



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY NUNZIO MONDIA

COVID CONVERSATIONS

Book 3 - 6

Interviews with City of Vincent staff and local police.



CITY OF VINCENT



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Covid Conversations Documentary Official Youtube Video Link:

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmXNVq3yEIA>



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1 Dale Morrissy

Dale Morrissy I am Dale Morrissy; I am the Manager at Beatty Park Leisure Centre here in the City of Vincent. I've worked here for the past 28 years. I started as a lifeguard way back in 1992. Yeah, so Beatty Park has been here since 1962. It was built for the Commonwealth Games, and it's evolved over many different iterations since then. In 1994, they built the indoor pool and in 2011 we built a brand-new gym and health and fitness facility and upgraded some of the pools. And it's going from strength to strength lately.

Beatty Park is a hub of the community; most people have learnt to swim at Beatty Park. The history is really steeped in tradition. The swim school at Beatty Park has over two and a half thousand kids in it per week. We have three and a half thousand members at Beatty Park. And a lot of the local schools use Beatty Park on a regular basis for their in-term swimming lessons and vacation swimming lessons are also held here twice a year.

When COVID hit Beatty Park it was devastating for a lot of our staff. We have 180 staff working here, and of those 130, after the first two weeks, we had to let go (indefinite leave). There was no Job Keeper available. It was a very difficult time for the permanent staff and supervisors to work out how to look after those staff. And we were working around the clock, for those first couple of weeks, to try and find ways to support those staff, keep them engaged and work at how long this was all going to happen. And making sure that we were looking after them.

It was an interesting time for the industry. We had to move very quickly to digital options, engaging with our clients through emails and newsletters about how they could keep up their exercise regimes from home. We couldn't monetize that as we would have liked to, at the start, to keep staff on and to pay staff. But we were looking after the community and giving them something to keep their mental health and their well-being going during that uncertain period. With the view that we'd be back as soon as we could. I was always aiming for that.

Nunzio Mondia How long was that period?

Dale Morrissy I think it was from the start of March through to mid to late May. We opened up very slowly after that in a staged approach, which was very difficult because we were governed by numbers, and we still are in some areas. How much we could offer the community managing that and their expectations and still maintaining a site that people felt safe and comfortable going to. That was a big challenge.

Dale Morrissy Working from home. Yeah, we did. I jumped online. I jumped onto the Fender free trial [online guitar playing lessons] for about six weeks and it was great. I got back into playing the guitar for a period. I spent more time at home with the kids and family and the cat.

Dale Morrissy That was interesting. Trying to hold Zoom meetings at home with the background noise and kids fighting. I jumped up once and had a yell at somebody and realised that I was still in a full meeting, which was a bit of a worry [laughter]. As

I sat back down and everyone was looking at me as I berated my children for not answering the door or something, I can't remember what it was, but that was quite a moment. I was embarrassed for about five minutes afterwards going back into the meeting.

It is challenging setting up, getting the technology, moving from workplace to a home workplace and making sure that the staff had those opportunities as well. This is a service industry; you can't take the pool home. The challenge was how to engage as many staff as we can. And we found a couple of projects within the city. There was a lot of digital and archiving that needed to be done over the next two or three years and we jumped into that with both feet and got stuck into that. We spent a lot of time archiving at the city and freeing up a lot of storage space, which would have otherwise taken many years. That was a good project to get started.

Dale Morrissy As we started to open up, we had limited numbers and we had bookings to use the pool. It was good because a staff member had to stand out the front and chat with people as they came in and make sure that they were keeping their social distance. And we got to talk to people on a different level. Normally they rush in through the front doors and into the pool, they have their swim, and they leave. Reconnecting with people, I've been here 28 years and I can remember some of the people from when I was on the pool deck. We got to chat with them as we were waiting to open the doors or for the new session to open. It was really good to get that insight and to get away from the paperwork and back to the grassroots of why we're here at Beatty Park. To provide a service to the community and allow people to connect socially. And that was really important. It actually made me feel good coming out of that lockdown. Despite everything that had happened, you could have a good chat and people were genuinely nice. You know, they really wanted to come back. They wanted to reconnect and be a community again, which is what people had missed over that time. It was a real, heartfelt moment. Some of those days standing out there at 5:30 in the morning, having a chat.

Dale Morrissy You don't use your towel, or you don't get in, if you don't wipe the equipment down, you get told off. We try to make the social distancing norm and hand sanitiser everywhere. Hand sanitiser spots on the floor everywhere [laughter] and the cleaners are constantly cleaning up. I don't think that'll change in the near future. So the bills go up because of that, we're using a lot more cleaning products. The gym itself, we're going through thousands and thousands of anti-bacterial wipes a month at the moment. But people are confident when they come back, and they see us doing those sorts of things. It instils that confidence that Beatty Park and the City of Vincent are doing the right thing by themselves, and they're happy to come along. That can be shown by the number of members that have returned in the first few months. We are almost back at the same levels as we were last year after only two months of operation. It shows great confidence in what we're doing and how we're interacting with our community.

Dale Morrissy What I'm hoping for is that people get a bit more tolerant around others. We've seen as I mentioned before the connections as people came out of the lockdown. More willing to talk, spend some time, and understand each other. Not rush around so much. You'd hope that people would be a bit more understanding of others and their needs. And the community as we saw, the community coming back wanting to connect with each other.

Dale Morrissy It's nice to have these Zoom meetings. It's nice to have phone calls, but you can't beat the face-to-face. The body language you can't tell over the phone, over Facebook, over Zoom. It was great to be able to interact with people and I think meetings should be shorter, to be honest. That's what I want to come out of this. Shorter meetings, off-the-cuff meetings where we just have that chat, discuss what's going on and move on to the next thing. These long, drawn-out meetings don't need to happen.

Dale Morrissy We need to live our lives and just keep moving forward.

Nunzio Mondia Spending more time with family and community?

Dale Morrissy Not worrying about the little, little bits and pieces because big things like this do come up. You realise that other things are more important than deciding on what time you open 'til at night. It doesn't really matter if it's five minutes or 10 minutes. It's the fact that you're open at all is the main thing that we're worried about here.

Dale Morrissy We are open, and people can come in and use the place and they need to use the place. Whether it's for rehab. or mental health and well-being. Learning a skill, learning to swim safely in this country and the state of WA with all the water around. It's very important that they can learn to swim. Swimming lessons with two and a half thousand kids. When they go to a backyard party or to a swimming lesson or to the beach, they come back safe. That's always been one of our goals at Beatty Park, water education. If the kid can swim, the parents are going to feel more comfortable and safer at places like the beach.

2 Gavin Carter, City of Vincent Senior Ranger

Gavin Carter Right, I'm Gavin Carter. I'm one of two senior rangers working for the City of Vincent. I've been with the city since 2018. We work two shifts two senior rangers, seven on each shift, and we work from 6:00 in the morning till 11:00 at night. A wonderful, wonderful service to the city. Obviously, I need to say that because we do. And between the hours of 11:00 and 6:00 in the morning, we have an on-call service. Either myself or the other senior ranger, Megan, will be on call for any urgent matters that come up. So that's really it. I've been with the city, as I said, since 2018. I know the place well through a previous life. And yeah, it's an enjoyable place to work.

OK, with the onset of COVID, the focus for the rangers changed dramatically. First, as you are probably already aware, most of the admin building and all our admin staff here at the rangers, all started working from home. Our I.T. department did a fantastic job getting them up and running. We worked remotely. It was a great achievement.

But the rangers, we were here in the building all the time, so we were the only crew that was. Nothing changed for us apart from our focus. The focus for the rangers is animal control and looking after building sites. Parking also plays a big part, but with the onset of COVID, that changed. There was a dramatic decrease in the number of people out and about in cars. People had to stay home. They were allowed to go out, allowed to walk and allowed to exercise. We saw a massive increase in people out and about in and around the parks and walking their dogs. There were a lot of very, very happy dogs during the early days of COVID because people were getting out of their homes and taking their dogs for walks and everything else.

So, for us, the focus changed quite considerably. Instead of our normal role, we assisted with law enforcement across the board, social distancing, and making sure people were doing the right things in the parks, in and around the parks. There was such a huge influx of people actually out and about because that's all they were allowed to do. Walking, talking to them, interacting, saying, "Make sure you keep your one point five metres. Be aware of your social distancing." We closed the exercise equipment, the play equipment, and the water fountains. We had an educational role and a monitoring role as opposed to our normal enforcement role. So, parking dropped off dramatically, as did other areas of enforcement. We were monitoring and educating the community about social distancing.

Gavin Carter In the office, we had to make sure that during our workdays and working two swings, the swings didn't interact. When we had our changeover every Thursday, we had to make sure that there was social distancing and that we obeyed all the COVID protocols. We couldn't afford for our team to go down. If there was an infection in one of the teams, we still had to have a presence. We still had to be able to continue to do our work, albeit we may have had to reduce our numbers if that had happened. It didn't because of good governance and obeying all the protocols in the office environment. We closed down a lot of our computers, and our distancing within the office was maintained. And so that affected us to a lesser extent, I suppose, at home and with our spouses and our kids and then being out and about.

It was a very interesting time, especially in the early days when we were trying to make it all work and get it together. And humans being humans, we are creatures of habit. So you automatically go to do something and then you say, 'Ok no. Guys, we can't do this. We can't do that.' We need to make sure that, we are not only adhering.., but doing it very well ourselves so that we can actually then go out and say to everyone else, 'This is what you need to be doing. This is how it needs to work.'

Gavin Carter One thing that did happen, and I suppose this is probably because of the lockdown and people working from home, the number of people calling up and saying, 'There are people in the park and there are ten people together in the park' It became quite funny. I think a lot of people may have gone a little bit stir-crazy when they were sitting at home. We did get a lot more calls from residents very concerned about people not doing the right thing. And that's fabulous.

Nunzio Mondia I did that myself. [Laughter].

Gavin Carter Well, I was going to say, you were one of the worst offenders Nunz. But no, actually, having said that. And it's fantastic, the ownership taken by residents was good.

Nunzio Mondia We have Birdwood Square nearby and multiple groups of younger overseas, house sharing backpackers would frequent the park, socialising for hours in what became mass group gatherings.

Gavin Carter We put up signage on all the exercise equipment, and a couple of people were exercising amongst all the signs inside the tape. There are always people who don't think it applies to them. So it was an interesting time. But in general, most people complied very well. And I suppose that is why WA is where it is.

During COVID, Hyde Park became an absolute hub and there were people everywhere. We didn't get involved unless we had to. But we monitored the people and it was quite funny, people walking their dogs and walking towards each other and doing the shuffle. 'I will go this way. You go that way.' Trying to keep social distancing, and observe all the protocols. That way was interesting. We were monitoring the numbers and there were 200, 300 people in and around Hyde Park on a regular basis. And that's fabulous. It's great to see the facilities and the parks being utilised the way they are. That's what they are for.

During the transition back from COVID lockdown to some sort of normality, whatever normal is, I think that differs depending on which side of the fence you sit on, we started with the cafes. There were so many people and depending on the size of the cafe, there still had to be social distancing. One thing that did change was the alfresco areas, there were fewer restrictions in regard to outside dining. We relaxed the rules to cater for that.

That is back to normal, now that we are basically back to normal. Letting everyone know, 'Look, we understand that it's very difficult and we need our businesses to thrive. We don't want our local businesses closing.' The rules and regulations regarding advertising in regard to local businesses, businesses really struggled. The rules and regulations regarding signage were relaxed for a while. That was appreciated by all the businesses. We've been very good and our management has been very good in regards to how we've managed that and bit of flexibility.

Nunzio Mondia And with regards to parking flexibility?

Gavin Carter Lots of flexibility with the parking. Yes. If you get a parking ticket, we're very flexible. If you don't get one, we're possibly not. [Laughter] No that's not true. There was also a transition back to parking. There wasn't a lot of vehicle traffic or even foot traffic for some period of time.

Nunzio Mondia I see that it was a good strategy for people isolating and wanting to get out of the house, to jump in the car, cruise around and grab a quick coffee before heading back home, back into isolation.

Gavin Carter Yeah, it was well promoted through the media in the City of Perth and us and others. There was not such a focus on parking. We did want our businesses to continue to thrive as best they could, and we wanted people to come into the city.

Nunzio Mondia What is your hope for the future?

Gavin Carter Look, I think I think the City of Vincent in general is leading in regards to a lot of things, the way we're looking at greening and being more environmentally friendly. I know that is a focus across a lot of cities. But our management and CEO have taken that on board and they're actually running with it really, really well. We go out on a regular basis, we have eco bikes. We go out and have a look around on bikes. Our car fleet now is looking at hybrids and not the normal run-of-the-mill type cars.

There's also a focus on greening the area in our parks and gardens. Along the footpaths and the roads, there are more trees which I think is fantastic. And that is the way of the future. If we can get people using public transport alternatives instead of cars. Firstly, they won't be getting a parking ticket. So that's good.

We are now moving away from the old paper ticket system and towards electronic parking and electronic permits. Using apps and technology to reduce the eyesore of lots of old ticket machines around the place.

Nunzio Mondia And there's great flexibility in that.

Gavin Carter Absolutely.

Nunzio Mondia So we can control visiting car permits via a phone app at any chosen time. Fantastic.

Gavin Carter Yes e-tickets and e-permits. That is the way of the future. It's not something that we're doing in isolation. Every council is looking at it. We're certainly there now regarding our parking permits. People don't have to have print permits and display them on their cars. There are now e-permits. We use new technology on our phones and we check using a camera on the phone. So, we are moving forward. And environmentally that is fantastic. We're not chopping down as many trees and spitting out hundreds and hundreds of tickets every day.

Nunzio Mondia is there anything else you would like to add? Would you like to sing a song?

Gavin Carter Well no. It's normally 35 Bourbons before I start my karaoke. And even then, if I think it sounds great, a lot of people don't apparently. We'll just leave it at that.

Nunzio Mondia [Laughter] Love it.

3 Jeffery Fondacaro

Jeffery Fondacaro Good day my name is Jeff Fondacaro. I've been at the Beatty Park Leisure Centre since the year 2001, I've been here for quite a while now. Coming up to 20 years. I guess the best thing I can say about Beatty Park is the people that visit Beatty Park and the people I work with. It never ceases to amaze me, the number of people, on a daily basis, that will tell me a story about their connection with Beatty Park.

The history, the connection and that people still remember it as the iconic venue for entertainment and elite swimming still amazes me to this day. It's always good to hear a fresh story and to see some of the regulars that have been coming here since virtually since the 60s.

Jeffery Fondacaro I hear a lot of their stories about, how they bring their grandkids and great-grandchildren to Beatty Park. And in a lot of ways, it's still the old Beatty Park, when you look at it at face value, and obviously, it's gone through some renovations over the years.

Nunzio Mondia Minus the 30-foot diving board. [Laughter].

Jeffery Fondacaro I do laugh at some of the stories, the frightening stories of people, as kids jumping off those diving towers. And it's spectacular. A funny story. On the 40-year anniversary, we had an open day and came across some interesting information about the training of the lifeguards back in the day when the 10-metre tower was in use. They had this technique because they didn't want people who were scared on the top platform to walk back down the stairs. So, the lifeguards were trained to go up and talk to the patron to say, "Hey, look, I know you're scared, but look, I'm here to help you. Just let me hold your hand and just come off the rail, let go of the rail, just come with me." And they would run them off the front of the tower and take them on the 30-foot drop. And that was their training technique for the lifeguards, and I can only imagine what that would look like in today's world in 2020. [Laughter].

Jeffery Fondacaro So here we are in 2020 and we've got the COVID lockdown. We get the call that we must shut the venue down. So, we went into quite an intense two- or three- week period deciding how to keep the plant equipment running, how we were going to keep staff employed and how we were going to get to projects that had been on the back burner for many years. We had this wonderful plan that would carry us for six months, which we thought would be the duration of COVID. But after about a few weeks, the city realised that it was going to be too costly to have a lot of staff still at the facility. We ended up having a small skeleton staff of half a dozen to keep an eye on the facility so that the plant equipment still ran because it wasn't cost-effective to shut down any of the filtration equipment. It was just going to be too costly to charge it back up again.

Jeffery Fondacaro A lot of people took leave, annual leave, sick leave and personal leave. People like me worked partly from home and partly in the venue. And in the end, some of us got re-located into the other businesses of the City of Vincent. I put my hand up to work in the Parks Department. I got kitted out and I did the induction training. I got my hard steel capped boots, my hat, my water can[?] and I went into the Parks Department. I lasted two days and then the next phase of COVID changed everything. They said, "Look, we need you back at Beatty Park. You need to get back there because we're going to start letting people in the doors." [Laughter] So that's how my COVID experience turned out.

Jeffery Fondacaro And all those projects that we thought we were going to do, we actually didn't get to do. I guess, prior to letting the public back in the building, it was quite eerie having a building of this size without any people in it. It was quite relaxing, to be honest [laughter].

Jeffery Fondacaro We knew a new phase [of COVID restrictions] was coming and we're trying to figure out how to do the logistics of getting people in and out safely. So, we had a small working group that liaised with the city's COVID committee. We were getting regular updates about the changing phases [of restrictions] and when they were being adopted and some of the key elements of letting people back into the building.

Jeffery Fondacaro We thought long and hard about how we were going to be perceived by people coming back to the building. We wanted to present a situation where people would feel super safe coming back into the facility. So, all staff did online training about how to deal with COVID and how to clean for COVID. We had extra cleaning staff. We spent thousands of dollars on extra cleaning chemicals and apparatus. We had a really rigorous routine; we would have sessions for people coming back. And then we would have intense cleaning sessions with our cleaning staff. So, everything within the building got a one-hour, virtually a one-hour wipe over and scrub down.

Jeffery Fondacaro We're continually educating the public on how to enter the building, how to move around within the building and how to keep the social distances. COVID had a pretty solid impact on everyone's attention to personal hygiene in a lot of ways. But the most overwhelming thing when we went from zero people to having people back into the building... The smiles on the faces of the people coming back were absolutely extraordinary. I think people really understood what it was they were missing out on. I think they had a real appreciation to have a facility like Beatty Park to be back in operation.

Jeffery Fondacaro And that's the message we got from every patron that walked back into the place. A lot of people that came back had a lot of health issues. Beatty Park, for them, is a seven-day-a-week, three-hundred-and-sixty-three-day-a-year visitation for health reasons. A lot of people that were stuck at home, that didn't have any outlets, that didn't have Beatty Park to visit, were really struggling mentally and physically. They were reaching out to us to see if we could accommodate them while we were shut, and unfortunately, we couldn't. But to have those people back in the building was outstanding. And from a management point of view, we were pretty chuffed that they came back, and we welcomed them back with open arms.

Jeffery Fondacaro So I guess the upshot of coming out of COVID [lockdown] is that we've had a big change in how people engage with our change rooms, our changing facilities and our hygiene standards. I think from a permanent change point of view, I'm just hoping people don't become complacent again and let those standards drop. I know a lot of people are still religiously following the COVID policies. I've got to tell you, we're spending a lot of money, quite unexpectedly, on the disinfection processes and people are very diligent. In the gym for argument's sake, we've asked them to clean their equipment once they've finished using the equipment. Quite surprisingly, they're following our instructions quite brilliantly.

Jeffery Fondacaro We are very close to opening the sauna steam spa area, which is still closed. But later this week, we're going to try opening that area. There are some restrictions, but we're hoping that people can self-manage the numbers. For a lot of people, the sauna steam spa area is crucial to their personal health. So, we're going to give that a go and hopefully, we can make a lot of people happy moving forward.

Jeffery Fondacaro Apart from working in Beatty Park as an aquatics operator, there's a lot of social stuff that goes on at Beatty Park. It was the Christmas of 2015/2016 that we realised that a lot of staff were musos. People who could play guitar and people who could sing. So, we thought what we do for Christmas had a bit of fun. We'd start a scratch band, which we did, and we had the best staff Christmas party ever and we had a lot of fun that year. And coming out of that, I rekindled my interest in music, particularly drums and singing. I managed to rope a couple of old mates and a couple of old employees to come out of retirement. So today I'm in a performing band as a remnant of the band that started up in 2015. So, we had a lot of fun. We played for the members. We used to have end-of-year Christmas functions, just as a thank-you for being a member of Beatty Park. And we put on a couple of gigs, and we haven't done a gig for the last five years. To this day, people say to me, "When are you going to bring the band back? When are we going to have the band back? Come on when's the Christmas party?" [Laughter] It's probably not going to happen again, but we can still live in the past. It's all fun.

Nunzio Mondia Did you get more time to practice at home?

Jeffery Fondacaro During COVID, I was very lucky because I live on the coast and there's a beautiful coast walk near my house and I could get out into the fresh air. But the beauty of working from home was great. You could mix a bit of your home time with work time, and it was just a better balance. It was difficult because you didn't get to see the grandkids. But as restrictions eased, we found having the grandkids over and talking about the COVID experience. They were the ones who were putting us in place about keeping our distance and keeping our hands washed. You don't realise just how receptive kids are. When it's time to put the grandparents in place, they'll let you know.

Jeffery Fondacaro Moving forward post-COVID, I'm hoping that people understand what it was like to not have these venues and to be in lockdown and to be restricted. I'll start again. So, moving out of COVID post-COVID, I'm hoping people don't have short memories. I'm hoping that they will remember those days when they didn't have a Beatty Park. They didn't have the venue that they love so much. The people that work here, I want them to remember that having a job at Beatty Park is so special. So, I'm hoping that their memories aren't too short and that they'll remember moving forward in their lives that the lifestyle and the conditions that we have here in Perth, WA and at Vincent, are pretty special. And don't ever take it for granted that's all I can say. I certainly don't. And I hope our punters never forget that.

Jeffery Fondacaro A lot of people have said to me, "Look, it's a credit to you and your staff. We are so impressed with the way that you've got people back into the building in a safe manner. And we really understand the effort that you've made to make Beatty Park still a special place to visit."

Jeffery Fondacaro I just want to say, from a personal point of view, thank the City of Vincent for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the greater aquatic industry. I was on the board of the Leisure Institute of Western Australia for twenty-eight years. I was president of the Institute for 14 years and on the Board of the Royal Lifesaving Society of Western Australia for 11 years. So there have been a lot of changes in my time at Beatty Park that have affected the wider Western Australian aquatic community. All of the public pools have benefited from what we've gleaned through my involvement with others in the aquatic industry.

Jeffery Fondacaro A very interesting story that you might like to hear is that the Watch Around Water programme has now gone global. Recently, America picked up the Watch Around Water programme that started here at Beatty Park in 2003. Unfortunately, we had a fatality in early 2002 that led to the introduction of the Watch Around Water public education programme. We ask carers and parents that come along with small children, to make sure that they are supervising their children while they're in an aquatic facility. That message is spread right across Australia and right across WA. I know Victoria picked it up wholeheartedly. South Australia has picked it up. The Professional Aquatic Federation in America have picked it up and they've done a great thing with it in America. So the word has got out. Supervision is king when it comes to water safety. It makes me proud to say that programme started here, obviously off the back of a tragic incident. I believe since 2003 we haven't had, in Western Australia, a group one drowning fatality. And I put that down to the Watch Around Water programme. It's a good message, you know, and Vincent got behind that from day one. So, hats off to them.

4 Martin Baraiolo

Martin Baraiolo My name is Martin Baraiolo. I am a Detective Sergeant attached to the Child Abuse Unit at West Australian Police Force. I grew up in the area, across the road from the library, and I went to local schools.

Nunzio Mondia Share with us some of your memories growing up in the area.

Martin Baraiolo I lived across the road and when I was a child, this was an open play forest area next to the football oval. We used to have cubby houses 30 metres up into the pine trees that were here then. We played cricket roughly where we are now [in the City of Vincent Local History Centre]. All the kids in the neighbourhood used to come and we would meet during the school holidays and have a game of cricket.

Nunzio Mondia Isn't it interesting how parent attitudes seemed more relaxed back then, parents were more relaxed with the idea of allowing their children to play with their friends within the community, parks etc...

Martin Baraiolo Absolutely. We used to play Chasey on our bikes and our boundary was the school, the Christian Brothers College in St Mary's College, and we weren't allowed to leave Loftus or Oxford Street. We also had Brownes Dairy, and we used to play in the drains. The freeway wasn't there when I was a kid. We would always go to Lake Monger on our bikes and go through the reeds. It was a great area for all my mates and schoolmates to grow up in.

Nunzio Mondia Tell me more about your mates and their backgrounds.

Martin Baraiolo My best mates, we had Macedonian, there was a Polish, Polac, a couple of Yugoslavs and Italians, and we all lived within four blocks of each other. We used to have breakfast in the morning, and then Mum used to say, "Get out of the house." And we didn't come back till four o'clock in the afternoon. I'd come back for lunch.

Nunzio Mondia So what are your top three or four items that you would expect to find in a typical European backyard?

Martin Baraiolo My mom and dad had a veggie patch, and we used to get in trouble for stealing all the vegetables and the fruit. And food and family were the biggest things that I grew up with.

Nunzio Mondia Excellent.

Martin Baraiolo As a Detective Sergeant at the Child Abuse Unit, I am in charge of seven investigators. When COVID hit Western Australia I was seconded to a unit that dealt with COVID. The situation happened when we had the two ships at Fremantle come in with all the passengers. That was on a Friday. Saturday afternoon I was seconded to the COVID investigation team. There were 50 others seconded to the unit, and we investigated breaches of COVID-19 quarantine and business premises that would breach it and not close down and isolate.

Nunzio Mondia Can you give examples of breaches that occurred in and around the Covid period?

Martin Baraiolo Well, we had a couple of breaches, people had left quarantine before having their examination to say they haven't got COVID. We also had business premises working: brothels, massage parlours, and nail salons that we investigated for breaching the quarantine.

Nunzio Mondia Once they were pulled up, would they follow protocol?

Martin Baraiolo Yes. At that particular time, there were 350 police officers in W.A. assigned to COVID, which included home visits and investigations. Because the first week we had two and a half thousand people who were under quarantine. All the people coming back from South Australia, Victoria and interstate had to be quarantined as well. So there was a huge amount of people that had to be monitored.

On a personal level, COVID affected my family. I isolated myself at home because my wife has lung problems and I didn't want to take the chance, if I was to catch it during my job, passing it on to her. I set up in another bedroom. In relation to my mother, she's elderly, we put her in lockdown and she wasn't able to leave the house. We did everything for her. We didn't want to take the chance.

Nunzio Mondia Can you remember what it felt like to come out of the lockdown and the gradual easing of restrictions? What did you particularly look forward to?

Martin Baraiolo Well, the first thing that we did once the restrictions came off, was we got the family together and I made a traditional meal, Polenta Taragna at home. We got my kids and grandkids and we celebrated the fact that we could see each other again.

Nunzio Mondia So how different is your job, your business, and your life now? Are there any changes that you were forced to make? Include positive and any permanent changes.

Martin Baraiolo Well, at home, the change that we had to make, my wife doesn't go shopping because she doesn't want to take the chance of copping COVID. I've had to take on that role. Workwise we are a little bit more safety conscious in relation to COVID and whom we speak to and whom we communicate with.

More extensively in my role now that I'm back at child abuse, we have victims in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, and we haven't been able to get the local police to grab the information from them for us to continue our investigation. So we've had to improvise by using a webcam, Skype and taking the information we need from them over the telephone and developing other ways in the workplace to obtain the information to progress investigations. It has changed the way we do business.

Nunzio Mondia Right. So that technological influence represents a positive change that will remain in the workplace.

Martin Baraiolo Correct. So previously, if we had a victim in Victoria, they would go to the local police station. She or he would then give their statements to them, and they would forward the statements to us to progress the investigation here. Because we investigate all offences that occurred in WA, but they happen to be living in Victoria, South Australia or somewhere in the country. Could be the UK or Boston, we have a victim in Boston at the moment that we need to communicate with. They are unable to go to their local police, so we've had to use technology to obtain information to progress in the investigation.

Nunzio Mondia What are your hopes for the future?

Martin Baraiolo My future hopes are that once we get out of COVID, we can develop industries, and technologies moving forward. We live in the best country in the world. We have many opportunities given to us in renewable energy and move forward to have a better Australia and set an example for the rest of the world.

Nunzio Mondia Where does your family come from in Italy? The northern or southern region?

Martin Baraiolo My father came out here in 1948 from the north of Italy, Valtellina. He cruised on a ship, went to Fremantle, and then went to a place called Lakeside, which is 150 kilometres north of Norseman. He couldn't speak a word of English. He had ten pounds in his pocket. He walked into the site. They gave him a saw, an axe, gave him a map and a tent and said, 'We want four tonnes of wood cut, four tonnes of wood stacked and four tonnes of wood delivered every day for the wood line.' They collected metre lengths of wood, which would go on the train [and be used as fuel] for the water pump to Kalgoorlie. Then he met a paisano or a friend and both of them met two friends, one of which was my mum, and the other was (we call her) Aunty Gena. Then they got married and moved to Perth.

Nunzio Mondia And that's when the polenta cooking started.

Martin Baraiolo We've always had polenta, Dad always made polenta on a Sunday. That was a ritual on Sunday, polenta, sausages and cheese. It's a tradition that I have kept going with my family and my nephews. They're always ringing me up and saying, "Uncle Martin, when are we making polenta again?" Yes, it's something I will continue and I have been teaching my son.