



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project
Edited transcript – Leonard “Dugga” Beazley
Interviewees: Leonard “Dugga” Beazley [DB] and Frances Beazley [FB]
Interviewer: Cathy Dodson [CD]
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Selling fish from the pier/selling from home

0.41.46 (part one)

DB: Well, where the Lagoon Pier is now – that’s a pier. The original pier was a breakwater. Now there were two piers originally and they used to go all the way up to Rouse St. But when they filled the Lagoon in, that made it two shorter piers. But the short pier is where they used to sell the fish. And I can remember – as back as far as I can go, I can remember four or five boats there alongside the pier of a Sunday morning selling fish. But in 1951, in February 1951 we got a really bad storm, and all the boats in the harbour got smashed up. And after it was over the only boat left floating in the harbour was the *Volunteer*, my old man’s boat. And there was another boat on the pier. There used to be a crane on the pier. They used to lift the boats out of the water to paint them. And there was another one of the fishing boats, a bloke named Roy Jones owned it, and he had it on the pier painting it, so he survived it, but the rest of them either washed up on the beach or sank. And what there was of them in them days, they were all old blokes, getting old. And that was the end of them. They didn’t replace them, [*the boats*], they just turned it up.

CD: They stopped fishing?

DB: Yes, well, we kept doing it up and ‘til about the end of the 1960s.

CD: Still selling the fish from the pier?

DB: Yes, and catching the flathead. Because the thing was with the flathead there was plenty of them and they were easy to catch. And you wasn’t stuck out all night or early hours of the morning, so it was a pretty good living....

0.49.28 (part two)

CD: We talked briefly about how you were selling fish from the pier and then you eventually moved to sell here from home.

DB: Well what happened, I was selling fish out of the boat down the beach for, you know, must have been 20 years. There used to be, where the Navy base was, a big S bend in the road like that, where the old lagoon used to be. And of course, in the 1960s there the cars started, you know, getting ... more traffic. They straightened the road up to the way it is now. It’s still got a bit of a bend in it, but nowhere near - It used to be like that. [*Indicates an ‘s’ with hands.*]

CD: Like a big ‘S’ bend?

DB: Yes, like a big ‘S’ bend, like that it was. But anyway, to do it they had to start roughly at Dow Street here, right down to nearly Pickles Street, you know? But they had all the road blocked

off from Bay Street, down to Pickles Street, the beach front. So anyway, what they did, they diverted the traffic down Rouse Street. And at the time -

CD: In front of your house?

DB: Yes, well at the time we lived up the road here a little, between Bay Street and this street, in the middle of the block here there was all houses here, and we lived up there. And anyway we realised that all our customers were going past so we put the fish sign up out the front of the house. And we had a cool room and everything up there, we had had it there for a long time you know? Yes, anyway the people were coming in there and buying the fish, you know, we gradually built it up. There was a factory there before all them blocks of flats were there and my old man had the only house left in the street and they pestered him 'til he sold it to them, you know? And at the time the house would have been worth about maybe \$20,000 if you were lucky. Anyway they flogged him, flogged him that much to buy it, and they finished up giving him \$60,000 for it. You know? And he was at retiring age, wasn't he? He was about 65, so he sold the house and he bought a virtually brand new house up behind the Town Hall for twenty, and he put the \$40,000 in the bank at the time at 10% interest and he was quite happy. But he still went fishing, you know, but what he done, he give us the business. So we moved it up here. We owned that house around the corner there, where Melissa lives now and we were living there and we were doing it there, we were selling the fish out of there. But there was an old house here –

CD: Where we are now?

DB: Where we are now, and I bought it, and we pulled it down and we built the shop. You know? And ever since that's, what, must be over 40 years ago now -

0.52.51

CD: So you would bring the fish home?

DB: Yes.

CD: And unload it in to the shop.

DB: Yes.

CD: And how would you sell them? I mean, what were they like? Did you gut them or do anything to them?

DB: No. No. Fresh. Just straight out the boat, as they were.

FB: Oh, we'd just ice them down in the boxes. We'd have the bench and put them on top of that. And we'd got scales, and –

DB: We'd make them wait out the front while we bought them in... -

CD: This is the customers?

DB: Yes. So what we used to do, we had scales down there and we used to do boxes and we would bring them in and weigh them. We had a book and we'd write the weights down. Like we never had a till or nothing out there. But what we'd do, we'd just chuck the money in the sink as we were selling them. But at the end of the day we'd know how much we'd got because

we'd have a look and say "Oh, we got 500 kilos of - We'd have a 100 kilos of snapper at \$10 a kilo, well that's \$1000." Just write it down in a book just in case the income tax man come here.

FB: Well, yes, we'd do it because of the income tax.

DB: They never ever came, but we had the book, you know...

FB: An account book. An exercise book.

DB: Yes, yes, and we would put on it Tuesday the 5th January or something. A thousand dollars or twelve hundred dollars for ... So that we had something to show them. Then I got an ice making machine out there. When I'd get up of a morning, before I'd leave, I'd turn it on. When I come home it would be full of ice and the first thing we'd do, before we'd sell them, we'd ice them.

CD: So how long would the time be from when you'd open the shop to when all the fish was gone. Was that like a full day or a few hours?

DB: Oh, well it would depend how many fish we had. You know, sometimes we'd sell out in an hour. Like originally we used to be open all day. In those days, when we were open all day I wasn't just selling fish that I caught, I was buying fish of other fisherman and selling theirs too. So we had a variety of everything you know? But as the years went by all them blokes got old and they either died or retired. So we lost them. You know, so in the finish, in the last, what, twenty years I suppose, we were just selling what we had caught ourself. And in the last three or four years, maybe, that would be all it'd be, we were only stopping open 'til about midday. Because what had happened, when the old fish market was there, I used to have a key to get in there of a night time.

CD: Which fish market do you mean?

DB: Up in Footscray Rd... And if we had any snapper left that we couldn't sell - Because we never used to keep them, if I had any left I'd take them up the market, because we like to sell fresh ones all the time. So anyway, we stopped there all day with them, you know, and of an afternoon it used to get quiet didn't it, but we'd still sell a good few. But anyway, what we'd do, I'd have my tea and if we had any left we'd stick them on the truck and take them up the market because I had a key to get in. But then they closed the market and they've got a new one now. But they've got all this security there. And there is no way known, the only way I can get my fish to the market is to have them up there before midday, or get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and take them up. Well 3 o'clock in the morning I'd be on my way down the Bay. So what we used to do, when we were selling fish, we'd always have on the answer machine, when we were on our way home I'd ring if Frances was up and say "Look we are on our way home, we'll be home at 10 o'clock." So she'd put it on the answer machine that we'll be home at 10 o'clock. She'd put a sign out the front that we'd be home at 10 o'clock. So by the time we'd get home there would be a crowd out there. So we'd get home, and like I say, we'd ice the fish, we'd open the gate, into it, you know? We'd sell them 'til about quarter to twelve or half past eleven we'd start packing up and if we had any left we'd stick them on the back of the truck and we'd hang on 'til midday, because I ring them up the market and tell them I'm coming. We'd hang on and give them every chance that they had to get a snapper, you know, and soon as midday come we'd pack up and we'd take them up the market. So in the afternoon we'd have the day to ourself.

0.57.48

CD: Did Frances do most of the selling, of like the actual dealing with people or were you both involved in that?

DB: No, well she did and she didn't. I wouldn't say she did most of it, but she would stop there when we got home, 'til it died down. You know 'til we got rid of the rush. Then I'd be there, or I'd stop there and do it, you know, or Melissa. When Melissa was here, you know she would do it, yes.

CD: Your daughter.

DB: Frances, she was there for the first onslaught. [*Laughs.*]

FB: Yes. Yes. [*Laughs.*]

CD: And you had lots of regular customers?

DB: Oh yes, yes. Oh, you want to have heard them when we stopped. Even now, yesterday- At the weekend there was two or three pulled up, come in looking for fish you know? "Oh! Where we get any fresh - Where can we go get some fresh fish?"

CD: Do you miss that, the selling the fish?

DB: Oh, well I do kind of. You know, it was a big part of our life wasn't it?

FB: It was, yes. And you get to know all these people -

DB: Yes, you get to know all these people.

FB: Especially when they live around the area too. You see them down the street.

DB: Frances used to say "I've had a guts full of this." You know? And she say "I can't do this anymore." I used to say to her, "You keep it up dear," I said "because it's keeping your brain working." [*All laugh.*]

FB: Yes. [*Laughs.*] That's what I said.

DB: So you know, you've got to keep your brain into it. I says "Selling fish out there, it's making your brain work." [*Laughs.*]

FB: Yes. Any excuse to keep me there.

CD: Keep you working?

FB: Yes.