dormant and maybe the trawlers should've been stopped in those areas but early times I'm talking about, you know, when that Agent Orange stuff, Union Carbide company that used to dispose of that stuff, maybe they weren't allowed to go up there because I remember when I was a kid, at the age of ten, my father, sometimes the prawns would spawn in Parramatta River and, you know, there wasn't much to be caught sort of outside from the Harbour Bridge so the prawn trawlers would go up and seek, see what they'd find, and travel all the way up to Ryde Bridge where the problem might have allayed, you know.

6.17 **MB: So, they'd start out from Woolloomooloo, that's where all the ships were moored, the boats were moored in Woolloomooloo?**

GLS: Yes, all the boats were always moored in Woolloomooloo.

MB: But they might go up the Parramatta River. Would they go outside the heads at all?

GLS: Well, they used to go outside, the prawn trawlers would go outside the heads but it become a bit of a dangerous situation because they were smaller vessels and the ships coming into the country, whatever, you know, like cargo ships or, passenger ships, they might drop a line or something like an old line. Like, "Let's get rid of it", because it's easier to get rid of something that you're not going to see again unless they've got cameras on you and watching you. And in the early days this technology wasn't about so, these cargo ships'd come into the country and probably just throw some of their rubbish and you as a trawler, you're basically running the net on the seabed so anything laid heavy on the seabed was very dangerous to be getting caught up and snagged up against it would tip you and capsize you.

MB: So, it was very hazardous?

GLS: It was very hazardous for the littler boats to go outside. So, the littler boats would only go out and do what they call "set line". They'd put say a hundred hooks into a box with fishing line that was all nice and tucked in each box, and they would bait it up and they'd put it out and they'd catch snapper and whatever fish they can, you know, leave there for a day or so, then go and pick them up the next day or maybe stay open – depends how much there was to be caught. If it's only a couple they'd leave it for a day or so and then go out the next day and pick it up. That was only seasonal; that would be winterish sort of stuff.

8.01 Mostly with the prawn fishermen, most prawn fisherman in the summertime would trawl Sydney Harbour. My dad's like one of the pioneers of that type of fishing. He wasn't the one that invented it but in Botany Bay he was more the explorer of Botany Bay and he explored Botany Bay, him and his brothers.

MB: Did they - this is in the '50s, was it?

GLS: No, no. My father would've trawled, exploring Botany Bay, would've been I would say late '60s. Probably '68 to the '70s they were still travelling Botany Bay up to – when? – to 2000, I think, when that was all closed down.

MB: What was the community like around Woolloomooloo?

GLS: Oh, the community of Woolloomooloo was a fantastic neighbourhood. I live in a beautiful suburb today in Haberfield, so quiet and nice. The neighbours are a little bit more introverts; they don't tend to come out and greet much, even though I've got a couple, one or two across the road, that I've forced myself upon, because I've learnt to grow up in a neighbourhood where I knew everybody and you knew me, I knew your kids, because we all went to St Mary's Cathedral School. And after school we had a recreational centre which was called the 'Woolloomooloo Recreational Centre' at the time which has now changed - it's now called the 'Juanita Nielsen Centre' - and that was our gathering as friends and kids after school. It was a good centre because we had really nice people to help us with, you know, not with much homework but with activity: Mrs Straughan and Mr Ryan and Mr Rose. There was a number of other – I just can't think at the moment, I'll pick them up again – Mr Winton which looked after the Ultimo Centre. Ian Winton, his name is, he looks after the Blacktown Recreational Centres today, I think – his name is Mr Ian Winton, lovely bloke.

10.00 **MB: So, the community there, are you talking just about the Sicilian community there or -?**

GLS: No, we weren't just a Sicilian community. There was quite a lot of ethnic people that lived in Woolloomooloo I have to say. The majority were Italians, between Calabrese and Sicilians - or Siciliani, that's what we call them – there was some Maltese, a handful of Greek people, there might've been one or two Polish people; it was a little community of mixed race of people but majority Italian and Australian.

MB: And the fishermen were primarily Italian?

GLS: Primarily Italian.

MB: So, any other people from any other countries involved?

GLS: No, not really, not really. There might've been maybe one Greek, maybe a group of one boat of, you know, one or two Greek fisherman and ninety five per cent would have to be the Italian, there might've been a couple of Australian. Woolloomooloo wasn't just Italian or Greek; there was a lot of Australians. Early times, early – well, I'm only still young compared to a lot of the others - I'm fifty four, going on fifty five but I do recall a lot of racism things that, you know, stemmed from, you know, beginning of '60. We were classed as "wogs" or "dagos" or whatever the old words; there was a lot of different words, "chocolate frogs" or whatever. People were just dirty on the Italians because we came here and, you know, or my father came with little bags probably as big as that (indicates visually) with a pair of shorts and something and worked with his brother to get himself ahead.

MB: So, how did your father and mother set themselves up? Were they married before they came here?

11.55 GLS: My mum and my dad were married in '50, 1950, and my father left my mother to come out here because he had his brother-in-law and obviously my grandfather had already come and set up his son-in-law and his son over the past to come here, so they were already here.

MB: He'd set them up in the fishing already.

GLS: Yes, well fishing. He'd bought a boat in the time he came over and then he left his boat with his brother and my other uncle, De Pasquale, Francesco De Pasquale, he was here with his brother-in-law and they set up and he bought his own boat and then my uncle, Carmello Squadrita, he had his boat so they were sort of trying. Then my dad came out and then he sort of helped with his brother-in-laws and then gave him some money to sort of like gather a little bit and then he bought my mother out here in 1953 – I think I was something like that, 1953 - because, you know, a couple of years it took him to save some money so to ship my mum out here. And so they were married for a couple of years and not together, not together, and a couple of years later my mum came out and then a year later I was born sort of thing, you know what I mean? It was a hard lifestyle for these people, a non [English] speaking background, doing it hard; there was no help from the government at the time; it's not like today. And my dad's done really well for himself; he worked two jobs for fifteen, twenty years; my mum did the same.

MB: Did they? So, as well as fishing he was doing something else?

GLS: Yes. Well, what he did on the off-season of the fishing because the first years of fishing you were allowed to fish seven days a week, twelve months a year and twenty four hours. Then the Fisheries Department came in and they stopped the trawling in the harbour and

made it five days a week, twenty four hours and then they stopped it again and they made it five days a week from dusk till dawn.

14.05 All the haul netters – which, you know, sometimes I'm not speaking out of line because I believe that's how it was, and a lot of people will tell you the same thing – haul netters were allowed to fish seven days a week, twenty four hours a day, twelve months a year in these estuary zones like Botany Bay, Sydney Harbour.

MB: So what was the reason for the difference?

GLS: Don't know. They believed that trawlers were doing more damage and I think that's a lot of garbage because, look, the prawn fisherman with the otter boards could do some damage to kelp and some weed that are around but it's like yourself: you can cut your grass; you leave it for a little while and it'll rejuvenate. And I believe as well as they might've been doing that little bit of cutting of the kelp and whatever but again the soot was getting chopped up, lifted off the surface and tides were ripping it out which would clean – it's like your fish tank: if you don't clean your fish tank for a while what's it going to look like?

MB: So, your father, because of the hours in which he was allowed to fish were restricted, he did other work as well?

GLS: Yes. Then he did other work. He worked at Garden Island on the off-season and become a rigger because he's good with his making nets and that so he became a rigger. Those days a rigger wasn't like you had to go and do courses or anything like that so because he was good with ropes and nets and he learnt a couple of little tricks from certain other tradie people, Australian people might've showed ím a couple of different splices then he became a rigger at Garden Island for many years. And then from there there was no work at the time. It was the old Painters and Dockers, the old days, and originally the Europeans were hard working painters and dockers, there were a lot of bludgers - I won't mention who they were because I might incriminate myself - and now and again they went and worked at Cockatoo Island, become a rigger at Cockatoo Island.

16.07 **MB: So, had he come from a long line of fishermen?**

GLS: Yes. My father actually from the age of eight years of age - there was no schooling for these people in Sicily; they are basically illiterate.

MB: So, your father is still illiterate?

GLS: Well, he sort of is in a way but he sort of helped himself a little bit. My mum's not really because she's pretty intelligent, got a super memory, and she does accounts and like, with no schooling behind, they had to both pick up things - - -

MB: Or learn all that?

GLS: - - - or learn it by themselves, nobody taught them anything.

MB: I've just heard that some of the fishing families, particularly when they come from particular parts of Italy or Sicily that they've often come from many generations of fishing families.

GLS: That's right, yes. Well, my father's father – his name was Rocco – and my mother's father was also a fisherman as well and they lived in this place called Spadafora which is like living on the beach, that's the only life they ever had. In this particular town there isn't any making of bricks or there was no commercial, like, clothing even. You know, the commercial clothing thing is more the north part of Italy and so their main income was from the fishing - - -

MB: From fishing.

GLS: - - - from the sea. And my dad also he lost his mum when he was about seven years of age and him and his younger brother, John – Giovanni like me; I was named after him – went fishing with his father because my father had eleven children, my father's father had eleven children. And they lost three in death: one leukemia, one was pneumonia and I can't remember what the other one was. And also my father's mum passed away as well so my father had to go and help his father to become a fisherman.

18.03 **MB: So he started at seven, did you say, or eight?**

GLS: Well, he started at seven and it goes on and my father's been a fisherman for all those years; doesn't know anything else.

MB: So, he was a full time fisherman from the age of - - -

GLS: Full time fisherman, yes, from the age.

MB: - - - from a young age, yes.

GLS: But those types of fishermen were slightly different than here. It wasn't for prawns because Mediterranean Sea doesn't have prawns. They have fish like sardine, swordfish, some other, like, type of bream but there wasn't really like what we have here. But their knowledge of nets and this and that and they come here and they seen what was cooking with the type of world sort of here and they enjoyed it, thought, "Oh, this is different" and tried to make a new life for themselves here and they have; my father's never been back. He's been here for fifty eight years, fifty seven.

MB: Not even to visit?

GLS: Never ever to visit. He says, “Oh, this is my house”, you know. He goes to the bar up the road which the old days their social activity after, like all the fishermen probably on a Saturday night, Saturday afternoon, the Bell’s Hotel and then the Rock ‘n’ Roll which is now the Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel. The Bell’s Hotel’s, old Jimmy Carruthers, an old boxer, he used to own it and they used to all go there, not to get sloshed or anything. They used to have a couple of beers and they'd probably play cards or they used to play Bigado, which Bigado is a snooker table but they're snooker tables with those little things, like little pawn pieces on and that was a different – I don’t know what they call that – it’s like billiards, I think it’s called billiards. Yes, they used to play billiards, not snooker in them days, in the old days and, oh the nice things. And they used to have a fish shop there and sometimes they'd drop off a – or he’d buy a little bit in the old days – there was a bit of black money in fishing, I s’pose he was, a little bit, you know.

MB: What did he do with the catch?

20.00 GLS: Well, a lot of the catches were taken to Haymarket, that’s where you'll see in the documentaries, a part of Haymarket, the old days.

MB: Where the old markets were?

GLS: Where the fruit market is today, that used to be the old fish market; it was the fruit market as well but that was the co-op at the time. And, you know, basically there was – which is De Costi today, which was the Ruellos, they used to come and get the catch off you because not many people used to have cars those days. So, they used to have the truck and they'd load it onto their truck and they'd take it to the co-op floor and it used to get sold like that. And because you were a registered buyer by the co-op you would be - Margo Beasley - you give me a stamp, Giovanni Lo Surdo, that you caught ten kilos or twenty kilos - well, those kilos weren’t kilos, they were pounds in those days - and you got X amount of dollars or X amount of cents, pence for your catch for the pound. You know, those days it was like five pence for a pound of prawns and it went up to ten pence and then it changed, went to dollars and now it’s dollars too. But it was quite - how would you say? - it was a thing, it was really nice to go to the co-op as a kid. You know, go with my dad and I used to have – he said, “Look, you can take the bait”, which the bait was a smaller prawn “and you can use that to” – you know, like anglers and they used to buy it and give you petty cash and you'd buy a couple of lollies or, you know.

MB: A bit of pocket money.

GLS: Pocket money for me, it was all my pocket because I’d be working with him and he said, “Look” - because there was no abundance of

money those days – "you know, for you to work to get your pocket money. Today, I've got grandkids and they get pocket money off me, five dollars, ten dollars, "Where's my money?" and I'm - it goes on but it's a little bit different.

22.02 **MB: What can you remember about – you said your father took you out on the boat, you'd go, I think, in school holidays and weekends and so on.**

GLS: Yes, I'd go in school holidays, yes, or Christmas period times.

MB: And from about what age did you say you were going out on a boat?

GLS: I started at five. He didn't like taking me because, see, I'd fall asleep and I'd be inside the cabin and my father was a bit paranoid that, you know, that something went wrong, getting me out of the cabin would be a problem. So, basically he would take me when it was - there were times where you can go fishing in the daytime and that was perfect for me because I'm a bit lazy. At night when the stars go down I also go down with the stars. As I got older I got better at it, you know, as in staying awake a lot longer and that wasn't so much of a hassle but I did go out when I was five. And he didn't want to take me, you know, and I'd be sort of waiting for my father to come home the next day. Like, my father would never be about with me, I was always with my mum. My mum had two stillbirths in early times after me and so I was always stuck with my mum, you know, and she was a seamstress and I'd help feed the needles and everything and do that work for her. And then about eight, like roughly more about eight years of age where I could swim and he wasn't so paranoid he would take me a lot more often, and then I wanted to become a fisherman. And at the age of ten there was a bloke called Frank Bonza, he was part of the Fisheries Department, inspector, and he knew we were young kids and blah, blah, blah, and we all wanted to be fishermen no matter what. You could say forget about [being] doctors; we always loved that game, that was our world, you know; we grew up with our parents and that's what they knew best and that's what we liked to do and he gave us all licenses. There was no course, no nothing.

MB: The kids?

24.00 GLS: Yes, he gave us all licenses for two dollars. I remember when it changed from pence to cents.

MB: To decimal currency.

GLS: Decimal currency change and I remember the first time it was two dollars, that's what it cost us for a licence and that would've been – I don't know, when did they change over - '69?

MB: ’66, I think.

GLS: ’66, was it? O.K, well that’s when it basically changed and then we all got licenses. And then we used to go like school holidays and my father sometimes when there’s a lot of prawns at this time of the day so he’d take me in the daytime to give him a chance to be able to – because it wasn’t just “Go today. Let’s go to sleep tonight”. The catch was there, you’ve got an X amount of months to catch what you can to make a living, to get ahead in life, so they would go twenty four hours, possibly two, three days like that, forty eight hours straight.

MB: What, and just have a quick nap somewhere or something?

GLS: They'd have a quick nap or because you're having me, you know, I know how to drive a boat. Basically he’d tell me, “I want you to point the nose of the boat to that corner”, but then he’d probably just rest himself. It might’ve taken twenty minutes to get to that point and that twenty minutes for him was like a power nap as you'd call it today. And that’s how it was, you know, and there wasn’t the goodness of having what they call of today, a lot of trawlers have got that computer autopilot, you know, never had it. You know, their autopilot was their brains, their thoughts, and now and again they'd close their eyes when they knew that there was nothing in front of them there. They would feel if it was a bit of a knock because it’s like yourself, a bump in the car, you feel that bump if you're asleep. If you're asleep and someone’s driving if someone, you know, gave you a bit of a rough ride you'd say, “Oh, God, what was that?”, you know what I mean?

26.02 And that’s how they operated: it was just a natural, like, autopilot. They were buggered, buggered men; they were really hard workers, not like today.

MB: And did they have physical problems as a result of the really hard work?

GLS: Well, not really. Maybe a slightly sore back because everything was picked up by hand. And then they had what they call a derrick with a mast and they sort of worked it out: it was like a block and tackle to make their catch a lot easier to pick up while it was heavy and that made life a lot easier. Then they called what they called a “nigger head” – not trying to be racist here but that’s what they called it. It’s on the end of a winch because in the old days it used to be pulled in by hands, Margo. It was ropes, like hessian rope. It was like not today, nylon, it was really stuff to make your hands where you'd have to wear – but they didn’t have gloves. The other way was just get some rags and pull it in with rags because eventually had blisters on your hands. Then they worked out - they were bringing up the otter boards because at early stages they were very light, light-ish, not as

heavy as they were as they got older, as more experience came in - longer nets, heavier nets, you needed to get them down quicker and otter boards were heavier so they worked out what they call a winch. And they were made by, I think it was a couple of Italian blokes, one was an engineer, he made the first one. It was made from old diffs that are in your cars.

MB: Differentials?

GLS: Differentials, yes, and they chopped the axles off and they put these drums on the end of it and they had hand – like the billycart days, you know, make a brake for your billycart. It was primitive stuff; it wasn't automatic press buttons like that,

27.57 And it was run by the motor on belts like fan belts. You know, they sort of just go on the front of the motor; the motor accelerates and would help bring these items up.

MB: Could we just digress a little bit? You mentioned that your mother was a seamstress.

GLS: My mum was a seamstress.

MB: What was her name and what was her maiden name?

GLS: Maiden name?

MB: Or is – she's still alive?

GLS: Yes, my mum's still alive. My mother's maiden name was Martia Squadrito, S-Q-U-A-D-R-I-T-O, and my mother worked for a company called Suit Master in Commonwealth Street, Central - - -

MB: Surry Hills.

GLS: - - - Surry Hills, yes. And she worked her way up into the – they were owned by a Jewish company or they were Jewish owned but I don't know - it was Australian to start with, I'm not sure about that. And she'd walk from – never catch any buses or anything – she'd walk from Bourke Street down every day and in getting to know the owner she became a manageress as well as they found she was so good with what she does because those days they used to do a lot of embroidery like, you know, back at home.

MB: Did she?

GLS: Oh, she did loads of embroidery - just I don't have any here to show you but my mum was very good with embroidery. And what they'd do after hours, and they used to get like five cents – we're talking about our currency, decimal currency – she'd probably get five cents a suit

just to pin it for the seamstress the next day. So, she would get a little parcel – well, that little parcel weighed about ten kilos, five to ten.

MB: She'd pick that up from Commonwealth Street?

GLS: Well, she'd walk that from Commonwealth Street to Bourke Street every day until my father got a [driver's] licence.

MB: She'd pick the work up and take it home?

GLS: Yes.

30.00 **MB: And then take it back the next day?**

GLS: Take it back, yes. After doing her normal eight hours she'd pick that parcel up and take it home, do the cooking for my dad. My dad would be off with his little bucket, he'd be going fishing; she'd set him up with his little bucket; well, that's what they used to do.

MB: For his food?

GLS: For his food, this and that, and then she'd cook for me or whatever and then she'd get back in doing her job and I'd be sitting there and maybe watching a bit of something or I'd be around the playground and eight o'clock, eight thirty at night she'd come around and get me and took me home.

MB: So, they didn't have any more children after the two stillbirths?

GLS: No. No, not after the two stillbirths, no.

MB: So, you're the only child?

GLS: I'm the only one, yes.

MB: You must have been very important in their family.

GLS: I'm very, very important to them. I wasn't allowed to do what I wanted to do. A lot of all the other kids, with Italians or Aussie kids that I grew up with, you know, they were allowed to go on excursion to – it's up towards Singleton – there were camping trips that I wasn't allowed to go on because I was so important. I was their only child and they weren't going to let me go out in case of some dangers and something would go with me, so they basically restricted me from doing anything on excursion. Kurrajong, that's what I mean. Them old days they used to take us to – Mr Ryan would take us to Kurrajong and do all these, you know, like excursion things through the playground time and the council would subsidise because we were sort of inner city kids; we were underprivileged, you know, we didn't have a lot of money.

MB: So then this was South Sydney Council?

GLS: Well, at first I think it was still City Council.

MB: Because there've been a few changes.

GLS: But then they amalgamated together and made it South Sydney City Council because there was King George Playground – still about today – there was a lot of playgrounds involved. There was Pyrmont, Maybanke Playground - I don't know if that's part of you too.

MB: Yes, I think it is.

32.00 GLS: That's still in Harris Street; I still see it today. The Ultimo one, which is on the corner there on Harris and the one that takes you down to Wentworth Park – I can't remember that name of the street. And there were loads: there was Woolloomooloo, there was Moore Park and it goes on. I can go onto ……. ……..

MB: So, you had a lot of good times in the playgrounds, the council run playgrounds?

GLS: Oh, fantastic times. I still see a lot of the kids from what we competed against because they were competing zones. Like, if you were from Pyrmont weekends we played tennis against you or there's a basketball structured competition through the season. And then obviously there was canoe races, you know, between the two or the three or four centres, you knowing the recreation supervisor on that one or that one or that one and you would structure, say, "O.K, we're going to pick a date and we're all going to go down on camp sites, have canoe races", and it was fun, it was all fun, structure doesn't bother these particular people. That was fun, it really was, because our parents were just hard at work, did not have any time for us.

MB: So this really helped your parents because it basically meant you'd be looked after if they were both working?

GLS: That's right, yes, fantastic.

MB: So, when you got the fishing licence and you used to go out with your father did you become then a full time fisherman?

GLS: Well, not really because, see, well I've got other trades. I've got a cabinetmaker's trade and I'm also a stained glass designer as well as a glazier itself because: I love the fish, I wanted to become a full time fisherman, I still had my licence for many, many years and always paid it up and used to go with my dad, like when I could. And of course, then I decided I wanted to go work with a lot of my friends

and work at the Kings Cross Post Office and then I worked at the Potts Point Post Office, then I worked with my uncle for many years.

33.59 Then I got out of that and I went and I worked at Garden Island, became a painter and docker – there was a lot more money – and so we were looking for money to make and, you know, then I become a cabinetmaker because I enjoy crafts.

MB: So you're saying you'd look around for where the opportunities were to get a better wage?

GLS: Yes, that's right, a better wage, a better wage, yes. And the painters and dockers in those days it was a good wage for an eighteen or twenty year old without any degrees or anything like that. And then, it was one of those things, I still did fishing, you know, like there might have been the Friday night to go fishing with my dad to help him out because he'd be on his own all the time, he hasn't got anybody to help him. And there was not a lot of money to employ you, even though the government came in with a new thing and they said if you wanted another deckhand you would have to have him as – it was called a "block licence", it wasn't called ……. the fishing licence because after so many years that went by, like us as young kids, we all got fishing licenses but then they stopped fishing licenses. And then the reason how I lost my licence was just a stupid dilemma because at the time I was going out with a young lady from the Windsor area and her father said, "Look, you're fishing, you know, and you should try looking at this little fish shop up in Windsor". And I thought, "Oh, yes", it was a going concern, I thought it'd be nice to have my own business, you know. And me and my friend - a good mate of mine that passed away about four years ago now – his uncle used to own Ruello's Seafood Market which is now De Costis', they sold it to De Costis. Well Sam and I decided, O.K, because I thought he had a bit of experience and thought, "O.K, I need someone with a bit of experience". I know how to catch stuff but when it comes down to putting a business together it wasn't my - - -

MB: You hadn't had any experience.

36.01 GLS: Yes, no experience. So, I knew how to fillet stuff and I thought he'd be the same but he was a bit hopeless, to be honest with you. Lovely bloke but he was always the delivery boy and never realised; just pick up the catch, deliver it to the markets, so he was more like that, so. Anyway, to cut the story, we ended up getting this going concern market and registered buyers at the fish market and blah, blah, blah. Any road, some Indian guy at the time come knocking on my door, says "Listen, my name", "Yes, yes", "And just, just wondering what your plans are. Like, you're not really going fishing any more". And I said, "Well, look, I own a fish shop now so I don't have any time to go fishing any more at this present moment in my life. You know, I'm seeking to get ahead in life". He said, "Well, you're going to have to

do the one thing and you'll have to surrender your licence or you'd have to give up your fishing. You have to do X amount of hours on the water".

MB: To retain the licence?

GLS: To retain the licence which it was a lot of bologna because there was a lot of other guys who'd go fishing for the six months of the season and they'd end up in the docks because they close you. So, they worked six months there and six months here and I could've been doing the same but at the end of it instead of causing any drama I surrendered my licence; that's how I had to surrender my licence. Because I had a fish shop, it looked bad that I had a fish shop and also a fishing licence and I wasn't going through the co-op which I was going through the co-op, I was buying my catch through the co-op; whatever I had in that shop went through the co-op, registered, everything. I said, "Look, hey, I'm not trying to go fishing and bringing my catch to my shop". I said, "Here you go. Have a look", and he sort of went, "Oh, yes, I understand. Yes, but we'd prefer you to have" prefer me to go fishing. I said, "Well, mate, there's no rules that I can't have two jobs". You know, my parents had two jobs. I mean, they set me up a little bit but I would like to set up for my own kids and I was restricted of that and I found that a bit - - -

38.05 **MB: So, he would have been from the Department of Fisheries or something like that?**

GLS: He was from the Department of Fisheries, yes, and restricted me from having my own licence.

MB: So, you didn't ever get a licence again after that?

GLS: So, what happened then, after about a year or so, the fish shop, the market that we had at Windsor, a lot of people didn't understand about fish and we weren't cooking it for them either and I didn't have enough money to set up oil cookers and all that so we basically shut the shop. Basically then I went back into my old trade which is my glazing game so I lost my shop, lost my licence, went back in the glazing game and I also then did stained glass work and I just survived, and that's the end of my fishing career but I still went fishing with my father after.

MB: You still went with your father?

GLS: Yes, I still went with my father to help him out. There might've been a two day, a three day, a one day a week, you know, because the man was tired and he had nobody to help him.

MB: Well, he would have been getting on by then.

GLS: He was getting on; he was probably late '60s.

MB: Right. So he wasn't one of those – because some fishermen have two or three boats don't they, but he just had the one?

GLS: Some trawlers, like you go down the Bagnatas, all the Bagnatas that have got you in the fishermen's union and everything. Like, they might have two or three trawlers, yes, they've invested. "You've decided that you want to sell yours, I'll buy it off you", thinking, well, O.K, in case that boat breaks down, you know, "We can take Jesapina or Makalata" or whatever, whatever boat they had. Or they set you up and say, "Look, you're the skipper, we'll pay you. Go out there, you run that vessel, make money on you". Some blokes did that but today they're restricted of water so they can't really do that because there's not a lot of water to - - -

MB: Restricted on where they're allowed to actually fish?

GLS: Where they're allowed to fish, how far off the coast they're allowed to go now.

MB: Because the Bagnatas are actually associated with the fish market in Pyrmont, aren't they?

GLS: That's exactly right, yes.

MB: But did they ever fish out of Woolloomooloo?

39.58 GLS: They did but they were always more trawlers, like deep sea trawlers, not Sydney Harbour. One or two might've, the younger sons decided to take on prawn trawlers. That was Ross Bagnata and Vince Bagnata. I know them today, they're my age, they'd tell you the same thing and I still know them today. We don't have a lot to do with each other today because they live at Leichhardt and I live here. When we were at Woolloomooloo I'd bump into Mario, you know what I mean.

MB: So, they lived at Woolloomooloo too, the Bagnatas?

GLS: They lived at Woolloomooloo as well, yes.

MB: Were there other prominent fishing families – can you remember any of the other names there?

GLS: Mussamanchi. The Pirellis had moved down to Ulladulla – well, there's loads. Actually, to be honest with you, it's getting a plaque putting on at the moment, it's in discussion with the Leichhardt Council about the Iron Cove fishermen, which is this bay down the road here because originally we were Woolloomooloo and then moving out of Woolloomooloo and people moved over to Leichhardt and they found there was a beautiful little place: they could park their

boat right down the bottom here and they all bought in Fraser Street which is like in the old times from back home, it resembled that area.

MB: They bought houses there, you mean?

GLS: They bought their houses right next to the back of that. The wives, they can hear the trawler coming; you know, you can hear fairly loud. They go, "Oh, here comes my husband, I'd better get his food ready for him", you know, cook, him a plate of pasta, whatever it was, you know, and then a lot of them have also got here too. So, there were a lot of fisherman also like, you know, there was Restuccia, De Pasquale, loads of Lo Surdos, there was Joya, Palumbo – God, I can rattle on another couple of – Junta.

MB: So there you've just listed off about ten families.

GLS: Oh, yes. You still have ten different sorts of, yes, ten different surname families, yes.

42.03 **MB: Easily.**

GLS: Easily, easily.

MB: And when you say there are lots of Lo Surdos – so who else in your family was around then at Woolloomooloo?

GLS: From my family my father's brothers; my father shipped his brothers and his sisters out here. He paid for all of them, they lived with us for many months until he established them into a house that he'd already bought in Fraser Street, so he'd set you up in there.

MB: Fraser Street in -?

GLS: Fraser Street here, Leichhardt.

MB: In Leichhardt.

GLS: Yes. ***** Fraser Street, Leichhardt, he's had that since early '60s; that was his first goal that he kicked when he, working his two jobs and my mum doing the same thing, they saved money - - -

MB: So, he's still living in Woolloomooloo?

GLS: Yes.

MB: But they bought the house in Leichhardt?

GLS: They bought the house in Fraser Street. And then his younger brother, Bartolo, he shipped him out first and he come and lived with us at Woolloomooloo for many months and then he also worked with

my dad too when I was only a little toddler. And after a couple of years he did his own thing and got himself rolling and then my father brought out his other brother, Sam. [Break in recording]

MB: O.K, we just had a brief pause there. We were talking about all the Lo Surdos. You said your father had brought out his brothers and sisters.

GLS: Yes, the Lo Surdos. And, yes, my father brought out two of his brothers and then he shipped out his sisters - my old man's a gem. You know what his name is? Santo. They call him 'Santo Claus' because he's always looked after his brothers and sisters and he loves them dearly because he lost a few of them back at home and he's always been a big brother, he is the big brother, he's the oldest.

MB: Is he the oldest?

GLS: He's the oldest and he always looked after – and he looked after his father, set him up but he was a bit annoyed early times because my father lost his mum early in life and my grandfather remarried and there was a bit of debate about that because, you know, the new mum, stepmum was a bit nasty to him and they weren't happy with that and then they had to be broken up from home.

44.09 And my father's got three stepsisters today and they now only over the last fifteen, twenty years have sort or reunited again - - -

MB: Patched it up.

GLS: - - - because of some stupid things, childish things, really. It's just the way the mum was and, didn't like her and then they took it out against you as a sister, not re-looking at it. But they're all good now, all good, everything happening.

MB: And so his brothers and sisters came and his sisters married here, did they?

GLS: No, they had the same situation as when my father brought my mother out. They all came out here as single men but were married.

MB: Yes. So, your father's sisters then already had husbands who were here, were they?

GLS: No. My father's brothers and sisters, right, were still back home. My father shipped out his brothers first, his brothers Bartolo and Salvatore, and then it was one of the sisters but she was already married and his name was Fasachi. And then my father's youngest brother, his name was Michau which is Michael and he has his own glazing business today, been having his own glazing business for

forty years. We've glazed eighty per cent of your city and I mean eighty per cent of those city buildings, from Opera House - - -

MB: So, you've worked with him too, have you?

GLS: Yes, I work with him; that's who I did my trade with, with him.

MB: So, you've done really major projects like the Opera House?

GLS: Oh, yes: Opera House, Australia Square, Centrepoint Tower, Grosvenor Place, the Regent Hotel, ANA – which is now Shangri-La – the Gazebo, oh, keeps on. What's the other one there in the corner of King and? – MLC Centre, Citygroup Building. Look, I can go on and go on and it would bore you.

46.10 **MB: That's enough.**

GLS:

MB: Let's talk about how you came to leave Woolloomooloo, how the family left Woolloomooloo.

GLS: How we come to leave Woolloomooloo?

MB: Is your father in Haberfield now?

GLS: Haberfield, yes, my father lives down the road here, ********, right next to the bridge there which is the City West Link now. Used to be the old – wasn't the Iron Cove, was the Leichhardt Bridge there - now, that's a park. How we left Woolloomooloo was that the eastern suburbs railway came through, was meant to be built and people from the government came around and basically wanted to buy us out and move us out and which I think that destroyed the most beautiful part of community that you'd ever see in your life in this country; I've never seen it anywhere else; where you would be able to walk, Margo, in 1960 walk down the street and you will see a fisherman with what we call a sewing needle for the nets wrapped up. He'd have half in his mouth and he'd have his toe stretching his net and he'd be doing his net; and I'm not talking about in his house, I'm talking about in your street. And down next to the wharves where the finger wharves are today, Woolloomooloo Waters [apartments] and all that, that was all fishermen, setting up their nets. Obviously, they didn't have the space, they utilised – there were no council restrictions. There is today because of some people that have got a negative attitude and said, "I might trip over that and sue you", and that's what all those good things that really have a culture about it have been destroyed because of some idiots that want to rort a system. And obviously over the years we all got bought out and we all moved to different locations. So, ninety per cent of them moved to Leichhardt, Haberfield, Five Dock.

48.05 **MB: Well, Haberfield's a big Italian - - -**

GLS: Yes, or they moved to Mascot.

MB: Your parents owned the house in Bourke Street, did they?

GLS: They owned a house in Bourke Street, yes. It was a two-storey house with an attic room on top.

MB: A terrace, I suppose, was it?

GLS: No, a terrace was – no, it wasn't really a terrace. Terraces have – oh, I s'pose it would've been in its early days, early days because we used to have a balcony in the front of it, it did have but then over there – Italians, they are, they rendered everything, you know, not thinking of spending X amount of dollars, "O.K, let's beautify, let's fix the balconies" and whatever it was, so. But always still had the attic room, that was my room. I could see the city like it was my backyard and I could see the Harbour Bridge; it was just, out of my little – I've got dormer windows. That's how I got my plan here from my house in Woolloomooloo.

MB: Your new house in Haberfield?

GLS: Yes, because we used to have a little dormer window upstairs and now and again at the fireworks time I would jump out my window and sit in like a little gutter there and we'd sit there at the front. And I think that place was built in, what, 1870-odd or something like that.

MB: But it wasn't a freestanding house, was it? It was joined to the house next door.

GLS: Not, it wasn't freestanding; it was joined to the houses next door.

MB: So it was what we call a terrace?

GLS: Yes, more of a terrace, yes. Well, most of the houses in Woolloomooloo were terraces, yes.

MB: That's right, yes.

GLS: I don't have any film or any – my mum might have photos of type of house at the time, she might. But all the houses were all together, there wasn't a freestanding home, and the houses across the road didn't get touched. It's just before the Matthew Talbot [Hostel] area; my parents lived very close to the crossroad was Harmer and Cathedral [Streets]. You probably don't know the city but I know the city.

50.02 **MB: I know Cathedral.**

GLS: You know Cathedral. Well, Cathedral's there and you've got Harmer here (demonstrates visually) going towards the water and we were in between that – it's called number 74. And they built a street and it was two doors down to – and it's still there today; I noticed it. It's like a generator, it's a power unit, it's still stuck there, it's partly to do with the Electricity Commission generators, whatever, it's still there at the end of ……. Street.

MB: About what year was it when you moved?

GLS: Well, we moved out of there in, I think 1971, I think, something like that, '70, '71. I was over here, I remember because then I met my wife and in them days I'm a young father. And in them days contraceptive wasn't sort of like it is registered today and people had kids taught sex education at school. Well, we were a little bit naïve and, you know, and things went on and - - - (phone rings)

MB: Is your wife from a Sicilian background?

GLS: No, my wife's Australian; she's a Jennings. Parents were a bit funny at first about that because, most European parents want for you to marry their type or their nationality.

MB: The same ethnic group.

GLS: The same background, whatever. I probably jumped the gun there. They weren't very happy with me at first but my father wouldn't have anybody else today.

MB: Your father or father-in-law?

GLS: No, my father. Well, my father-in-law, he passed away. At first he was also against the fact and I got a lot of racist comments against me and had lots of quarrels and now and again have a little bit of a fistfight over it. No stabbing or anything – not like today; there's probably more stabbings today than there's ever been.

52.01 **MB: But that's all over now. You've got grandchildren now, haven't you?**

GLS: Yes, they're my grandchildren there. (Indicates visually)

MB: I see. And how many children do you have?

GLS: I have two, two boys.

MB: Two children and you've got three grandchildren.

GLS: Yes.

MB: Very attractive they are.

GLS: The other one, the younger one, he's twenty six going onto twenty seven this year hasn't sort of found himself a girl yet and it's only a matter of time but he is not married - he's a locksmith. The older one is a bit more – he's thirty six now.

MB: Now, in Haberfield, I remarked when I came in "What a beautiful house you have". It's very different to the house in Woolloomooloo.

GLS: The house in Woolloomooloo, yes, yes. I picked this house when I was about twelve years of age.

MB: Did you?

GLS: Yes, because my mum and day always, like, as me going to work and as the European way was where, you go to work. Like I said before, that I got some petty cash, some petty cash - - -

MB: Pocket money, yes.

GLS: - - - some pocket money but now and again I'd give it to my mum and I'd be proud to give her some money to put away for me and she'd bank it for me over the years. And, you know, me doing those things one day, she said, "When you're getting married one day you'll probably have your own home so, what we'll do we'll put a little bit of this and that" and they would restrict you a lot of things. Like I wasn't allowed to go away or use money as in abundance of money, you know. So, they were probably putting it away and I picked this place when I was twelve years of age. So, deduct from fifty five – I'm not fifty five yet, a couple of months away – when I was about twelve and I remember seeing this house and I was fascinated by the oldness of it. I love antiques and I've always been an antique lover so it's my mother's house.

MB: It's a very beautiful freestanding Federation house.

GLS: Yes, a Federation home. And at the time from what I come from in Woolloomooloo it was, you know - - -

MB: A palace.

GLS: - - - a palace. Well, it was an eye-opener. I go, "Wow, this is beautiful", like you know what I mean. But I'm not looking at the suburb; I was only looking at the house.

54.00 But the suburb, compared to the suburb that I grew up in Woolloomooloo, I wouldn't compare. I would never change, if I had a choice to stay how it was in Woolloomooloo I would have it every day, I would sell this house to go back there.

MB: But how did you come to buy this house then if you saw it when you were twelve?

GLS: Well, my parents always had a little bit of money and they obviously put away, you know, and they put a deposit on it and then they - - -

MB: They put a deposit on it for you?

GLS: They put a deposit when I was twelve years old for me.

MB: I see.

GLS: And as time go on, you know, it'd be rented out and helped to pay and you pay a little bit of mortgage off slowly, slowly – them days were slow like that. My mum was always the brains of the family, like, my dad just used to go to work. My mum did the same but she was very hard with the money; she wasn't sort of a flamboyant "Buy this, buy that". My mum will make you that shirt, she has made shirts like that but she wouldn't go and buy that shirt, she would make it herself, you know - she would make it for her neighbour.

MB: And keep the money to invest?

GLS: Yes, that was how they were. They did things as simple as they could and as less money they could spend. You know, they could buy this fruit. (Indicates visually) Who do you think this fruit comes from? That's my father.

MB: We're looking at a bowl of fruit on the table in front of you.

GLS: Yes, you're looking at a bowl of fruit on the table there; that comes from my father. Every day he'll come up with fruit, you know; he'll buy a box instead of an avocado.

MB: One or two avocados, he'll buy - - -

GLS: Yes, he'll buy a buy a box.

MB: - - - and share it around amongst you?

GLS: He'll go and share it with his sister in law, my mother, my son, my grandkids and he'll do that; that's his job today.

MB: When did your father give away the fishing?

GLS: My father was bought out by the government in 2003, maybe, something like that.

MB: So he was working - - -

GLS: He had two licenses, he had two licenses. Yes, my dad was only - - -

MB: - - - until very recently?

55.52 GLS: Oh, yes, my father was working in – no pull your leg – Botany Bay. He had two licenses: he had a Port Hacking which is Sydney and also Botany Bay, he had a licence for both, and I begged him not to sell it; I told him, "Don't give it to them. Bugger it, I'll go fishing". "Oh, well, you going to go. I don't want to go any more". He had enough, you know. It wasn't very long after that he did give up his fishing he got bowel cancer and that was five, yes, five and a half years now but that boat there, (indicates visually) my cousin De Pasquale, Dom De Pasquale - - -

MB: When you say "that boat there" you're talking about a little painting you've got of his boat.

GLS: Yes, the painting of the boat over there, the Isabella' is the name of the boat, Isabella', 3083 was the numberplate, LSB3083. It was just sitting around, after he sold his licence back, buy-back by the government which he got peanuts for because they only kept so much paperwork and what they kept was all on a computer and they knew – they wanted your best three catches over the last ten years. Well, in the last ten years it's declined so it was convenient for the government to say, "Look, Margo, I'm going to give you the best wage you've had for the last three years" but you've only been working because they've been putting you off here, put you off. So, they rorted you sort of thing, I believe so, because they blamed us. They were trying to close the waters for the angler fishermen or whatever, right. So, my dad basically then for a year or so when he sold back his licence to the government my cousin didn't take it and he had his father's trawler – he's my uncle, De Pasquale, Francesco, was one of the prime ones with my dad when he first came out to this country, helping, he passed away - and my cousin, Dom, took the licence over and he fished. But then his boat played up and he didn't have a boat to go so then my father said, "Look, why don't you use my boat?" Then my cousin, Dom, said, "Why don't you come with me?" and show him more the ropes because my cousin, Dom, didn't have that. He was still a rigger at Garden Island for many, many years and he decided he'd become a fisherman.

58.01 And so my dad then again took up fishing just as an offsider and my cousin, Dom, was allowed to have him on board because it was part of the Fisheries Department you're allowed to have a helper which it

was called a “block licence” and you were just allowed to have one helper on board.

MB: So your father went back?

GLS: You can have as many as you like on board but they weren’t allowed to touch a net, you weren’t allowed to walk around with gumboots because that classed you as a worker. Even though the Vietnamese were allowed to do whatever they liked but us Italians we weren’t allowed and we always – like, I’m not sticking up for the Italians here but the Italians just didn’t want to break laws; they wanted to live comfortably in this country, not have any conflict with police or detectives or any riff-raff, trying a clean slate with people - you know what I mean? - where today - O.K, there was a few, these ‘Underbelly’ [television series] people, rorting the system with drugs and made billions of dollars – these men were workers. They came here with a bag and they went to work with that bag till they made themself a suitcase – that’s how I look at it.

MB: That sounds like a great place to end. And one of your neighbours has just started mowing the lawn so we might wind up there.

GLS: Yes.

MB: Thank you very much.

GLS: That’s all right.

Interview ends