



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY NUNZIO MONDIA

# COVID CONVERSATIONS

**Book 5 - 6**

*Interviews with local business owners in the City of Vincent.*



CITY OF VINCENT



Centrestage  
Recording  
Studios



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries

# Covid Conversations Interviews - Content Overview

## Book 1-6 Interviews with Sweet Thursday Singers

1 Agnes O'Kane, 2 Alf Gaebler, 3 Chris Sharpe, 4 Janine Wells, 5 Luke Helath,  
6 RoseMarchie, 7 Susan Margaret, 8 Tim Cusack.

## Book 2-6 Interviews with the City of Vincent local musicians

1 Beryl & George Long, 2 Evan Kennea, 3 Robert Hoffmann

## Book 3-6 Interviews with City of Vincent staff and local police:

1 Dale Morrissy, 2 Gavin Carter, 3 Jeff Fondacaro, 4 Martin Baraiolo

## Book 4-6 Interviews members of former Loftus Centre Craft Group:

1 Carmela Corica, 2 Jane Merrells, 3 Joyce Richards, 4 Patricia Wilhelm, 5 Penny Thomas,  
6 Rosemary Lake, 7 Sisters Win Sngara and Dolly Beros

## Book 5-6 Interviews with local business owners in the City of Vincent:

1 Emma Ainsworth (Source Café), 2 Rachel Taylor (Miller and Baker), 3 Russell Blaikie (Must Bar)

## Book 6-6 Interviews with the City of Vincent locals, Mount Hawthorn primary school teacher, CEO of the East Perth Soccer Club, President of Italo-Australian Welfare and Culture Centre and Janet McCallum former resident of Mount Hawthorn:

1 Aureliana & Fabrizio Di Rollo Mount Hawthorn primary teacher & engineer husband from Italy)  
2 Dean Turner (East Perth Football Club)  
3 Enzo Sma (President of the Italo-Australian Welfare and Culture Centre)  
4 Janet McCallum (Former Mount Hawthorn resident)

## Covid Conversations Documentary Official Youtube Video Link:

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



CITY OF VINCENT



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries

## 1 Emma Ainsworth Source Cafe

**Emma Ainsworth**, I'm Emma Ainsworth, and I'm the owner of Source Foods. My shop is on the corner of Brisbane and Beaufort Street. We are local residents and we live on Bulwer Street ourselves. We've lived in the area for eight or nine years now and we've owned the shop for the last seven.

It's been challenging, but we love the area, we love our customers and that's what it's all about, giving the love. It's a big family. COVID was and is still a challenging time in our lives. My mum had a stroke before Christmas. I'm sorry, but I had to put her in a nursing home during COVID. For me, that was harder than all the business stuff. Having to drop her at the doorstep, not being able to take her in and not being able to see her for five to six weeks. It was just, for me, the hardest thing. And not being able to enjoy my son with her and do all the normal things that grandparents do with your child was one of the toughest times of my life.

And even now, it's difficult. We can't see her too often because we don't want to take illness or sickness into the nursing home. But they've relaxed everything now so that we can visit. Even the dog is allowed to visit now; they're allowing pets to visit. Yeah. So that's really, exciting.

Business-wise, we have never been busier. Source is just so.. Even our normal customers are finding it hard to get in. I've never, ever had to say to people, "I'm sorry, but we can't accommodate you today." before. We didn't used to take bookings and now it's hard to get in without a booking because you never know when there's going to be a seat available. So it'd be nice to know when we can open up to our normal amount of seats. So that will make it a little bit easier. But with the restrictions, it's still difficult.

Unfortunately, I've had to close our second store, Henry Little, which was in the Perth CBD. The city is just so quiet still, and I think that most of the city people are now in their local area. That's what we've found. A lot of our customers are people who work for BHP and all the big guys who still don't have their offices full. So they're coming to us and they're coming in to see us every day.

I don't know how long this is going to take to recover. It's so sad. We're not the only people that have had to make this decision. We just couldn't do it any longer. There's only so much money you can throw at something, and we just had to make the decision that we need to look after Source. So, one thing at a time. Do one good thing and do it really well, concentrate and just do a really good job. So that's what we've decided. We just have to make sure that the first baby is looked after. Unfortunately, that sacrifices the second one. You learn these things and you just got to take it and you just got to move on and keep going.

For us, we became a place where all the locals came just to say hello. You know, they came in in the morning to get their one cup of coffee. To have their interaction with the one person or maybe two people that they had the opportunity to come and see.



We started doing takeaway meals for people and we brought in our *Source for You* meals. And we were selling those a lot. We brought out our isolation boxes. Thankfully, just before COVID hit, we bought lots of toilet paper, so I had lots of stock. [Laughter] And I sold to a lot of people whose families were in isolation and self-quarantined at home. I was actually delivering isolation boxes to people who couldn't leave [their house]. So they were getting coffee, bread, bacon, eggs, muesli, everything that they needed to get them through. And the meals as well. So, they didn't have to do anything. We still do the meals. But unfortunately, at the moment, we are just so busy with a normal menu and we haven't had a chance to bring that back again, but we do plan to do it.

You get so busy in life trying to make your business work. Sometimes you don't look at the smaller things, which actually are the bigger things that you need to look at. And realising, "Oh, I was spending lots of money on wages that I didn't really have to." All those things that actually make your business profitable when you're not wasting in that area.

The difference for us is the packaging costs. Going from dining-in cups to take away for a longer period of time, when we were shut down. We couldn't afford to have a staff member out there doing dishes because we weren't actually selling a lot. Having to do takeaway because no one could dine in and knives and forks and takeaway containers. And for a sustainable business, it's so hard. We spent so much time and energy trying to stop people using takeaway containers that, you know, it was a bit heartbreaking. To do takeaway meals in a plastic Chinese container box because that's the best way, you can reheat, you can freeze and it's reusable. Hoping that people did do that.

**Nunzio Mondia** Bring your own box,.

**Emma Ainsworth** We did that as well. That was really, really, really challenging. We just love our customers. And the return, we got so many new people and so many regulars. We've got some people that have been coming here for the whole time we have owned the place. So it's really nice to see people's children grow up. And now Henry is now nearly four. People saw me while I was pregnant and now they're seeing him come in and say, hi to everybody. It won't be long before he's making coffees for people.

I just hope that the customers that have been coming now don't disappear when this is all over. As soon as the borders are opened up, I know that this isn't going to be forever. We're not going to continue having the number of people coming in. I just hope that we still get that follow-through afterwards. I know some people are really nervous about having the borders closed, but for us, we think it's a pretty good thing. Mark McGowan has really helped WA stay safe. And if it means that we need to be closed for a little bit longer and spend our money in Perth and help the small businesses that need it. I think it's fantastic.

What's going to happen at Birdwood Square? Hopefully, some new events will be on in the park and that's going to help us. We want to be involved. The soccer has been great. All the kids, the mums and everyone that come in and watch the kids play soccer on the weekends. It's just so exciting seeing people out. Summer is coming, at least COVID was during winter. There's nothing like being at home under the doona and being safe for a couple of months.

I would have liked to have had some time off, but we didn't close. [Laughter] We were open throughout the whole thing. I can't wait to have a holiday myself. [Laughter] I'll tell you that much. I've got to go and spend some money in WA as well, I just need some time off.

**Nunzio Mondia** So your hope for the future is to get a holiday.

**Emma Ainsworth** I got a holiday. I had accommodation booked for the beginning of the year and I didn't get to go. Now I can't get a bloody flight. Just waiting for it to die down a little bit and then take some time off with my husband and my son. He starts school next year. Being more involved in the Highgate Primary School community will be exciting. That's across the road. He can walk, from my house and he can walk back to the cafe after school. We're here for the long haul.

## 2 Rachel Taylor

**Rachel Taylor** I am Rachel Taylor, I own Miller and Baker [Lake Street] with my husband, Mark. We are City of Vincent local residents, and we live in Mount Hawthorn. We used to live on Glendower Street, it was our first house. So, when this place came up for rent it was ideal. We couldn't wait to get back into the area.

**Rachel Taylor** We've lived in the area off and on for twenty-five years, maybe a little bit more. And we opened Miller and Baker last December, two weeks before Christmas. So, it's quite new. In March, mid-March, we were still trying to figure out how to run the business and how to manage staff and how to do ordering and customer services. We don't have experience in this industry at all. We have no small business experience or hospitality experience, so it's completely new. And then COVID hit. [Laughter] That completely threw a spanner in the works, and we were so stressed out the weeks before that. "Oh, maybe we can just close?" Because nobody would think the worst of us. We could use it as an excuse and shut for a few months and take a breath. But we didn't get a chance to do that, because suddenly we had a business that was thriving, and everybody needed bread. So, for us as a new business, it was probably a godsend.

To begin with we thought, "What can we offer our customers?" Most of our customers before COVID were retirees. We were worried about [their safety] going to supermarkets and we thought we'd try and offer a one-stop shop so that they could get their basics here and not have to go to the supermarkets so often. So, we started selling milk with the bread, eggs and whatever else they might need, trying to figure out what we could provide for them.

And then we also had a new clientele, young businesspeople who were working from home. We had a queue every morning of people wanting coffee. The coffee drinkers who would usually get their fix in the city came here instead and we've seen a lot of them every single day since March. They get their coffee on the way to work. It's really lovely to get to know them. It's quite strange now because we were used to seeing them in their track pants and T-shirt, scruffy hair straight out of bed, and now they come in dressed in suits, "So this is what you look like when you're going to the office?'

As soon as COVID hit, it was really sudden for us, "What should we be doing?" We had to look at other cafes. We looked on Instagram to see what everyone else was doing. So overnight we went from dine-in to takeaway only and we had to mark the floor. We marked blue lines on the floor and measured: "This is where you need to stand." Overnight, we had to figure out how to run the business with all the COVID restrictions. We were trying hard, and a lot of cafes were ahead of us in adapting to the restrictions. We were listening to the news and saw what other cafes were doing. People stopped using keep cups and they stopped doing dine-in. This was from one twenty-four-hour period to the next 24-hour period. We stopped dine-in and we marked blue lines on the floor so that people knew where they could stand to be served. That was one day, and the very next day, it all had to be outside, and we moved everything outside.

We opened the door. We put a table at the front door, we moved our bread to the door, and we just passed things out of the window. And we were trying really hard to give our customers space, especially the elderly customers. And when we saw them, we said "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at home?" We were offering delivery. Not a lot of people took up delivery. I think they liked the opportunity to see other people and walk from home to here. We were just trying to figure it out as we went along because there wasn't a lot of information coming out.

As a new business, I think we were lucky because we quickly got to know our customers. When we first set this business up, one of the things that we wanted, was to become part of the community. And we did become part of the community in the following days and weeks. We really got to know our customers. It was so lovely the way they came in and asked if we were doing okay and we wanted to know if they were okay. And a lot of them thanked us for being here and thanked us for being open. And I think that has continued.

**Nunzio Mondia** It's more than just selling a product to someone. Did you feel the community coming together during Covid?

**Rachel Taylor** The contact. Yup, familiar faces. I think and I hope we provided that for them. It felt really lovely, and I know everyone was genuinely worried for each other. We were worried for people who were in isolation, and we have a delivery service for them. I think it was just a nice caring atmosphere in the community. And I think that has continued for us. Just knowing our clients and our customers.

*[Our pastry chef makes the most delicious jam, and she filled our shelves with it... It may have been her way of dealing with stress because she did that on top of all her other tasks for the bakery.]* And another one of our staff members would be our crowd control. She's got a really loud voice. She would yell, "Stand back, give 'em space!" [Laughter].

I hope that we continue, and future generations continue, to value the neighbourhood that they live in. I think we've become so globalised that we can live in our house and forget that there's anyone outside the door that cares about us. But I think COVID made people realise that we live in a community and it's one of the most important, besides family. It's probably one of the most important aspects of living in this place. I just hope that continues. I think people were becoming so alone and isolated. And I hope we don't go back to that.

The one thing I noticed when we drove home from work, the roads were quiet. We'd drive home and in our street in Mount Hawthorn, all the kids were out playing, and the parents were standing in their front gardens talking [to one another] across the road. I've never seen the street so alive. And this was just on normal days of the week, but because everyone was at home, they were really enjoying interacting with one another.

### 3 Russell Blaikie the Must Wine Bar

**Russell Blaikie** I'm Russell Blaikie, I'm the chef and co-owner of Must Wine Bar in Highgate here on Beaufort Street [519]. When the COVID-19 shutdown came about, it was stressful in the business, in the community and even with the family. But I've got to say walking out on Beaufort Street on a Friday afternoon, not a soul on Beaufort Street. Not a car. Not even a person walking a dog. It really brought it home to me that we were in for a ride that was something I'd never seen in my life before.

**Russell Blaikie** So here at Must, naturally, we were shut down. We converted to take-out two days before the shutdown. And that's what got us through the COVID crisis. We got busy with food takeout and home delivery. And that supported a bunch of staff here that would otherwise have been out of a job.

**Russell Blaikie** I felt for the guys next door, Jungle Noir, as they had opened their business on Thursday and were shut down on Sunday. They must have been totally desperate; it was so tough for them to watch that happen. We had eighteen years of history behind us, 13,000 on our database, and a lot of support for our business. They had only just been a brand-new opening. It was really tough for them. And to watch that happen to those guys and to other people in the industry, it was really tough.

**Russell Blaikie** But we all stuck together and a whole bunch of chefs, restauranteurs, and hospitality peeps, were all sharing with each other. Sharing what we were doing and there was a real sense of, 'We're at war with this thing and we're going to get through it.' And we did it together. The hospitality community became a bunch of warriors during COVID. Everyone really came together. There was lots of communication between chefs, restauranteurs, and other hospitality owners. We were sharing information; we were asking people what they were doing about takeout. We were here together to beat this. It was an amazing sense of community within hospitality in WA.

**Russell Blaikie** Coming out of lockdown was, amazing and fantastic and also incredibly stressful because of the notice we got as a business. Within two days we went from a hospitality operation for 175 people, licensed and 25 staff serving masses of customers, to zero. And then becoming a takeout operation and then re-converting that back into a smaller-scale hospitality operation, because we were only allowed to have 20 people at a time in the business. It was actually incredibly stressful.

I left it for about 10 days before I reopened because I really wanted to assess how we would reopen. And we also wanted to renovate our business and not reopen it as the same business. That was particularly important to me because I think COVID changed so much in the world. I didn't want to see people coming back to just the same old Must. I wanted them to come back to the new Must that was fresher, more vibrant, cleaner, and crisper and that's exactly what we did.



**Russell Blaikie** We've changed the way we operate as a business. First, we are only open four days a week. We were open five and six days a week in the past. But now we've compressed that to our solid trading days, Wednesday to Saturday and a Friday lunch. And that's been hugely successful for us as it compresses the amount of time that we put all of our energy into and I think the customers get a different product from a really vibrant and energetic staff.

In the business we refitted the bistro, we took tables out and fitted really comfortable banquette seating, so we made the business more comfortable. And personally, having a business open four days a week instead of five has given me so much more energy to work on the business.

**Russell Blaikie** To keep staff employed during COVID I employed kitchen hands, waiters who wouldn't have stayed at work, as drivers and riders delivering our food. I didn't use online platforms like Uber Eats because the cost was way too high, and that would have created an exorbitant cost for our customers. But we kept more people at work. And the feeling that I got and the team building we did by keeping everyone in jobs (We kept 10 people in jobs) during the COVID shutdown, was second to none. Fantastic.

**Russell Blaikie** The COVID crisis was terrifying. As a businessperson, I've never felt so out of control of my business, as I did during that time, with no notion of how long we would be in this situation. However, when we reopened and we got the business back up and running again, I don't think I've ever felt more in control of my business. So, the flip between the two has been incredible. So, we've learnt a lot during the crisis.

**Nunzio Mondia** Sometimes you sink all the way to the bottom...

**Russell Blaikie** To dig yourself way out of it.

**Russell Blaikie** I think COVID will leave us with a legacy. I think it will change hospitality forever in a sense, that it will always be a different beast than pre-COVID. I think there was a lot of waste in hospitality. I think there are a lot of businesses that were marginal during the pre-COVID era that maybe aren't in business post-COVID.

It's a hard one to work out or [to see in a] crystal ball where we're going to be in five- and ten years' time. We've had the benefit, even in Perth, of having locked borders and people have opened their eyes and got the blinkers off about how good Western Australia, whether it's in the city or the regions, actually is. And what we can produce in the city and in the regions. And that, I think, will be a retained influence for many years to come. People have discovered, restaurants along Beaufort Street, discovered Exmouth, Broome, Albany and all the other places around Western Australia, that they have overlooked and have gone overseas or over east. I think they will have a reason to return because we do deliver great hospitality experiences.

**Russell Blaikie** I think staffing post-COVID will be an interesting issue, particularly with the lack of international travel and a lack of working holidaymakers or backpackers coming into the country as they are a great underwriting force for our employee cohort in the hospitality industry. It's really important that we see them back. If I had one thing to say to the government, I'd say "Give all our hospitality employees or any person on a working holiday visa, add another year to it straight away. Keep them in the country. We need them if we want to have a great experience in Perth or in the regions and it needs to be staffed.' And that's one of the great challenges coming forward, staffing hospitality operations around Western Australia, metropolitan and country right into the future.

**Russell Blaikie** One of the big challenges of COVID was, we're in a pretty smart venue, we pay a lot of rent on Beaufort Street. We had to go to our landlord and say, "Look, we need some help. " And I've got to say I was absolutely gob smacked with the support that our landlord gave us during COVID. He came on board. We made an agreement. It wasn't about stalling rent. It was just paying the value of rent according to our turnover. And that support got us through this crisis and it's ongoing. So absolute thumbs up to our landlord and I hope a lot of other businesses in Western Australia and in Perth and in Beaufort Street had the same response when they said, "We need help. "