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COVID CONVERSATIONS

Book 4 - 6

Interviews with members of the former Loftus Centre Craft Group.



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 Carmela Corica

Carmela Corica I am Carmela Corica, I live in Mount Hawthorn, and I come here every Monday to join the group for the crochet. It's very good. I like to come here it's a nice pastime.

Nunzio How long have you been coming here?

Carmela Corica Oh, I started coming here after everything blew up [COVID lockdown] when they were thinking to start again. Then when I heard about this, my daughter told me about this, and I've been coming here.

Nunzio So you like it because...

Carmela Corica Get me out of the house in the company we laugh, and we talk. It's good because I live on my own. I've got five children, and they work. I'm pretty content to be in Australia. Wonderful. Been here for 61 years.

Nunzio Have you always lived in this area?

Carmela Corica No Osborne Park. I've been in this area for thirty three years now.

Nunzio Mount Hawthorn. Tell us your thoughts. [Question about panic buying during COVID lockdown]

Carmela Corica I was scared at first, really scared but the toilet paper didn't worry me one bit. Not at all. I was scared the food was going to go off the shelves. That really scared me. I didn't feel alone, and I actually felt among company because all of the mothers were at home with the children. And any time there were parents with the children walking up and down and I could hear them talking and laughing. I felt lonely when everything went back to normal.

Nunzio Very interesting.

Carmela Corica Yeah, I felt lonely. Everything was so quiet. Didn't hear any kids anymore. Didn't hear any laughing or talking. So, I was lonely then. I never deprived myself to go to the shop. I knew what I needed before I left home. I went straight to that shelf, got what I needed, went home and cooked. I was alright. I didn't feel lonely. My kids have always called or dropped in. I was perfectly alright when I got over the food shortage. I don't let that worry me. That's their life. Every generation is different.

Nunzio Please offer our younger generation some advice.

Carmela Corica Some advice from me? I really don't know what advice I can give. I really don't. But yeah, everything would be so different. So, my message is try your best to stay happy.

2 Jane Merrells

Merrells I'm Jane Merrells and I live in Wembley, and I've been coming here for probably, 14 years. My friend Penny who's in the group invited me to come. We've really enjoyed coming to do crafts and do exercise here on Wednesdays.

Nunzio Can you share a little of what you are making here today?

Merrells Well, I do a lot of things. This is a beanie I've made for my granddaughter she wants it to be a pineapple. I've got to work out what shapes to put on and the top for the pineapple. I've made her a bee beanie and she has lots of different beanies. Anything that I can make, that's a bit different. She wants a watermelon and a pineapple beanie.

I make rugs and beanies for the Red Cross soup kitchen. They are handed out to homeless people that need beanies. And I've knitted trauma teddies for Red Cross. I just love it.

I think it really affected me as far as not being able to see friends as much. Not being able to hug a friend was really sad for me because they'd go, "Oh, no". And you think, "Oh, are we really.. do we really have to do that? You know, can't we hug?"

My husband is semi-retired, so we didn't need to leave the house as much, but it did get very boring and sad after a while.

Nunzio Now that we have an easing of Covid restrictions, what are your plans?

Merrells Coming here again. I didn't mention that my daughter and her child live in Busselton. I couldn't go and see them for a couple of months. That was sad because I usually spend at least a week a month with them in Busselton. That was not nice at all. My granddaughter would say, "When are you coming, Granny? When are you coming down to see me?" But her mother told her all about COVID and she was telling everybody, "This is COVID and I can't see my granny at the moment. But later on, when it gets better, when all the people start to feel better, it'll be much nicer. And I can see Granny."

We're semi-retired. We can't go to Tasmania or to America. We can't go anywhere and that's what you do, when you retire, you have fun.

Nunzio It feels like a permanent change for you.

Merrells That's what my daughter said. She's going to tell her daughter Lily, that years ago before COVID, people used to travel all over the world and visit people in other countries. But we can't now. Hmmm. Now that most people recover from it and there's a vaccine. You just don't realize it when you watch the news at night. The numbers start not to mean much, and it's pretty sad.

3 Joyce Richards

Richards I'm Joyce Richards from 7a Muswell Street in Balga. I first came when [the group started] in Leederville. I was 56 then and I've been coming ever since.

Nunzio Wow, quite a few years now! Excellent. And you mentioned two sisters [Win & Dolly].

Richards I grew up with them when we were young and I moved to Shakespeare Street in Mount Hawthorn.

Nunzio It's wonderful that now, in this later stage, you can be together again.

Richards Yeah, very nice. I always see my kids. I have a son and a daughter. I see them every week, twice a week they come to me. I haven't got any friends around me now because I've been there so long. All my friends have moved and I'm amongst strangers now. It's a bit lonely where I am. I have to get used to it.

Nunzio OK, and so you obviously feel that coming regularly to the community centre in the City of Vincent is something that's been a positive experience for you.

Richards Yes. It's lovely to see your friends and someone to talk to and knit. They're all very nice girls.

Nunzio And how did it feel when the lockdown occurred when they had to shut this Centre?

Richards Lonely, you get lonely at home. It was a pity but when they opened it up again, it was good.

Nunzio So you came straight back? Were there any interesting stories in that period that happened to you?

Richards No, nothing really. I lead a very quiet life. Not that I do much. The kids take me out all the time and I still drive. I won't be for much longer. I've got macular degeneration. I'm going blind in my eyes. I have needles in my eyes every eight weeks. When I was 14, I started work in Newcastle Street sewing clothes for soldiers and I was there until I was about 23, it was lovely. Mr [unclear] owned the place and all his sons. There was a war on at that time and we used to have to go there at night time and sew and pull all the blinds at the windows. It wasn't a nice time.

Nunzio You were 14 years old. [How different is] the experience of COVID now from what you experienced in those early years?

Richards This is worse because this is terrible. All the people that have got it, that's a terrible thing. I feel very sorry for all the people. You know, there is nothing you can do for them. But, yeah, just try and keep clean and watch yourself. I have a great-granddaughter. She's lovely. She helps me all the time. Just be careful, keep clean and look after yourself.

4 Patricia Wilhelm

Wilhelm I'm Paddy Wilhelm and I come to the classes here at Vincent and have this Monday, just being in a crowd as such, particularly now after COVID.

Nunzio Do you live in the area?

Wilhelm No I live In Balga, which is a fair distance, it's nice to come down here. A nice group of ladies.

Nunzio Excellent.

Wilhelm I put on weight being locked away. My great-granddaughters. I couldn't see them, and they used to ring and cry. "We want you, grandma." And I said, 'Well I can't come and that's all there is to it.' Being in that age bracket, that was very sad. But apart from that, I was OK.

I used to get groceries brought to the house, so I didn't have to go out in the major period of COVID lockdown and afterwards just shopping for food was an outing. I have lived out in the desert, so I know what it's like to be alone. It didn't really bother me too much. I didn't go crazy. But emotionally, it was hard at times for the little ones, like living in jail without bars around it. It was like out of Laverton, which is northeast, I think, of Kalgoorlie, right out in the desert. My husband was a policeman, and we were there for three and a half years, which drove me crazy. I've got used to being isolated and locked in because the actual area around Laverton was reservations, I suppose you'd call it, for the Aboriginals. And they're all different tribes.

Nunzio Do you have any interesting stories to share with us?

Wilhelm They used to come to Laverton for a holiday, from Warburton and Giles and Mount Margaret. Anyway, they were all Wongi [people], but one tribe would not talk to another. There were always fights in the middle of town and it was quite comical to see spears and rocks being thrown and dead shots with their rocks. And you could walk up to the area. The first time it happened to me, I thought, 'Where do I go, where do I run to?' But they just stopped, and you walked past the rock throwing and the spear throwing going on behind you. So that was quite interesting and very, very nice people, too. They never lied. Never lied at all. And when they weren't drunk, they were so sweet. They would give you the shirt off their back, literally. Very nice people.

The toilet paper fiasco is something that I couldn't get my head around at all. I would have thought of food before toilet paper. I had an email the other day that was quite astonishing, saying that if anyone lived in a certain era of the nineteen hundreds right through to the 2020s, we had lived in two centuries. We've lived with two wars in the nineteen hundreds, and we've gone through the Spanish flu and a lot of other worldwide epidemics. And now we're in lockdown for COVID, which is a Chinese-based pandemic. And now everyone takes it for granted that, oh, well, something's happening. We've just got to get over it and not panic. That's about it.

5 Penny Thomas

Thomas Good morning. My name is Penny. I've been coming here for about 10 or 12 years maybe, and I love it because I'm a realist, I love people. I'm a mum and wife and a grandmother. I'm babysitting today because it's a pupil-free day [at school]. I live in Dianella but stumbled across this centre way back when. And I do a craft group. There's an exercise group called Move for Life. There's a laughter club. In case you hadn't noticed I laugh a lot. And the yoga class when that was going. But of course, COVID brought all that to a standstill. We're still doing our exercise class because we're able to socially distance ourselves.

I found it very hard because I'm a hugger and not being able to touch people has been very difficult. And a lot of people need it, too, I get plenty of hugs because I'm lucky enough to have my husband at home and a son as well who lives with us. So, I get my share, but I love to share it around.

My husband has an autoimmune problem, and he still works full time, but work panicked and said, 'No, please don't come in.' So, he was forced to stay home and for two weeks we had an absolute ball. We sorted stuff in cupboards; he'd been in a business that closed in 2001 and we still had boxes of stuff from the shop. So, we went through it all and sorted it. Not that we did anything with it, we did throw a lot out, but we had two weeks of lots of fun. And then my husband was asked to go back to work because they were short-staffed. But in his work, he was able to be separated from people, so not too close. And so, then it was just me at home with the dog and my son and I didn't enjoy it much. Not that it did me any harm, but I did feel isolated.

Nunzio Did you keep in touch with your friends?

Thomas No I found that during the two weeks when my husband was home, it was just us and it broke the contact. I didn't keep communicating. It was also my seventieth birthday in the middle of that.

I've been on the Board of Management of the Community Centre for about five years. And the girls here, the staff here knew it was my birthday and they very cunningly organised a drive-by. I have a wide driveway, there were five cars parked in the driveway and we all stood in a great big circle and laughed. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was the best birthday I've ever had, despite being isolated from people. And it was lovely for them because they hadn't seen each other for a couple of weeks either. So, they got to talk to each other. And it was rather a unique occasion.

Look, after your mental health. I think that kids need to be learning how to manage their mental health starting in primary school. I know my 11-year-old grandson. I worry about him. He frets about the future. And I think kids need to be taught these sorts of skills. Myself, I'm borderline depressive. It's a constant battle, not a huge battle, but I'm always aware and always doing things for my own mental health. And I know a lot of people don't understand how important it is, they just exist without rationalising these sorts of things. So, I think it needs to be taught more and more.

Laughing, laughter's my saviour. I've always been a glass-half-full person and I find humour in all sorts of things. I appreciate nature. I love walking in the bush, and I hate walking on the footpath, I love walking in bushlands. I think that's something that especially city kids miss because they just don't get grounded with the Earth at all. But how do you introduce that into the school curriculum? I don't know. For myself, I actually go to a psychologist every six weeks because I need to, I have a lot of pressure on me. You need to be aware and talk to people. Just keep talking and ask for help. When you ask for help and recognise the signs before they get too bad, and often just changing the way you think about something can make a big difference. I've done that for myself many times. Just think from a different perspective. I think that's about all.

6 Rosemary Lake

Lake Hi, my name's Rosemary Lake and I live just across the road from the Vincent Library and Community Centre, very close by, and I've been living around this way for 12 years.

Nunzio Why are you here today?

Lake When I first moved into the area, I came over to join the little craft group here, just across the road from home, as a way to get to know people of my age in the area.

Lake I was suspicious about it [COVID], having a medical background, and I went out and bought masks and sanitiser in February, which took me a couple of days to get, and the masks actually took a bit of tracking down, way back then, before anyone was thinking about it. Because I went to the States at the end of February and came back on about the 21st of March.

Being over there, it was very unusual. There were no tourists right from even the end of February. Very strange seeing no queue for the cable car and buildings empty. But by the time I left, we were getting a bit more worried about flights being cancelled. Fortunately, my Qantas flight came through and about two days before I left, things went to '*Shelter in place*' [in the US.]

The supermarket was amazing at how they cut out the distances and spaced people. The trolley sanitiser. A person handed you the trolley, they took the trolley off you at the car so nobody could pick it up in the car park. You weren't allowed to put anything on the conveyor belts, and you had to stand six foot back until it had been sanitised. Very impressed, and it was a junk supermarket!

The plane was so jammed full on the way back with people. And the people I was sitting next to had amazing stories. One had come up from Mexico to San Francisco to get back to Brisbane and the other lady, South America she'd had been her roundabout way of getting there. But they were getting out. So, we flew back in. Brisbane Airport was very disappointing. Nobody cared, 'fill in a form with your name and address.' No mask, no keeping distances. From what I had read we had to have masks for the next flight. They just said, "no, we've got no masks."

When I came home, I had to quarantine for two weeks. Not that anyone was checking me at home. That was the start of it. Of course, as you do, I had cleaned out the fridge and the cupboards and everything before I went. So, there was no food or anything in the house. My ex-husband kindly dropped me off bread and milk so I could get through the first 24 hours. And that night I could do a shopping list that a friend south of the river brought and dropped at the door the next day. And she did that for a couple of weeks. I thought it'd be very easy because I could, not that I'd ever used it, use Coles or Woolworths home delivery for food. But that was the couple of weeks that they cancelled when they got the muddle with everyone getting deliveries. And the poor people like me that were home quarantined [had no way of getting groceries]. So, I had my friend coming from way south of the river to bring me food because Coles and Woolworths would not deliver it. And then when Coles went back to doing it, they would only do it for somebody that had a carer, which is hilarious. If you've got a carer, you've got somebody, who can go and get it! [Laughter]

By the time I got through quarantine, we were in our shut down here, so I wasn't going out anyway. I would go out once a week. For some reason, I felt happier with long sleeves and clothes, gloved and masked and sanitiser everywhere and doing my weekly bit and that went on for two or three weeks. I got very good at walking because it was rather a luxury once I got walking out of my little yard for two weeks because I'm in a unit. I was walking and walking all around this area, and I knew every plant in everyone's garden, walking half an hour to an hour a day, which I have given up again.

Nunzio Any changes for you personally?

Lake Permanent? I think coming out of it, people were very good at ringing everyone. We have wine time on Friday night, and four of us girls sit down on WhatsApp. I'd started socialising with a group I played cards with. We decided just the two of us and neither of us would meet up with other people. So we kept just to the two once a week. And then over a period of time, as things got safer, we went back to our group of four. But we're still doing that, just the two friends. Friends and socialising are still at a much lower rate probably than it was, although we now *do*.

One group of friends and very close friends came to me and said, 'we have decided if you feel okay with it, we're up to giving each other a hug now. We decided with our own family last night that we would give them a hug.' And they had not even hugged within their family. And she said, 'we wouldn't do it to anyone until our family first.' So, things have come back. I got a lot of work done for charity, goods made for charity, knitting and sewing.

I think in a lot of ways it's been a good slowdown for a lot of people, making them reassess. I laugh at my brother, who races around. He's never looked healthier because he's had to stop racing around. He's in New Zealand and they've been shut down quite a bit. He looks the best he's ever looked. I think he reassessed some of his health priorities. I feel sorry for my daughter and son-in-law in San Francisco. They're still masked. I have a grandson attending school or pre-school, masked. They have a new baby and he's still working from home. They haven't been in their offices since February. Point blank. Luckily they are in a position to do that. But yeah, it's just a timing thing.

Nunzio Any last comments?

Lake I'm probably a bit more lonely because I don't see people quite as often. But then the walking keeps the old serotonin up. Being back at the gym was lovely. Getting back to the exercise classes has made a big difference.

7 Sisters Win Singara and Dolly Beros

Win Hello, I'm Win Singara and I'm at the Loftus Community Centre

Dolly And I am Dolly Beros, Win's sister.

Nunzio Do you both live in the area?

Dolly No, I'm from Ascot.

Win And I'm from Menora.

Nunzio So you both come from outer communities and visit the City of Vincent area regularly.

Win Well, originally, I came from Wanneroo with an older sister who was coming to the centre, but she's passed on now. And I've been coming here for about 30-odd years.

Dolly It would have to be.

Nunzio Wow excellent

Win Well, I don't think it's affected me too much. I live in a village that did shut down for a while. Most of the things we were doing were closed for a couple of months. But they are all back open again. Apart from social distancing, everything's much the same. We didn't keep apart from family.

Dolly Well, no. The only thing I found was I was very conscious when I went shopping in the shopping malls. Regarding family, my family kept coming around, but they kept their distance and there were no hugs or kisses.

Nunzio So you applied COVID guidelines. Do you still maintain them?

Dolly Yes, we are. And yes, we are still buying time. Yes, I do. If I go shopping, I take wipes and I do use their wipes and I'll get in the car and wipe my hands again. And as soon as I get home, I'll go straight and wash my hands before I unpack.

Nunzio Remember the panic days? What are your thoughts on the rush for toilet paper? How did you find that situation? Were you able to compete with the madness?

Dolly I didn't worry too much about it because I think we were brought up a long time ago, as you know. Well, I'm 84 and Win's 86. So going back a long time, we were very poor and we were one of eight. We knew how to cope with all the things. And that didn't seem to worry me. But if I could get them, I got an extra packet.

Nunzio Yes in comparison, it's surprising what today's generation panic about. What would you say to them, you know, to the younger generations, for example, regarding the toilet paper panic?

Win Well, I probably bought an extra packet that, you know, there was plenty there because there's only me in the house.

Dolly I think they've got to learn to cope. Yes, very much so. And I'd tell them what we used to do. I won't tell you. But we were brought up.. It was all clean.

Win: Very frugal. [Laughter]

Dolly: But they've got to learn to do something different out of their scene.

Nunzio Like cooking at home for themselves?

Win We still do our own.

Dolly You improvise. I still cook. I've got a husband at home. I've still got to cook for him. [Laughter]

Win We see everybody every week. What is that? [Looking at a card]

Casey: Dolly made that.

Nunzio [Reading] We're all in this together. Stay happy, stay healthy, stay safe. Would you like to read that out Dolly?

Dolly I made it. I sent them to my friends. We're all in this together. Stay happy, stay healthy and stay safe.

Nunzio And so coming out of this lockdown, how did it feel? You must have been excited about being able to come back to the Loftus Centre.

Win: Oh, yeah. It was nice to be able to come back again and catch up with all our friends.

Dolly Yes. I missed it. When you've just got a husband, you like female chatting.

Win I think it's nice to be sociable, you know, and keep into groups and things, you know. That is one of the reasons I come because it is sociable and I meet other people.

Dolly I disagree with a lot of the phones and things that the youngies use, myself.

Win I think they're on their phones too much.

Dolly I had a person say to me, 'Oh, I'm just talking to my friend'. And I said, "have you met him?" "Oh no but I played games with him." And I thought, well, he's not your friend. That's my way of thinking, my friends are one on one. Yeah, not on those things.

Nunzio So what would you say to them? Get off that phone?

Win We had to walk half a mile to see our friends.

Dolly I'd say that they'd have to be very careful these days.

Win I think it's sad too, the way you see young couples, boys and girls, walking down the street together. We would have been holding hands and talking to each other, whereas they're going on their phones, which annoys me. [Laughter]