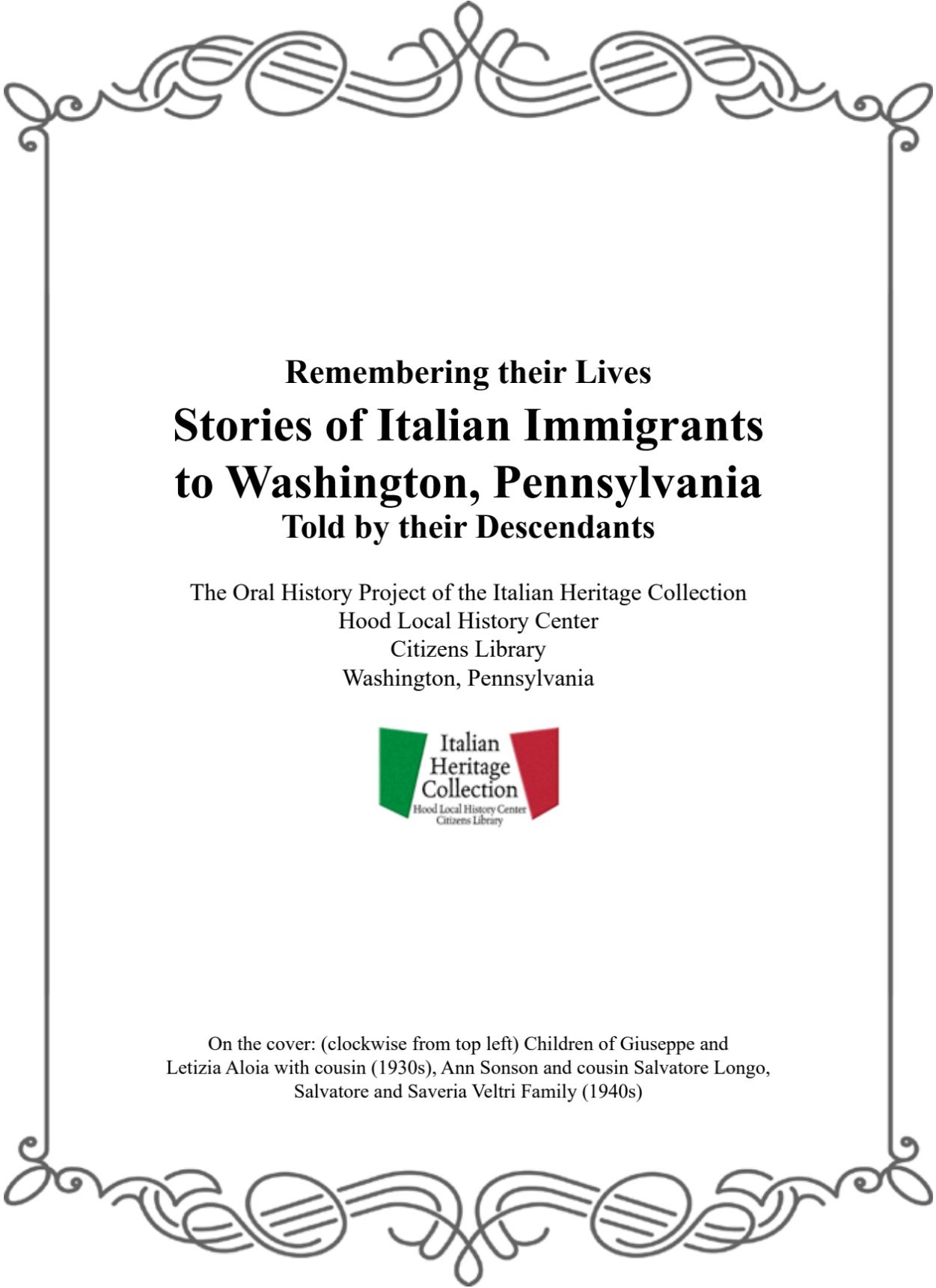


Remembering their Lives  
**Stories of Italian Immigrants  
to Washington, Pennsylvania**  
Told by their Descendants





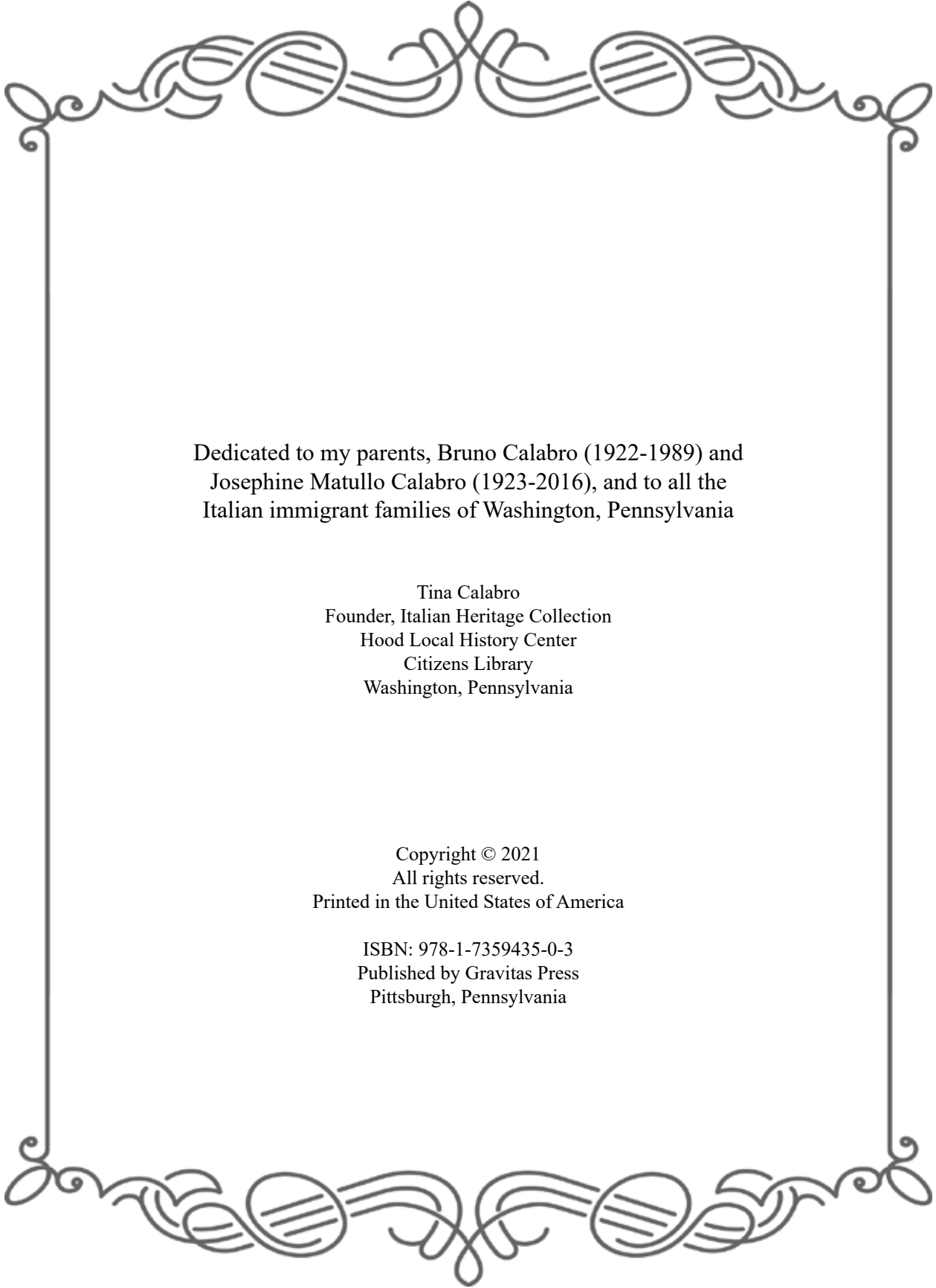


**Remembering their Lives**  
**Stories of Italian Immigrants**  
**to Washington, Pennsylvania**  
**Told by their Descendants**

The Oral History Project of the Italian Heritage Collection  
Hood Local History Center  
Citizens Library  
Washington, Pennsylvania



On the cover: (clockwise from top left) Children of Giuseppe and  
Letizia Aloia with cousin (1930s), Ann Sonson and cousin Salvatore Longo,  
Salvatore and Saveria Veltri Family (1940s)



Dedicated to my parents, Bruno Calabro (1922-1989) and  
Josephine Matullo Calabro (1923-2016), and to all the  
Italian immigrant families of Washington, Pennsylvania

Tina Calabro  
Founder, Italian Heritage Collection  
Hood Local History Center  
Citizens Library  
Washington, Pennsylvania

Copyright © 2021  
All rights reserved.  
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-7359435-0-3  
Published by Gravitas Press  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	I
Introduction	II
About the Italian Heritage Collection	V
About the Oral History Process	VII

### **Oral Histories from Descendants of Italian Immigrants to Washington, Pennsylvania**


Virginia Veltri Adamsky	1
Mary Aloia and Sally Aloia	19
Frank Insana	37
Frank Mancuso	53
Joe Mancuso	71
Angela Valitutti McVeagh	97
Joe Molinaro	121
Florence Nicolella	145
Sam Oliverio	157
Silvio Passalacqua	179
Theresa (Betty) Sonson Powers and Frank Sonson Jr.	201
Louis Anthony “Sonny” Spossey	223
Amon Trapuzzano	249
Shirley Sorge Blue, Linda Dickson West, Bill West, John West and Norma West	271
Donald Joseph Zenner and Eleanor Capo Zenner	295

### **Oral histories from Descendants of Italian Immigrants who Settled Elsewhere in Western Pennsylvania, Recounting their Ties to Washington, Pennsylvania**

W. Bryan Pizzi	317
Charles and Rita Gabrielli Tripoli	333

**All references to “Washington” in the oral histories refer to Washington, Pennsylvania.**

**Family tree information was obtained from oral history interviews and is not intended to be a complete genealogy.**





## Acknowledgements

**Sincere thanks to the following people who made this collection possible:**

The oral historians who generously shared their family stories.

Dyane Troiano, who personally reached out to Italian immigrants to interview, and who assisted in several recording sessions.

Sandra Mansmann of the Washington County History and Landmarks Foundation and Citizens Library, who provided encouragement and professional guidance. Liz Terek transcribed most of the oral histories. Cheri Duball, Cara Lytton, and Mary Patterson also transcribed.

Ella Ann Hatfield, Kathy Pienkowski and Diane Ambrose of Citizens Library, who opened doors to make the project possible, with additional help from library staff.

The members of Primo Italiano Lodge #2800, Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, Sons and Daughters of Italy, who brought much enthusiasm to the project, especially Jon Bruno, John West, John Riddle, Bob Johns, Lisa Aprea, among others.

Keith Irvin, who did the initial page layouts, and Kath Manolios, who designed the book. Proofreaders were Janna Eversmeyer and Melanie Gutkowski. Rick St. John and Melissa Marinaro gave advice. My husband, David Steidl, devoted many hours to final edits.

Washington & Jefferson College interns Caroline DeJuliis, Ricky Deprato, and Halie Tucci, as well as faculty members H.J. Manzari and W. Thomas Mainwaring, who referred them.

Ann Rea Kopy shared her experience of helping her mother—Virginia Proia Rea—publish her memoir about growing up Italian in Washington, Pennsylvania, and has been a constant supporter of this project.

Floyd C. Marasco's memoir about growing up Italian in the Tylerdale section of Washington also inspired this project. He and his daughter, Paulette Marasco Stout, supported the project in many ways.

Theresa Mancuso, Tom Milhollan, Ann Rea Kopy, and Dennis and Regina Urso helped spread the word about the project at Washington's annual Italian Heritage Festival.

The Washington *Observer-Reporter* has informed the community about the Italian Heritage Collection through several articles.

Financial supporters of the Italian Heritage Collection, including Friends of Citizens Library, Washington County Community Foundation, family of Bruno J. and Josephine Matullo Calabro, and Paulette Marasco.



## Introduction

My mother, Josephine Matullo Calabro—the daughter of Italian Immigrants who settled in Washington, Pennsylvania—died in May 2016 at the age of 92. She had lived a long and beautiful life, never far in distance or memory from her upbringing on tiny Mill Street in the West End, one of the areas of the city where the first Italian immigrants put down roots in the late 1800s and early 1900s.


Seated next to me at the funeral parlor, Frank “Fuzzy” Mancuso, age 89 at the time, leaned over and told me about his Italian family’s connection to mine. Frank’s family lived on Fulton Street in the West End, just a few streets away from my father’s family—the Calabros—who ran a grocery store on Altamont Avenue, in the area called Bellevue. My father’s parents were his godparents, Frank informed me. They were always good to him, he said.

Our chat was providential. Deserved or not, I fancy myself a family historian, the conscientious keeper of my family’s Italian American story. Over the years, I had recorded my late mother’s and father’s memories of their Italian upbringing in Washington. Their vivid stories brought their childhood neighborhoods back to life.

Frank’s reminiscences at the funeral home suggested that other descendants of Washington’s first Italian immigrants still had many stories to share—stories of camaraderie, unexpected life trajectories, and “pride of place.” Suddenly, I realized that these stories needed to be collected before the storytellers passed from our midst.

Washington, Pennsylvania, is a city with a long and rich history of Italian immigration. Between 1880 and 1930, hundreds of Italians settled in the city. They were part of the great wave of more than four million Italian immigrants, mostly from southern Italy and Sicily, who left poor economic and political conditions to find work and opportunity in the United States.

I brought the idea of collecting the life stories of these immigrants through the eyes of their sons and daughters to the Hood Local History Center of Citizens Library, where it was met with enthusiasm. Sandy Mansmann, executive director of the Washington County History and Landmarks Foundation, had recently completed a collection of oral histories from members of Washington’s African American community. That collection, housed at Citizens Library, served as a guide for this one.



Between 2017 and 2019, the Italian Heritage Collection recorded and transcribed the stories of 17 families.

Frank Mancuso was our first interviewee. Frank's parents—John and Bella Lucchese Mancuso—were part of the great migration that brought Italians to the city of Washington to find work in the industries that produced glass, steel, and other products, and to found businesses that served fellow Italians and the larger community.


Italian immigrants brought a population boom to Washington. They comprised the fastest growing ethnic group in the city in the early twentieth century and left a lasting legacy in all aspects of civic life. According to census figures, Washington's population increased from 4,292 in 1880 to 24,545 in 1930 (a nearly six-fold increase).

The oral historians in this collection recall the sights, sounds, and traditions of Washington's Italian homes and neighborhoods throughout the West End, Tylerdale, and the East Maiden Street corridor. The stories portray a city burgeoning with industry and opportunity, but also a certain amount of discrimination and closed doors. They detail how the early immigrants moved through obstacles and became part of the fabric of the city.

Washington's Italians came from many parts of southern Italy and Sicily. A wide range of Italian hometowns are represented in the collection. However, four towns in particular generated a sizable amount of chain migration—Bellosguardo and Aquara (Province of Salerno, Campania), San Giovanni in Fiori (Province of Cosenza, Calabria), and Bovino (Province of Foggia, Apulia).

The collection also includes stories from descendants of families who settled elsewhere in Western Pennsylvania but occupy a special place among the Italian Americans in Washington—Dr. Charles and Rita Tripoli, and attorney W. Bryan Pizzi, son of Dr. Wilson Pizzi.

In addition to oral histories, the Italian Heritage Collection holds other media related to Italian immigration to the city. Significant among those items are Sunda Cornetti's 1986 doctoral dissertation on assimilation patterns among children of Italian immigrants in the city, Anthony Costanzo's 1973 master's thesis on geographic settlement patterns of Italian immigrants to the city, and the story-rich program booklets from the Italian festivals held in downtown Washington from 1982 to 1988.



These materials are housed at Citizens Library, available online, and shared with those who have an interest in Italian immigration to Western Pennsylvania.

We hope that the Italian Heritage Collection will continue to grow as a tribute to Washington's Italian immigrants and as a resource for generations to come.

It is our pleasure to share these oral histories with you. Each story in this collection is remarkable in its own way. Gathered together, the stories form a mosaic of Italian life in this particular time and place, a mosaic that appears more exquisite as we move further away from it.

Our first oral historian, Frank Mancuso, passed away in 2019 as the project moved toward completion. He is remembered with deep appreciation and affection.

Tina Calabro  
Founder, Italian Heritage Collection  
Hood Local History Center  
Citizens Library  
January 2021



## About the Italian Heritage Collection


The Italian Heritage Collection contains oral and written histories, publications, photos, and other materials related to Italian Americans who settled in Washington, Pennsylvania, in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Between 1880 and 1930, hundreds of Italian immigrants came to the city of Washington. They were part of the great wave of more than four million Italian immigrants, mostly from southern Italy and Sicily, who left poor economic and political conditions to find work and opportunity in the United States.

Like most immigrants who came to Western Pennsylvania during those years, those who settled in the city of Washington hoped to find work in industries that produced glass, steel and other products. Many others—grocers, barbers and tailors, for example—provided essential services in their new community.

During those peak immigration years, the city's population increased from 4,292 in 1880 to 24,545 in 1930 (a nearly six-fold increase), Italian immigrant families comprised one of the largest ethnic groups in the city during those years and left a lasting legacy in all aspects of civic life.

Many businesses and services originating with these Italian immigrants continue to serve the community to this day. Likewise, Italian Americans have built a strong record of local service in government, education, and other fields.



The collection includes:

- Oral histories
- Family histories and photos
- Memoirs, including “Tylerdale ... as I remember it!” (2010) by Floyd C. Marasco, and “On the Virg: Stories of our Italian Family” (2016) by Virginia Proia Rea
- Program books from Washington County Italian Heritage Festivals, 1982-1988
- Academic papers, including “A Geographic Study of the Italian Community in Washington, PA: 1900-1970” by Anthony Walter Costanzo, and “The Assimilation of Italian Immigrants and their Children Through a Variety of Educational Experiences in a Rural Area” by Sunda Cornetti

Financial supporters of the Italian Heritage Collection include Friends of Citizens Library, Washington County Community Foundation, family of Bruno J. and Josephine Matullo Calabro, and Paulette Marasco.

For information about the Oral History Project and the Italian Heritage Collection:

**Tina Calabro**

412-818-9169 or Citizens Library 724-222-2400

[tina.calabro@verizon.net](mailto:tina.calabro@verizon.net)



## About the Oral History Process

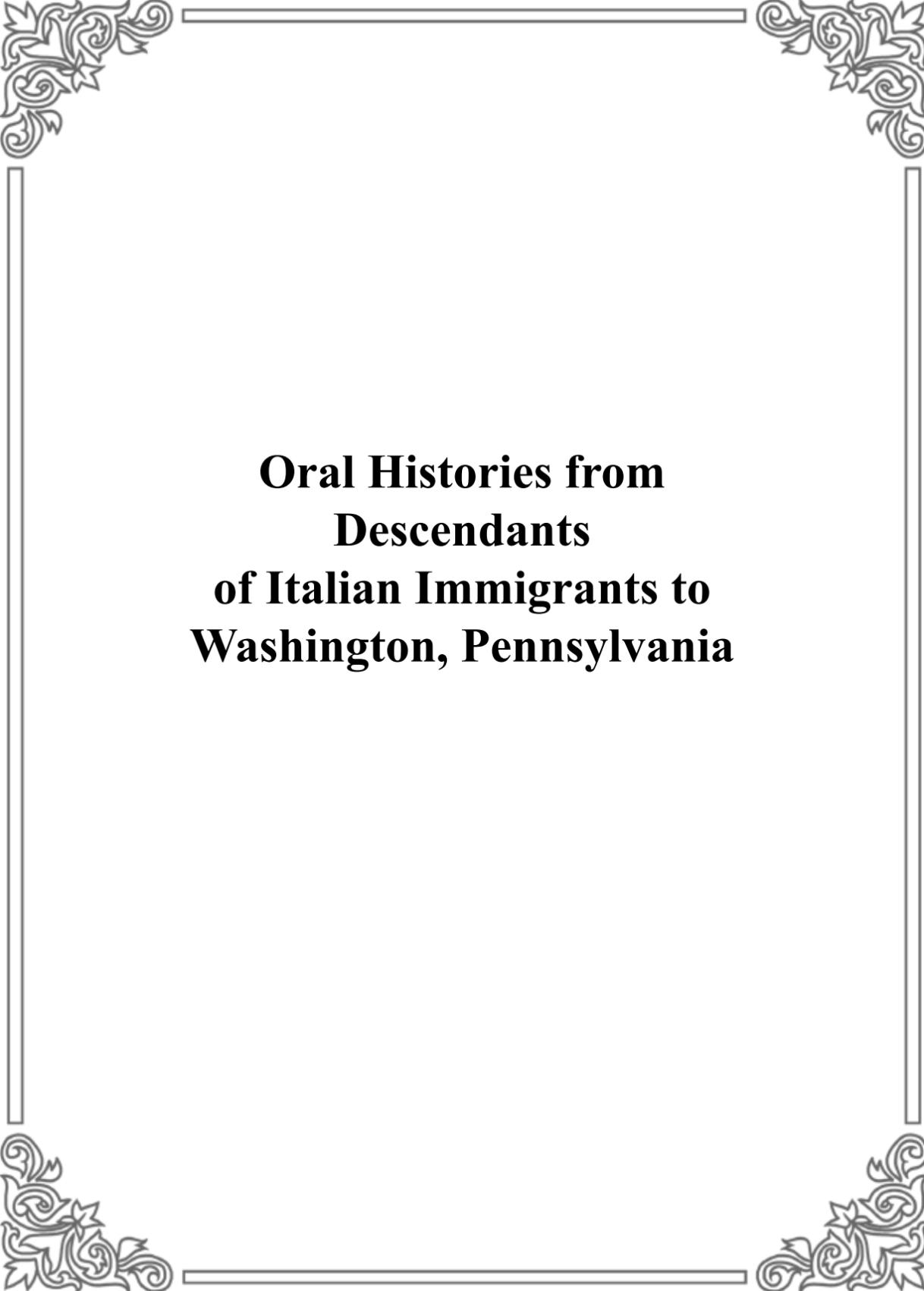
Beginning in late 2016, the Italian Heritage Collection—with the help of Primo Italiano #2800, Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, Sons and Daughters of Italy—identified potential subjects of oral histories. The priority was to record interviews with the sons and daughters of the first immigrants to Washington, Pennsylvania.

Between January 2017 and December 2019, the project audio-recorded 17 oral history interviews. Some recordings included multiple subjects. The interviews took place in the homes of the oral historians or at Citizens Library. Photos of the oral historians were taken at each interview. In addition, interviewees' historic photos were photographed. The average length of interviews is 90 minutes.

The interviews were transcribed and prepared for publication as a collection. All transcripts were edited for clarity by Tina Calabro, then submitted to the oral historians for review. The final transcripts incorporate corrections requested by the subjects. The recordings were not edited.

Each oral historian signed a release granting permission to the Italian Heritage Collection to share the oral history with scholars, teachers, and other members of the interested public. Most subjects also granted permission for the digital recording to be shared.

The Italian Heritage Collection provided each oral historian with a printed transcript of their interview, a digital transcript in PDF format, and a digital recording in MP3 format.



**Oral Histories from  
Descendants  
of Italian Immigrants to  
Washington, Pennsylvania**



## Virginia (Ginny) Veltri Adamsky

Daughter of Salvatore Veltri and  
Saveria Matrigrano Veltri


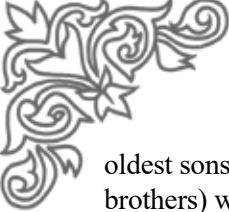


Virginia (Ginny) Veltri Adamsky grew up in a large, industrious Italian family in the Tylerdale section of Washington. Following their arrival in America, the Veltris supported themselves through farming, a grocery store, a dry-cleaning business, and a large trucking company. From the start, the Veltri businesses were truly family affairs. The outgoing personality of the family was also a factor. "The Veltris are people people," said Ginny.

Ginny and her 10 siblings are the children of Salvatore Veltri and Saveria Matrigrano Veltri. In 1916, Salvatore

Veltri and his sister Luisa arrived in Washington as children with their parents, Pietro and Francesca, from Belmonte, Italy, in the Cosenza area of Calabria. Around the same time, Saveria's parents, also from Belmonte, emigrated to Washington. When they reached adulthood, Salvatore and Saveria were introduced to each other by family. They married and for many years, the couple lived above the family grocery store on Woodland Avenue. Their growing family later lived at 1206 Summerlea Ave.

During the Second World War, their two



oldest sons (Pietro and Paul, Ginny's brothers) were drafted into the Navy directly from high school. They both served as gunners on battleships. Once again, during the Korean conflict, oldest son Pietro was drafted. During his absence, the family pulled together and kept the dry-cleaning business going so that it would be viable when he returned.

Like most Italians who emigrated to Washington, the Veltris faced slights that many other Italians also faced upon their arrival to the U.S. Ginny and her siblings learned from their parents to take the long view and remain proud of their heritage. "Other people don't know," their mother told them.

In addition to establishing a long-standing dry-cleaning business proudly carrying their Italian surname, the Veltris were also among the first Italian families to purchase land outside the city limits. The Veltri subdivision in Wolfdale is anchored by Veltri Drive.

Ginny and her siblings lost their parents earlier than most people of their generation. Just as the siblings pulled together to make the family businesses a success, the Veltri siblings became the emotional anchor for each other. The extended family today numbers more than 70 members. Each Father's Day weekend, the family has a reunion at the home of Samuel Veltri in Wolfdale. On Christmas Eve, the family members gather for the Feast of the Seven Fishes at Washington's Alpine Lodge, a social club for Italians that Ginny's grandfather, Pietro Veltri, helped to found.

September 2017



Salvatore Veltri and Saveria Matragrano Veltri with their children, 1940s



Salvatore Veltri and Saveria Matragrano Veltri with their children, 1930s



Francesca Suriano Veltri with her children Salvatore and Luisa

## Family Tree of Virginia (Ginny) Veltri Adamsky

### **Ginny's Father:**

- Salvatore Veltri, b. 1-17-1901, Belmonte, Italy; d. 4-7-1960, Cleveland

### **Ginny's Mother:**

- Saveria Matragrano, b. 7-16-1908, Washington; d. 7-29-1958, Washington

### **Salvatore and Saveria's date and place of marriage:**

- 11-26-1924, Washington

### **Salvatore and Saveria's Children:**

- Pietro Valentino (Pete) Veltri, b. 11-22-1925, Washington; d. 6-24-1999, Washington; m. Juliette T. Basil (b. 6-27-1928, Follansbee, WV) on 5-10-1952
- Paul Vittoria Veltri, b. 3-5-1927, Washington; m. Martha Tomik (b. 5-3-1934) on 8-24-1956
- Ralph Veltri, b. 12-1-1928, Washington; d. 1-2-1935, Washington
- Eugene Ralph (Erpie) Veltri, b. 12-29-1930; d. 2-27-1992, Washington; m. Margaret Bosick (b. 1934, Slovan, PA) on 11-12-1955
- Dolores Francesca (Dolly) Veltri, b. 5-5-1933, Washington; m. Henry Anthony Wilson Jr. (b. 1-24-1929) on 6-9-1962 in Steubenville, OH
- Salvatore Joseph Veltri, b. 10-31-1935, Washington; d. 11-21-1935, Washington
- Angeline Mary Louise Veltri, b. 10-29-1936, Washington

- Virginia Rose Margaret (Ginny) Veltri, b. 2-11-1938, Washington; m. Allan Frank Adamsky (b. 10-30-1938, Ellsworth, PA) on 8-29-1959
- Victor Joseph Veltri, b. 9-5-1945, Washington; m. Eloise Mae Shaffer (b. 5-12-1946) on 4-15-1968 in Sharon, PA
- Michael John Veltri, b. 5-7-1947, Washington; m. Debbie Ann Townsend (b. 10-26-1949, Merced, CA; d. 2013, Washington) on 3-15-1968 in Nevada

### **Salvatore's Parents:**

- Pietro Veltri, b. 6-4-1880, Belmonte, Italy; d. 9-21-1949, Washington
- Francesca Suriano Veltri, b. 12-21-1883, Belmonte, Italy; d. 1963

### **Pietro's Parents:**

- Antonio Veltri and Angela DeLuca

### **Saveria's Parents:**

- Raffaele Matragrano, b. Sept. 1879, Belmonte, Italy; d. 7-14-1917, Pittsburgh, PA
- Angeline Sicilia Matragrano, b. 12-21-1885; d. 1942
- Married 10-3-1907 in Pittsburgh, PA

## Interview

### Date and Place of Interview:

July 17, 2017 and September 5, 2017; home of Ginny and Allan Adamsky

**Interviewers:** Tina Calabro and Dyane Troiano

**Transcriber:** Mary Patterson

**Editors:** Tina Calabro and Ginny Adamsky

**Tina Calabro:** What is your date of birth?

**Ginny Adamsky:** 2/11/38

**TC:** Were you born at the hospital?

**GA:** At home.

**Dyane Troiano:** What is the address?

**GA:** It was 1206 Summerlea Avenue.

**TC:** And your husband's name?

**GA:** Allan Adamsky.

**TC:** And your husband's occupation? Is he retired?

**GA:** Yes, a retired engineer.

**TC:** And you're retired. What was your occupation?

**GA:** Well, I stayed home for 27 years but during this time I volunteered at the hospital. Some of the volunteers felt that they needed a more professional volunteer organization. So, Bill Kline, vice president of human resources, was in charge of the volunteers. He approached me about building a department of volunteer services. They had never had

that. So I did it as a volunteer for one year and I tried to quit and it became a job.

**TC:** So you built the volunteer services office and became its coordinator?

**GA:** I did it all. I got a pencil, tablet and a phone. Every document we had, we did it from scratch. I had volunteered since college, so I had an understanding of what needs done and how you work with volunteers.

**TC:** So you volunteered at the hospital since college?

**GA:** Over 40 years. Well, I started volunteering while in college at WVU. I started volunteering then and I kept volunteering. I am not a shopper or a lunch-out person, so any spare time I had, I did volunteer work.

**TC:** And you said that you went to WVU? What was your major?

**GA:** Art.

**TC:** That was a little unusual at the time to go college, women in traditional families.

**GA:** Yes, I was the first one in my family that went. And I was finally told I was

permitted to go a week before college started. My mother sort of snuck me out of the house.

**TC:** So when you went there, did you stay in the dorms?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** Were you there for four years?

**GA:** No, I was there a year and my mother became very ill. I was working to get money to go back my second year and she died. She had just been 50 years old a couple days and she died. So I didn't go back to school. I took care of my father, my sister, my two younger brothers. I sort of just stopped my own life; it's that simple. I had a boyfriend and we later got engaged and set the wedding date. We had the gowns and everything. Truthfully, when I saw how he behaved when my mother passed on, the selfishness, I began to doubt my feelings. It was when I broke my engagement that I met Allan.

**TC:** It looks like you met Allan shortly afterwards?

**GA:** Oh, my goodness, it was within weeks.

**TC:** How did you meet?

**GA:** My sister, Angie, did not want me to get married. She was working at the courthouse where Allan had a summer job. She kept telling him, "You'll have to meet my sister Virginia," "You'll have to meet my sister Virginia." Well, one of my

jobs was keeping house, one of the other jobs was driving my sister to and from work every day. Well, I would be busy working and I would put makeup on and [do my] hair and I had a housecoat on underneath a coat. So, Allan was coming out of the courthouse and my sister told him the next day, "My sister Virginia picked me up." [Allan asked], "Was she in the blue Chevy?" Angie said, "Yes, she was in a blue Chevy." The next day Allan was on the phone.

**TC:** So he was at W&J as a student? He did his undergraduate there?

**GA:** He did the 3:2 plan. Three years business and two years engineering at Carnegie Mellon. So we met in October and we were married the following August. So instead of marrying Stan in July, I married Allan in August.

**TC:** Your dad needed the help of the daughters in the family?

**GA:** Well, he died two years later. He was not healthy. So that left two little boys orphaned. My oldest brother, Pete, offered to take care of the boys, and Angie, rightly so, said, "Well, I am at the house, I'm not married, don't take the boys away from me." So, Angie and the boys stayed there until the boys married and left.

**TC:** How old were they when your mom and dad died?

**GA:** They were seven and nine, and two years later my dad died.

**TC:** I know all your siblings are listed [in your family genealogy book], but can you tell me their names again?

**GA:** There was Pete (Pietro), Paul, Eugene, Victor, Michael, Sammy Jr. (died in infancy, possibly from flu), Ralph (died of infection at the age of 7). In one of the pictures [Ralph] has a jawbreaker in his mouth. That is the only picture we have of him.

There's Dolly, Angie, Virginia, Victor, and Michael. Of course, my mother had stillborns. She married at 16 and was pregnant at 17.

**TC:** How did your parents meet?

**GA:** It was arranged because the Veltris on Woodland Avenue had a grocery store and somehow, they knew my mother's father died when she was young. The first story, which wasn't true, was that he was buying liquor from the Black Hands in Pittsburgh and they killed him. I said, "How many bottles of whiskey could he have carried in his hands back to Washington?" [My daughter-in-law] Laura found out [through her research] that he went to the hospital. He fell off the incline. [My sister] Angie still doesn't believe it. My story wasn't as dramatic as her story.

**TC:** And that was your mother's father?

**GA:** Yes, he died. Of course, there was no Social Security or anything, so my mother was a teenager, I think 13 or 14 [when her father died]. Her dad worked

at the glass factory so they allowed her to come and take his job. She married at 16 and so she had to be at the factory at 13 or 14 because she helped to support the family at that time.

**TC:** Now you said that the Veltris had a grocery store on Woodland Avenue ...

**GA:** Woodland Avenue. The house is still there, big grey house, and the grocery store was on the first floor.

**TC:** Who founded the grocery store?

**GA:** My grandmother and grandfather.

**TC:** And that's the Veltri family?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** What were their names?

**GA:** Pietro Veltri and he married Francesca Suriano in Belmonte.

**TC:** So they were the first ones to come here?

**GA:** Yes. Well, my grandfather came first.

**TC:** Did they marry over in Belmonte?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** Oh, they came to Washington?

**GA:** Well, only he came.

**TC:** Why did he come to Washington?

**GA:** Truthfully, he kept saying for a better life. From pictures, the house [in Belmonte] looked beautiful. But the ground was hilly and dry, making it difficult to farm.

**TC:** And then why did he choose Washington? Did he know anybody?

**GA:** Relatives.

**TC:** Who was the relative?

**GA:** I really don't know. He just had a relative, either in Washington or Vandergrift. My grandfather bought his first farm in Masontown and then this farm on Country Club Road.

**TC:** When he came, he came to this area to farm? It wasn't to work in factory or labor? And then Francesca, his wife, eventually came over?

**GA:** This picture is of my grandmother Veltri, my dad, and Aunt Louise when they came to America after my grandfather. There were many years in between.

**TC:** So those were the two born in Italy? And then the rest of the children were born here?

**GA:** No, there was only the two of them. [My grandmother] had a lot of miscarriages.

**TC:** After your grandfather started farming, how did their lives unfold?

**GA:** Well, they did farming and that's all he had. He heard that there were glass factories and such. He understood by now that he could not live on farming. He heard that there were many glass factories in Washington, PA, and that's when he bought the farm on Country Club Road. And then he built the home on Woodland and underneath he put a grocery store.

**DT:** So he actually built the home that the store was located in?

**GA:** Yes, he built that home with my dad by hand. And everybody lived above. Aunt Louise, my mom and dad. My mom kept having babies and they were all up there. So my grandfather and my dad built a small house behind the house. If you look at the grey house where the store was located, and you look behind it, you'll see a very small house off the alley that runs behind and that's where they built the house. So that's where my dad moved in with [our family] and had to pay rent.

**DT:** What was the name of the store?

**GA:** Veltris.

**TC:** So your grandfather realized that he was not going to make a living on farming. Did he go work in factory?

**GA:** First, he had the Country Club Road farm and then he got a job at the glass factory. Then he built the first house that had the grocery store. And then my dad was old enough to go work in the tin mill. The old tin mill was where the

Washington Steel was. It was before Washington Steel. So my dad was a married man working at the tin mill and living in the back house.

As a family, the Veltris were a unit. After a visit to the hospital for my ruptured appendix, my father, with the help of my two brothers, worked to pay off the bill to the hospital. My brother Pete would go to school, come home and fix supper, go to Brockway [Glass] and work, come home after midnight, sleep a couple of hours, get up to help my mother, and go back to school again. My brother Paul also worked to help pay off the hospital bill. And then during Pete's senior year, they drafted him in the Second World War. He left high school and then they took my brother Paul out of high school and they were both drafted. I think Paul might have been able to graduate. Pete definitely was not able to graduate. They drafted him and they were both gunners on battleships. I said to my brother Pete, "What did you do?" He said, "Well they strapped me in and you just did the best you could." Then they drafted him again for the Korean War, poor Pete, and picked up where he had left off to help with the cleaners.

**TC:** Let's go back to your siblings. Pete had the cleaners. And Paul, what was his occupation?

**GA:** He worked in a steel mill in Bridgeville.

**TC:** Eugene?

**GA:** Worked at a paper company in Washington.

**TC:** Dolly?

**GA:** Worked at the cleaners and Bell Telephone and then got married.

**TC:** Angie worked at the courthouse?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** Victor?

**GA:** Victor, it's pretty interesting. He was studying to be a Navy Seal and something happened. He was performing night maneuvers. He was dropped from the plane when they were too close to the ground. My sister got a call to come to Philadelphia because he was dying. It was blood clots from the fall. So Victor left the service. He has scars all over his legs. My brothers all worked very hard and did extremely well.

**TC:** Did he start his own business?

**GA:** He worked in construction and then started his own construction company.

**TC:** And Michael?

**GA:** Michael went in the service and came out and worked for the post office.

**TC:** So going back to the grocery store, did your grandmother Francesca run the store?

**GA:** My Aunt Louisa ran it with her

mother. And then Aunt Louisa, the story goes that she liked one of the neighbor boys but grandpap didn't particularly like him. So he went to fix her up with Patsy Porto, the Porto family. They were most gorgeous couple if you ever see their wedding pictures. They were absolutely stunning.

**TC:** Your father, Salvatore, went to work in the tin mill and married your mother. He was fixed up with her.

**GA:** He also sang in a band. He sang opera on various radio stations. Of course, when we were little and we would be going to Kennywood [Amusement Park], no air conditioning in the car, packed in two deep, and we're just sitting there <singing> and of course we were embarrassed.

**TC:** Aside from Pietro and Francesca, did they have any brothers and sisters that came to the US?

**GA:** No. For an Italian family, this was unusual. But they did have a house full of people, because I do know they took in boarders. Men that came here and saved their money, and they were sending money home and saving enough money to bring their families to America. My father would make his barrel of wine, and I can remember it was a nickel for a glass. They didn't have money to spend and they would sit around the kitchen table visiting. It was wonderful. I didn't know what we didn't have. I felt sorry for those other people. I didn't know if they felt sorry for me, but I felt sorry for them.

**TC:** What other memories do you have from the neighborhood?

**GA:** That the women worked hard. They were hanging sheets and sweeping off the sidewalks. They kept that neat as a pin. And they would do it for each other. My strongest memory is my dad, you know the air raid warden, he'd put on his helmet, and everybody has to shut the blackout curtains, and my mother had a flag with two stars that corresponded to her two sons, two teenagers in the war.

My mother was a real sweetheart and never got mad. My mother was dead for 20 years and people would say "I still miss your mother." You know, they had tears in their eyes 20-30 years later because she worked so hard. We had the farm out past Woldale because her brother, Uncle Frank, and her sister Aunt Theresa, knew that my mother wanted her own place. So, there was a farm for sale. I think they each pitched in \$3,000 and they each took 1/3 of the farmland. They gave my mother the strip that had the house, the barn, the springhouse. That's what they did for my mother. She was just happy as a lark.

We ate very well. We didn't make money on the farm because there were no farmer markets. We ate very well, but we worked very hard. My son likes to cook gourmet foods. He said, "You never canned tomatoes; you bought cans of tomatoes." I said, "Because when I was young we canned 300 to 400 jars of tomatoes." It held no glamour for me.

**TC:** And where did you go to high school?

**GA:** Trinity. Wolfdale grade school and then Trinity High School.

**TC:** So you left your ethnic neighborhood?

**GA:** We were the first Catholic Italians in Wolfdale.

**DT:** How was that?

**GA:** Different.

**TC:** You named the streets, Paul Street, Veltri Drive ...

**GA:** Paul Street, Veltri Drive, and a little alley that I always called Erpie Alley. My brother Eugene's nickname was Erpie. Where they got Erpie, I don't know. But it was Erpie Alley. One day, I noticed the sign said "Angeline Drive." My sister said that someone had called and said that the road needed a name. Basically, my sister, Angeline, renamed the road.

**TC:** So is it still called Angeline Drive?

**GA:** Well, they only started it about half a year ago. Until then, we lovingly called it Erpie Alley.

**TC:** Veltri Drive and Paul Street.

**GA:** Two older brothers. And that's why I gave the alley Erpie Alley, because he was the hell raiser. One time there was a letter in the newspaper [about how some]

people had blown their tire and told them just to go. And [the woman] sent a letter to the editor. She said his name was "Earpie" or something like that, but it was Erpie. He had a heart of gold. A hell raiser, though.

**TC:** And your mother inspired you to not wallow in [prejudice and discrimination]?

**GA:** No, no. My dad wouldn't put up with it. My mother took the nice approach. [Allan enters the room.] Girls, this is my husband, Allan.

**Allan Adamsky:** Hi, ladies.

**TC:** So you describe your mother as a very nice woman, everybody loved her. She had good strong opinions.

**GA:** Well, she had positive opinions, but she would tell you in very humble voice, "Now, you know, you've got to feel sorry for them." Whereas my dad would say, "Stupid jackass," and he eliminated them like that. My dad didn't suffer [fools]. In fact, when Allan came home with a red beard after I canceled my wedding with Stan, my father was shocked. Who knew a man with black hair could have a red beard? My dad didn't trust him, but grew to love him very much.

**AA:** And now it's a white beard.

**TC:** You talked a little about your brother Pete and how when he started the cleaners, there was a question about whether he should use the name Veltri.

**GA:** And several Italians said, "You know, if you put Veltri, those other people aren't going to bring their cleaning." And my brother Pete said, "My name's Veltri. I'll name it what I want, I'm working hard." So he put it on the trucks, he put it on the cleaners, and did extremely well. That was it.

**TC:** You said your brother Pete learned to be a tailor from a Ruffalo?

**GA:** It was a cousin of Nick Ruffalo. He had a cleaners and he taught Pete how to sew. Sandy [Ruffalo] might know. But Pete could make a suit by hand.

**TC:** Tell me about your dad's personality.

**GA:** My dad could do everything. He could hunt, he could fish, he could build a house, he could fix a car. One time, he and little Joe killed 27 rabbits. Little Joe was very short and my dad was tall for an Italian. In the picture, they are each holding one end of a rope with 27 rabbits. Then they went and handed them out. Tastes like chicken when you soak it in salt water. Now it's a delicacy. Outside of that he always had menial jobs. He worked in the factory, he tended the bar at the Alpine [Italian lodge]. And it really was to bring in just enough. But when my brothers came home from the service, of course, it all went into the pot. We started living very well. My brother Pete went to the farm out Wolfdale when he came back from the Second World War. We had bought the farm while he was gone. He was like, "Mom, where's the bathroom?" It was an outhouse. And Pete said,

"What?" She was ashamed to tell him. And so, the next day my brother Pete went up to McVehil's and within days we had an indoor bathroom. That was his severance pay. He thought nothing of it and spent all of it on the bathroom. I found my mother's letters to Pete. She didn't have much to say but wrote him a letter each day so that at "mail call" there would always be something for him.

**TC:** So you're describing a very supportive family.

**GA:** Oh, God, yes. They would do anything for anybody. We built this house and my neighbors couldn't get over the fact that my brothers helped to build it. My brother Pete was our contractor. Allan was an engineer and was traveling. The neighbor said, "What do they get paid?" I said, "You don't pay a brother."

My youngest brother, Mike, was delivering mail in Canonsburg and got bit by a dog. He went to emergency, had his leg all wrapped up, but he knew that the concrete at the house was settling. So he hurried over here and did the concrete. Pete was here three or four times a day, and he would get all of the brothers here to work. We could never afford to build the house by ourselves.

**TC:** And it sounds like your parents fostered that.

**GA:** Oh, yes, because some parents foster things that aren't so very nice. Everything is always someone else's fault. When we

complained, my dad [would say], “Look in the mirror. You got a complaint, look in the mirror first and then we’ll talk.” And that was my dad. He didn’t want to hear it until you could prove that something was not necessarily your fault. Then he would listen to your complaint.

**TC:** What about Pietro and Francesca, what were their personalities like?

**GA:** They had a hard life and that was their personality. Grandma ran the store. When you went to Grandma’s, you got a Hershey Bar, she always had Hershey bars to hand out. And my grandfather was a very strong man. I didn’t know him very well because he, of course, worked very hard. And my mother used to tell me this story: when I was born, for some reason the way I laid in the womb, my nose was to a side. [My grandfather] was horrified. My mother said every chance she got, she would go like this (demonstrates bending her nose straight). It eventually straightened up. [My mother said], “Virginia, whenever I came near your nose, I wasn’t even touching your nose and you would start screaming.” My grandfather smiled but never said a word.

**TC:** What about your mother’s side? How did she end up in Washington, PA? Was she born here?

**GA:** Yes, she was born here.

**TC:** And what about her side of the family?

**GA:** Grandma Matragrano had a hard

life. I don’t remember my grandpap, he was gone when I came along. But I remember her as a hard, hard woman.

**TC:** Were there superstitions or traditions that you remember?

**GA:** The traditions. The Christmas Eve, the seven fishes. We still do it to this day. We rent the Alpine [Lodge], and there’s about 80 that go down. We do the fishes, we still do it. And someone dresses up as Santa. My kids come in from Georgia, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Alabama, North Carolina, and wherever they live.

**TC:** So you all do that on Christmas Eve. Go to the Alpine and you have family gathering of 70 people.

**GA:** Right. The kids. The grandkids. Two extra generations. The only trouble is we older ones are dying off, but the young ones are stepping up to the plate, slowly. They have to understand, I said to them, “If you let this [seven fishes tradition] stop, it will be hard to start again.” That’s all I tell them. I don’t whine. It’s like our boys, they all went to college. They all earned their own way. We gave them \$1000 a year that was it. And this woman said, “Your boys are so smart, they should go to MIT, this and that.” I said, “Did you want to give them a scholarship?” They went to Penn State. They did fine. It’s not where you get your degree, it’s what you do with it. They understood that.

**TC:** Tell me a little about this relationship with the Alpine Club?

**GA:** Well, my grandfather was one of the founding members. There were about 12 men who realized that they needed a place to relax and socialize. My [wedding] shower was there. My wedding reception was there. It was all at the Alpine.

**TC:** That was the common place for the Italians, especially for the people that lived in Tylerdale?

**GA:** Well, and whoever came to town they would go play a hand of cards and had a little whiskey and that was it. They wanted companionship. That's what it was.

**TC:** And then they probably were affiliated with Sons and Daughters of Italy?

**GA:** Yes, because it was in Pittsburgh. We still get the [Italian] paper to this day.

**TC:** So your grandfather built the house first?

**GA:** That's what she [my sister, Angie] said, but I find that hard to believe. But she said that he built the store first and then he let grandma run the store, and bought the farm in Masontown. And when that didn't pan out he bought the farm on Country Club Road ... My brother Pete could have told you everything. It's so frustrating with him gone.

**TC:** Did his children ever interview him to get his memories?

**GA:** No.

**TC:** He became the leader of the family?

**GA:** He was like my father. He was the one that would help anybody. If you had a problem, if it was money, whatever it was, you went to Pete. It is really like that.

**TC:** In your house, did you speak Italian?

**GA:** Angie just reminded me of that story, when my grandpa took my brothers to work on the farm in Masontown, he only spoke Italian to them. When they came back to Clark School speaking Italian, they were told if you didn't speak English, you didn't come to school. So from that point on Italian wasn't spoken in the house. Now, my dad would have spoken a mishmash of Italian and English. It's funny now because my nieces' and nephews' kids want to know how to speak Italian.

**TC:** And did your family subscribe to an Italian language newspaper?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** And did they listen to Italian radio shows?

**GA:** Oh, God, yes. On Sunday afternoons.

**TC:** And did your parents become involved in politics?

**GA:** Ah, not involved in politics per se

but there were so many of us that everybody knew to talk to Sam Veltri if you were going to run for office or something because there were so many votes in our family. We must have right now maybe 60. But, no, that was not their [thing]. They worked for a living. My dad would tell you, "I had to work." There would be no time for politics.

**TC:** And you got married at St. Hilary's? Is that the church the family went to?

**GA:** Yes. Well, first it was a Polish Catholic Church and all the masses when I went were in Polish. And then it slowly went into English.

**TC:** Did your dad become an American citizen?

**GA:** Yes.

**TC:** Is there anything that you want to add?

**GA:** No, I can't think of anything. It was my brother, Pete, who had the stories. But you say memories, we always had spontaneous gatherings where Nick [Ruffalo] would come up on the squeeze box, my dad would pass out wine, and we kids would dance in the yard until we were ordered into the house. We all laughed. And how good a Hershey bar from Grandma would taste. Oh, boy, you couldn't wait to get that, but that's all. You went to visit them from the farm. We walked up Maple Terrace. To us, that was exciting because they had street lights. It was dark out at the farm. But I just

remember that you would go out on the street and there was always someone to talk to, somebody to play with, these little old women sitting on that bench in front of the store, Polish, Italian. The different ethnic voices are what I really miss. Just the love of a big family, neighborhood, church, and that was it. That was your world.

**TC:** You're a visual artist. Did you ever do any drawings or paintings?

**GA:** Just in college. My mother died. Then I was home. I was going to transfer to the University of Cincinnati. I went there and I got all my paperwork ready, but there was no one to take care of the house.

**TC:** Did you ever have any inspiration to try to capture some visual elements from your childhood?

**GA:** No, quite honestly, our life has been so full. Somebody once said to me, "I was too busy living." So there was never the time. Allan traveled with his job, then I went to work as an employee of the hospital. When I retired from the hospital, my son bought me paints, watercolors, and they thought I was going to "find myself." It couldn't happen. First of all, I have arthritis, I've had surgeries, but I can still cook and bake. Instead, I enjoy my spare time being with people. I volunteer at the hospital, the church, and several other organizations. The give and take of conversation is always exciting.

A little story about my mother: They had

a woman at the bottom where the farm is who took care of welfare kids, and they loved my mother. They knew Wednesday was baking day. So all these little kids who had no home life would come up the hill. This little Tippy, he had little buck teeth, poor Tippy, nobody had money to spend on Tippy. I felt so bad for him. And my mother said, "Tippy, go wash your hands." He would disappear and my dad would walk in with his lunch bucket and he'd say, "Salvina, what are all these kids doing in here?" And Tippy particularly loved my mom. And all of them would sit like this (quietly). And [my mom] would ignore [my dad] because she knew that he was joking [when he said] "Now, you mean I've got to feed all these kids?" And of course my dad would wash up and come sit down and everyone would start to eat.

That was my home. The [kids] knew that every Wednesday Mrs. Veltri made bread and meatballs and sauce. So they knew Mrs. Veltri would give them meatballs and Italian bread. My dad would ruffle [Tippy's] hair when he walked by. Sometimes there would be five or six kids that didn't belong to us. They knew my mother baked bread and she wasn't going to turn them away. She made her own cheese, provolone. She made cottage cheese, ricotta. Eggs, whatever she had, you had. This went on for years, she fed those kids. That's how we grew up—sharing.


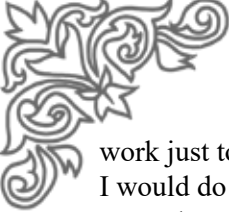
### **Additions, September 5, 2017:**

**GA:** My dad would give a whistle and when he whistled, three or four [Veltri] children would run home. Everybody else on the street knew that if Mr. Veltri whistled, they better go. You could hear him down to Viehmann's Drug Store, practically. You didn't wait for a second one, that's how loud it was. And if it was loud, he was mad and boy, were you in trouble.

We didn't have the fancy things kids have today. We had newspaper rolled into a ball with masking tape or glued together, and that was our ball. Someone said to me recently, "Kids today don't go to church as much anymore." I said, "That's because they have too much. Let the bad times come, they'll trip over each other getting into church."

[Back then] it was safe. Nobody bothered anybody. Women used to sweep the sidewalks, nobody does that now. My mother would sneak over to visit her friend, Annie Yaros, a couple of streets over, so she could chat a little over the fence. My mother [felt] renewed, she had female companionship. Now everyone shuts their door [and stays inside].

We didn't have much money, but often times on Sundays, my mother would prepare dinner. She would wrap it all up, stuffed peppers and everything, and put it in the trunk and we would go to Wheeling Park. She just wanted her kids to be out and about. Later in life, I thought to myself, I wouldn't do this



work just to take supper to the park, and I would do a lot for my kids. But she so wanted us to be happy.

On Italian Day at Kennywood, we would go there and my father would sit at the [entertainment stage] and sing along with the performers. And my mother would let him have his day. It was their little bit of Italy.

The Veltri reunion started with my dad over 70 years ago and then my brother Pete took it upon himself when my dad was not well. My brother Pete held the family together, he was everything. If you didn't have a job, he found something for you to do at the cleaners. Then when he started the trucking company, he did the same thing. And now my nephew Sammy Veltri (Pete's oldest son) sponsors the summer Veltri reunions at his home. He stepped in when his dad [Pete] died. This newer generation is branching out and still works very hard to maintain their family connections. My four sons are all engineers, are in different states and yet try to make it home for the Veltri reunion in the summer, Christmas Eve, and other family events.

## **Sara Jane (Sally) and Mary Elizabeth Aloia**

**Daughters of Giuseppe Joseph Aloia  
and Letizia (Daisy) Martino Aloia**





Sisters Sara Jane (Sally) and Mary Elizabeth Aloia grew up with their six siblings on Houston and Rural streets on the hillside south of East Maiden Street in Washington. Their hardworking parents, Giuseppe Joseph Aloia and Letizia (Daisy) Martino Aloia, made a name for themselves with their hillside farm that not only fed their family but also the community through farmers' markets and door-to-door sales. "Everything we ate came from the garden," Mary said. "Only flour, sugar and oil came from the store."

Giuseppe emigrated to Washington around 1908. After Giuseppe's mother died, his father Domenico and his siblings also came to Washington. They lived on lower East Prospect Avenue, a popular street for Italians. One day, Giuseppe saw

a photograph of Letizia Martino of Bellosquardo, Province of Salerno, Naples, in the home of one of his Italian neighbors, who was Letizia's aunt. Based only on her photograph, Giuseppe proclaimed, "I want to marry her." In 1914 he did exactly that, marrying Letizia at Immaculate Conception Church.

Like many other Italians who emigrated to the United States, Giuseppe and Letizia sought opportunities that were lacking in poverty-stricken southern Italy. Washington was an obvious choice of location for Giuseppe because many other families had settled here from his hometown of Aquara, Province of Salerno, Naples. In fact, Aquara and Bellosquardo are among the most frequently represented Italian hometowns in the city of Washington.



Like most immigrants, Giuseppe and Letizia struggled to make a living in their new country. They and their children pulled together to farm, sell produce, and take care of the home. Early on, the Aloias faced typical discrimination against Italians, but the family thrived through perseverance and hard work, and acceptance came over time. In 1953, Sally became one of several Italian Americans who went to work at Bell Telephone. Mary was employed as a clerk in Taylor's Pharmacy in the George Washington Hotel for 32 years. Their nephew George Chicora was the first Italian American to work for the *Washington Observer-Reporter*.

Today, Sally and Mary pride themselves on the cooking and gardening skills their parents instilled in their family. They are surrounded by 18 nieces and nephews, as well as great- and great-great nieces and nephews. The sisters spend their days together, enjoy the company of relatives who stop by frequently, and keep true to their Italian traditions.

March 2017



Letizia Martino Aloia (mother of Mary and Sally Aloia) with grandchildren Lu Anne Aloia and George Chicora, 1950s. Remains of chicken coop are in background.



The Aloia family c. 1940: (front row) sisters Mary, Pearl, and Sally; (back row) siblings Lou, Rose, and Domenic, father Giuseppe, sister Virginia, mother Letizia, sister Louise



Domenico Aloia, paternal grandfather of Mary and Sally



Virginia Aloia, top left, the oldest daughter of Giuseppe and Letizia Aloia, cared for younger siblings while their parents worked on the family farm in the south end of the city.



Giuseppe Aloia's garden on Rural Avenue Extension, 1950s



## Family Tree of Sara Jane (Sally) Aloia and Mary Elizabeth Aloia

### **Sally and Mary's Father:**

- Giuseppe Aloia, b. 3-9-1891, Aquara, Province of Salerno, Naples; d. 4-1-1970

### **Sally and Mary's Mother:**

- Letizia (Daisy) Martino  
b. 9-17-1894, Bellosquardo, Province of Salerno, Naples; d. 6-3-1980, Washington

### **Giuseppe and Letizia's date and place of marriage:**

- 9-24-1914, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

### **Giuseppe and Letizia's Children:**

- Virginia Aloia, b. 10-25-1915, Washington; d. 3-17-2000; m. John Chicora
- Dominic George Aloia, b. 2-22-1918, Washington; d. 5-25-1960
- Mary Elizabeth Aloia, b. 7-14-1920, Washington; d. 12-22-2018
- Rosa Aloia, b. 3-3-1923, Washington; d. 3-14-2009; m. Warren Taylor; m. 2nd Roy Salisbury
- Louise Aloia, b. 9-24-1926, Washington; d. 10-31-1979; m. Frank Jones
- Louis (Luigi) Patrick Aloia, b. 3-17-1929, Washington; m. Vernadine Davis
- Pearl Aloia, b. 7-25-1932, Washington; d. 11-25-2016; m. Frank DeLuca

- Sara Jane (Sally) Aloia, b. 9-30-1935, Washington

### **Giuseppe's Parents:**

- Domenico Aloia and Virginia Marchese

### **Domenico and Virginia's Children:**

- Giovanni (John) Aloia
- Angeline Aloia DeLuca
- Mary Aloia Churcio
- Giuseppe Aloia, b. 3-9-1891, Aquara, Province of Salerno, Naples; d. 4-1-1970
- Luigi Aloia, m. Esterina Martino
- Teresa Aloia Dolicamore
- Lucido Aloia, m. Stella Lucerne

### **Letizia (Daisy's) Parents:**

- Francesco Martino and Maria Macchiaroli Martino

### **Francesco's and Maria's Children:**

- Letizia (Daisy) Martino, b. 9-17-1894, Bellosquardo, Province of Salerno, Naples; d. 6-3-1980
- Esterina Martino, m. Luigi Aloia, Washington
- Josephine Martino (was a nun in Italy)

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

March, 27, 2017; 1:35 pm; home of Sally and Mary Aloia

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Others Present:** Dyane Troiano

**Transcriber:** Dyane Troiano

**Editors:** Tina Calabro and Sally Aloia

**Tina Calabro:** Today we are interviewing Sally and Mary Aloia about their experiences as Italian Americans growing up in Washington. Mary, what is your full name?

**Mary Aloia:** Mary Elizabeth

**TC:** Sally, your full name is?

**Sally Aloia:** My proper name is Sara Jane. Why they called me Sally, I don't know.

**TC:** Mary, your date of birth?

**MA:** July 14, 1920.

**TC:** Where were you born?

**MA:** Here in Washington on Houston Street. Elaine D'Agostino Romano's house.

**SA:** Elaine Romano lives there now.

**TC:** Sally, how about you?

**SA:** I was born right here in the bedroom where I sleep now. I was the only one born here. Mary, Dominic, and Rosie were born on Houston Street., Virginia on lower East Prospect. Then they came to

Rural Avenue in the big house next door. That's where Louise, Louis, and Pearl were born. Then they moved here in June of 1935, and I was born in September.

**TC:** Are you the youngest?

**SA:** I'm the youngest of eight.

**TC:** What was your father's name?

**SA:** Giuseppe (Joseph) Aloia.

**TC:** What was his birthday?

**MA:** March 9, 1891.

**TC:** Where was he born?

**SA:** He was born in Aquara, Province of Salerno, Naples.

**TC:** Then your mother?

**SA:** Letizia Martino Aloia, born in Bellosquardo, Province of Salerno, Naples. When she lived on Houston Street, her Irish English neighbors—they were nice people—but one of them said, "Mrs. Aloia, we can't pronounce 'Letizia.' We'll call you Daisy. See the flowers blooming there? That's what they are called."

**TC:** Did she go by Daisy?

**MA:** She went by Daisy.

**TC:** For the rest of her life?

**SA:** Yes. [Mary and Sally both laugh.]

**TC:** What was her birthday?

**SA:** September 17, 1894.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**SA:** Bellosquardo, Province of Salerno, Naples.

**TC:** Have either of you ever been married?

**SA:** No. We are two old maids. We baby our nieces and nephews.

**TC:** How many do you have?

**SA:** [starts counting] Eighteen. We lose count of the great- and great-great nieces and nephews.

**TC:** That's wonderful! What about work experience?

**MA:** I worked for 32 years at the George Washington Hotel as a clerk.

**SA:** There was a drug store there—Taylor's Pharmacy. She worked there.

**MA:** I worked at the fountain. Served and everything for 32 years.

**SA:** But before that ...

**MA:** I worked for six years for Presbyterian Senior Care. It was Hillsvew Sanitarium then.

**TC:** What did you do at Hillsvew?

**MA:** I worked in the dining room.

**TC:** Then to Taylor's Pharmacy. Did you cook there?

**MA:** I made mostly sandwiches, and also worked at the Miscellaneous counter.

**SA:** Before Hillsvew, she did housework for people on LeMoyne Avenue.

[Train whistle can be heard in the distance.]

**TC:** I hear a train. Does that go by every day?

**SA:** Yes, but usually a little later in the day.

**TC:** Sally, what work did you do?

**SA:** I worked for Bell Telephone Co. I started there as an operator in 1953. In 1956, we went to dial. Before that, the operator would ask, "Number please?" The operator would then connect the caller to the person they were calling. When [Bell Telephone] went to dial they didn't need as many operators in town. A good many transferred to Pittsburgh. I worked in Pittsburgh for 40 years in the engineering department Downtown

on Stanwix Street. Before that, I was here on East Beau Street.

**TC:** What did you do in the Engineering Department?

**SA:** I was filing, then I was a supervisor. I retired in 1995. I was in various carpools. The last 15 years, I was fortunate enough to get in a van pool. We women didn't have to drive. That was nice. I was once in a carpool with four men. I was the only woman, and I had to take my turn driving no matter what kind of weather it was.

**TC:** So how many years with Bell?

**SA:** 42 years.

**TC:** So now we'll talk about your siblings. Their names, birthdates, where they were born, and their occupations.

**SA:** Ok. Start with Virginia. She was born October 25, 1915.

**TC:** Her occupation?

**SA:** Well, sorry to say, the older ones didn't graduate high school. They quit and got jobs to help the family. Virginia did housework, worked at the George Washington Hotel, Hillview Sanitarium and Duncan and Miller glass factory. Then she got married and had six children. Her husband worked at the water company.

**TC:** What was her married name?

**SA:** Chicora. Her children are Cecelia, George, Paul, John (T.T.), Judy, and Mary Jane. George now owns Kurtz Monument Company and several other monument companies in western PA.

**TC:** Next in line after Virginia?

**SA:** Dominic. He was possibly the only grandson my mother's mom got to see [but I think our cousin Ben got to see her too]. Dominic was stationed in Foggia, Italy, [during] World War II. On weekends, he would get a pass and visit my grandmother. He worked at Hazel Atlas before entering the service. When he returned from the service after four years, he wasn't that well. He died at the age of 42.

**Dyane Troiano:** His birthdate?

**MA:** February 22, 1918.

**TC:** So he died in 1960. What about Virginia?

**SA:** She died March 17, 2000.

**TC:** You are next in line, Mary, on Houston Street?

**MA:** Yes, on July 14, 1920.

**TC:** Then next?

**MA:** Rose was born March 3, 1923.

**TC:** When did she die?

**MA:** She died on March 14, 2009, and

buried on St. Patrick's Day.

**TC:** Was Dominic married?

**SA:** No.

**TC:** Was Rose married?

**SA:** She was married twice. She married Warren Taylor. They had two children—Warren and Carol. Then they divorced and she married Roy Salisbury.

**MA:** They had three children—Alfreda, Rose, and Roy Jr.

**TC:** Was your sister Rose born on Houston Street?

**MA:** Yes.

**TC:** Did she work?

**MA:** That was World War II. She worked at Duncan and Miller with Virginia, and after as a clerk at Nickles Bakery.

**TC:** Then Louise. What year was she born?

**MA:** 1926 on September 24. Louise was born here 186 Rural Avenue.

**TC:** Was she married?

**SA:** She married Frank Jones. They had three sons—Frank, Bob and Kevin.

**TC:** When did Louise die?

**SA:** October 31, 1979.

**TC:** Did she work?

**SA:** At Duncan and Miller.

**TC:** What year was Louis born?

**SA:** March 17, 1929, on Rural Avenue. He worked at the A&P. He married Vernadine Davis. They had two children—Lu Anne Aloia-Uram who lives in Naples, Florida, and Joseph Mark Aloia. Joseph owns Pancake Towing. His father Lou and his son Joe Jr. are employed there. His mother Vernadine is the night dispatcher and his daughter Lauren is the day dispatcher. Joe Sr.'s son Steven works elsewhere.

**MA:** Pearl is next.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**MA:** July 25, 1932. She passed away November, 2016. She was on dialysis for 10 years. She was born on Rural Avenue. She worked at Montgomery Ward and then Bell Telephone.

**TC:** Was she married?

**MA:** Yes and had two girls—Lori Mariano and Lisa. Pearl married Frank DeLuca.

**TC:** Let's talk about your parents. Where did they meet?

**SA:** Dad lived on lower East Prospect

and Mama's aunt lived next door. He saw a picture of Mama and he sent for her.

**TC:** So your father was born in Italy and came here by himself?

**SA:** Yes, he came by himself then went back to Italy once after his mother died. His father and most of his siblings then came to Washington. Their youngest was eight years old.

**TC:** How old was your father when he first came over?

**SA:** I think he was about 15 or 16 years old.

**TC:** What was your dad's father's name?

**SA:** Domenico Aloia.

**TC:** What work did he do?

**SA:** When he came here, he worked for Hazel Atlas Glass Company.

**TC:** Did your grandfather ever remarry?

**MA:** No, he never did.

**TC:** How many children did Domenico and his wife have?

**MA:** Seven. Giovanni, Angeline, Papa, Mary, Luigi, Teresa, Lucido. The youngest was Lucido. He remained very close. My mother was like a mom to him.

**TC:** Where did the family live when they first came here?

**SA:** They settled on lower East Prospect.

**TC:** So your mom was the niece of the neighbor of the Aloias?

**SA:** My dad told [my mother's] aunt he wanted to marry [my mother]. He sent for her. She came on a boat with her chaperone, Sabbatina Angelina, a friend from Italy.

**TC:** So, sight unseen, he sent for your mom? Had he heard anything about her?

**SA:** I would imagine so.

**TC:** So your mom gets here and meets her future husband. What was that like?

**SA:** I guess they liked each other. They agreed to marry. They were married at Immaculate Conception Church. It was located where the clock is now on the campus of W&J College. Mama said the day they were married there was a funeral going on. They had to wait in the vestibule in the back of the church. After the funeral Mass, she walked down the aisle.

**MA:** They were married in 1914, and Virginia was born in 1915.

**TC:** How much time did your parents get to know one another before marrying?

**SA:** A couple of months.

**TC:** Did your dad ever say what attracted him to your mother?

**SA:** She was blonde and blue-eyed. I guess he fell for her. That's our family photo on the wall.

**MA:** That's my mom with the white blouse. My mom had reddish blonde hair and blue eyes.

**SA:** Well, in fact, Mary, Virginia and Rose all were blonde and blue-eyed. The rest of us were darker. My pigtails were auburn. Now, here I am gray.

**TC:** Did your mom ever say why she liked your dad?

**SA:** No. She said they were so poor in Italy. She was glad to get out.

**TC:** Anyone else from her family come over?

**SA:** Yes, her sister Esterina. My father's brother Luigi saw a picture of my Mom's sister, Esterina, and he sent for her.

**MA:** So two brothers married two sisters.

**TC:** Was Esterina younger than your mother?

**SA:** Yes.

**MA:** She had another sister, Josephine.

**SA:** She was a nun in Italy.

**TC:** Luigi [Aloia] and Esterina [Martino] married and you had cousins?

**SA:** Yes, my cousin V. (Virginia). She's 96 years old. (Note: She died in June 2019.)

**DT:** Did Luigi and Esterina have other children?

**MA:** They had five—Dominic, V. (Virginia), Frankie, Benjamin, and Joey.

**TC:** So with your Mom's relatives and your Dad's, it was a big family here.

**SA:** Dad's sisters all moved to New York. My dad, Uncle John, and Uncle Lucido stayed here.

**TC:** Why did your Dad come here?

**SA:** It was so poor in Italy. They wanted to come for a better life. It was sad the way they lived. Worked so hard. He wanted to farm. They lived on Houston Street. They made gardens wherever there was land. Grew vegetables. Mrs. Quay lived on Elm Street. She said to my father, "Pap Aloia, you want to farm? There's a house up the hill for sale. A big field right across the road from it." Grandpap looked at the house and liked it. He bought it and they moved up there. He farmed the whole area. He brought vegetables to farmers markets in Pittsburgh. Beautiful produce. He farmed all the way up the hill because these other houses weren't there. My father believed that if you had a patch of land, water and sun, it was a sin not to put them to use. There was an attorney on East Maiden Street and Rural, on the corner in a big red brick house. He told my father he owned the land and the

field. The attorney said if you want to farm there, you can, but I want \$2.00 a month. My father said, "Sure, I'll pay you." So he paid. We later found out that man didn't own the land. The railroad did. My father would bring him the most beautiful produce.

**MA:** My father didn't speak English very well and this man took advantage of him. He saw my father didn't understand. My father worked so hard! He raised animals here too.

**SA:** He had a meat route. On Friday nights, my dad and Uncle Lucido's wife, Stella Lucern Aloia, would go to a farmer friend in Prosperity. They would slaughter and butcher the animals. Then early Saturday morning they would sell the meat to the neighbors. He did the same with the produce. What he didn't sell, my mother would can.

**MA:** That was the Depression. Real bad depression. Trying to raise eight kids. It made it hard on them and everyone at the time. I remember the Depression.

**TC:** Can you describe how poor your family was?

**MA:** It was very poor. Relatives lived together in one home to try and help each other. Everything we ate came from the garden. We didn't go to the store. The only items my mother bought at the store were flour, oil, and sugar. The rest we got from the farm. The milk from the cows. We made our own butter. It was better than what you buy at the stores today. My

mother made our clothing from flour sacks. She carried sacks of flour up the hill. She lived to be 85 years old. We had no car. We walked everywhere.

**SA:** She had three or four cows that she milked. One cow wouldn't let anyone but my mother touch her. My mother would have babies, stay in bed one or two days, then get up and work the garden and milk the cows. By the time I was born, things were better. My sister Pearl and I went to Washington High School. To go to school, we had 50 cents for a pass to ride to school all week.

**MA:** We didn't have that. We had to walk. That's why I quit.

**SA:** 1950, 51, 52, 53 ... we rode a streetcar.

**MA:** I had to walk.

**SA:** Pearl and I had it better than my older siblings did. They were working. Pearl got all the new clothes. I got the hand me downs. Pearl was a fun person. Very pretty girl and full of fun. One fourth of July, I had gotten a new blouse for babysitting or something. We were sitting on the front porch and Pearl was planning to go out. So I said to her, "I hope you didn't put on my new blouse; I just got that. Please give me the thrill of wearing something new this one time." She said, "I wouldn't wear that; it's ugly." I said, "Thank God!" Then my sister Rose said to me, "Let me see your new blouse." I went upstairs and the blouse wasn't there!

**MA:** Pearl had put her old blouse on over Sally's new one and went out!

**SA:** She was something! My parents were strict. We weren't allowed out. Our windows were low to the ground and Pearl would sneak out. She would put a baby doll in bed with me so Mama would think it was Pearl in bed. At night when she came home, I'd have to let her in through my window. My mother caught on. She didn't beat Pearl, she beat me because I didn't tell her what Pearl was doing. [Mary and Sally laugh.]

**TC:** When you moved to this house, you were how old?

**MA:** I was 15 years old.

**TC:** What did you think of this new house?

**MA:** I cried, I didn't like it. I missed the old house.

**SA:** Uncle Lucido and his family lived with my grandfather and us. It was a big house. Later, Uncle Lucido and his family bought a home on East Prospect Avenue and sold the one they had built. In 1950, the railroad bought the Bob Avenue house. They were going to tear the house down. My mother asked [the railroad] if we could buy it. The railroad sold it to [us] for \$500. [We] moved it after building a foundation to where it is now.

**MA:** It took three days. I watched them. Our brother Louis and his family moved into that home.

**TC:** Was this an Italian neighborhood?

**SA:** No. We were the only Italians on this hill, but down the hill there were many Italians. One day, we were taking a walk and passed a lady talking on the phone on her porch. She said, "Oh, here comes a bunch of dagos that live down the street."

**MA:** Yes, she said that.

**SA:** My aunt, Uncle Lucido's wife—she was Polish—said in Italian, "Oh, what she said!" My mother and Aunt Stella worked together in the garden and doing household chores.

**SA:** But by the time I went to school, I didn't encounter too much discrimination.

**TC:** Did you, Mary?

**MA:** Oh yes. I remember that! A few would say, "I don't want to be friends with Italians, they're dark. But you, Mary, you're fair. Why don't you Americanize your name? You girls could get a better job." But I would never change my name just to get a job. [We were proud of our Italian name.]

**SA:** By the time I went to high school, things were getting better. Florence Marchione Nicolella said that Russell Marino (possibly a state representative) went to Harrisburg and fought for the utilities to hire Italians. Florence was one of the first Italians hired at Bell Telephone.

**TC:** Talk about when the changes first

came about. Do you mean electric, water, and telephone companies?

**SA:** Yes. One of the Marinos—there were five brothers and one sister. Teresina was a teacher at Washington High School, Patsy was a judge. I'm not sure what the others did, but they were professional people. Russell Marino was the one who went to Harrisburg and fought for the utilities to start hiring Italians.

**TC:** How did you cope with it if you heard someone say something against Italians?

**SA:** Well, it upset you but you couldn't say much because they were the bosses and had the authority, and Mama told us to be kind to everyone and treat everyone as you would want to be treated.

**SA:** Our nephew, George Chicora, got a job at the Observer Publishing Company. He was congratulated by a lot of Italians because he was the first Italian to work there.

**MA:** The *Observer* didn't hire any Italians. He was the first.

**DT:** About when was that?

**SA:** About 1962 or 1963.

**TC:** All your siblings went to Washington High School?

**SA:** Yes, but some left school early. We are in the Washington School district. Trinity High School is closer, but we

were considered within walking distance of Wash High because we lived in the city.

**TC:** And you had to walk?

**MA:** That's the reason I didn't graduate. All that walking! So I started working. I do all right. I get social security. I don't make a lot but I pay my bills.

**SA:** And bosses me around!

**TC:** When your father came here, why did he choose Washington?

**SA:** That's where the paisanos were. The Marinos, Marchiones, Macchiarolis, Petrocellis, Cornettis, Demarias, Valituttis, Consolmagnos ...

**TC:** So he knew people from his hometown? Did they work at Hazel Atlas?

**SA:** Pretty much, or the brick yard or Kurtz Monument.

**TC:** All from his hometown?

**SA:** If not from Aquara, [they were from neighboring towns].

**TC:** Did they come through Ellis Island?

**SA:** Yes.

**TC:** Describe the personalities of your parents.

**SA:** Hard working. My father was strict. He had a kind heart, but strict.

**MA:** Yes, he was strict.

**SA:** My mother would come get you at a party if you were late. If you were supposed to be home at a certain time and you weren't home yet—yes, she would.

**MA:** We have Pearl's picture here. She was beautiful.

**TC:** Describe your mother.

**SA:** She was kind and quiet. She was meek and had a good heart. She wouldn't interrupt my dad if he was talking. He was strict with her, too.

**TC:** Once they came over, they knew they wouldn't return to Italy?

**SA:** Yes, because they were so poor there.

**TC:** Did you keep in touch with anyone there?

**SA:** Oh yes, my mother's mother and sister were there.

**TC:** Your mom didn't get to see them again?

**SA:** No. Our brother Dominic was the only one they got to see. But I think possibly our cousin Benny may have gotten to see her when he was stationed in Italy.

**TC:** When you were growing up, did you go to Immaculate Conception Church?

**SA:** Oh yes.

**TC:** Were there a lot of Italians there?

**SA:** Some, but also all nationalities.

**MA:** I miss going to church. I need assistance in walking so I don't get out much except for doctor appointments. A neighbor on Acre Drive brings us communion on Sundays.

**TC:** Who are some of your favorite priests?

**SA:** We liked and respected all of them. At my mother's funeral Mass, the priest, Father Ford, said, "Who would have thought someone in a little village in Italy would name their daughter Joy. That's what Letizia means in English."

**TC:** How old was your dad when he died?

**SA:** He was 79. He had uremic poisoning. They didn't have the medicine they have now. All the poison backed up in his blood stream and it killed him.

**TC:** What kind of things did you do for fun while growing up?

**MA:** Walk up the hill. One day, the neighbor's bulls chased us. I lost my shoe.

**SA:** We would go for walks, play kick ball, jacks, hide-and-seek, hopscotch. We were always outside.

**MA:** Jump-rope.

**MA:** Every Sunday we [older kids] would walk to the cemetery on Locust Avenue to visit my grandfather's grave. That was a long walk.

**TC:** So you grew up with your grandfather in the same house? What was his personality like?

**SA:** [He passed away three years before I was born.]

**MA:** He was a kind man but liked to drink. Oh, he drank! He'd take a gallon of wine. He made his own wine. He had an accordion. He'd go on the back porch, drink wine and sing.

**SA:** Neighbors would say, "There's Mr. Aloia." He was kind but don't get him mad.

**TC:** What about speaking Italian? Did everyone speak it at home?

**MA/SA:** We do speak it. The older nieces and nephews speak Italian also.

**TC:** Did your parents learn English?

**SA:** My mother could write and speak in English. She taught herself to read the newspaper. She signed our report cards. She did very well.

**MA:** My father spoke broken English, but he could not read or write in English.

**TC:** Did your grandfather learn English?

**MA:** Yes, but he had broken English.

**TC:** What did they do at Hazel Atlas?

**MA:** They were laborers. They shoveled glass and did various factory duties.

**SA:** We had a lot of glass factories—Brockway; Hazel Atlas 1, 2, and 3; Duncan and Miller; Tygart Valley; Washington Company.

**TC:** Did your parents read an Italian newspaper or listen to Italian radio shows?

**SA:** Every Sunday they listened to the Italian radio show.

**TC:** Tony Ortelli, my dad, listened to him. Did they belong to any Italian organizations?

**SA:** Mama did, the Sons and Daughters of Italy.

**MA:** I did too, but I can't get out anymore to go to the meetings.

**TC:** Did your parents have friends who weren't Italian?

**SA:** Oh yes. Several friends who were not Italian. My father used to buy his animals from farmers at auctions who were his friends but not Italians. [Also neighbors Biddle and Mary Long, and Mildred and Bert Ritchie.] My sister Pearl was named for one of the farm ladies. When I was born, they were going to name me Ruby after friends who sold my father animals. Mary spoke up and said, "No, Sara Jane." Thank God!

**MA:** Sara Jane was a friend of mine from school. So the doctor said, "What shall we name the new baby?" I was 15 years old so I said, "Sara Jane." My dad said, "Name her Sara Jane." All the kids were born at home. In a couple days, my mother was taking care of the animals and the garden.

**TC:** Did you parents become American citizens?

**SA:** Yes, they did.

**TC:** What Italian culture did they bring to the United States?

**SA:** The cooking traditions—all the pizzas, biscotti, baked goods, rice pie, ricotta pie, lasagne. Gardening skills. Love of opera. And hard work! And respect for everyone!

**MA:** My father raised the best tomatoes.

**SA:** He had a fig tree in the front yard. He would ask the city to dump most of the leaves they picked up around town in the yard. He used them to bury the tree for winter. [Several] Italians would come up in August to get figs. Louise Merlo in her 90's walked up the hill to get the figs.

**MA:** I always worked in the yard. I stopped at 95 years old, cleaning the bank over the hill.

**SA:** One time she got stuck down the bank. I didn't hear her yelling. Our neighbor helped her up the bank.

**MA:** I'm 97 now; how much longer will I be here? I need assistance in getting dressed. I have a lady who helps me bathe.

**SA:** I used to bathe her until we both fell. We were stuck until my niece Cecelia Wiley came to our rescue. God bless Cecelia. She calls us twice a day. Our niece, Carol Furmanek, who lives in West Finley, calls us frequently also.

**TC:** Any other story about growing up before we finish?

**MA:** I still sing the old songs in the mornings.

**SA:** She brushes her teeth and sings.

**MA:** My brother Dominic used to sing all the Italian songs. He had a beautiful voice. Mom used to sing, "O Sole Mio."

**SA:** Once, my mother and I were at the doctor's office in the waiting room and she started to sing. [She was getting a little dementia.] I told her "shhh," and an Italian man sitting there said, "Let her sing. If these people don't like it, the heck with them."

**TC:** Final words?

**SA:** We miss our parents, brothers and sisters, and other family members who are gone. All in all, we had a good family and a good life. And we hope our nieces and nephews keep our family traditions alive.



## Frank Insana

Son of Gabriel Insana and Concetta Catanese Insana




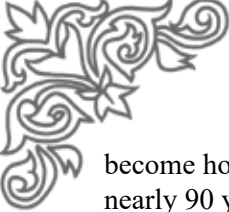
*Frank and his wife, Jean Lucciola Insana*

Frank Insana grew up on South Street in Washington, a veritable Italian village where families were known for helping one another.

Frank's father, Gabriel Insana, emigrated to Washington as a young man with his father, Antonio, and brother, Frank. They had a cousin in Washington who helped them find work in coal mines. When Gabriel's brother Frank got the flu and died, it prompted a return to Italy. Gabriel, however, decided to return to Washington once again and make a go of it. He married Concetta Catanese in Sicily in 1920. Concetta was pregnant with their

first child, Mary Ann, when she arrived in the United States in 1921.

Frank describes his father as a hard working man and very strict with his children. During Gabriel and Concetta's early years in Washington, their luck with houses was lacking. The roof of their first house on Woodland Avenue in Tylerdale—barely more than a shack—caved in. They saved money to build a better house on nearby Ohio Street, only to see it burn down during a botched neighborhood burglary. Good fortune struck when the Insana family found a home at 64 South Street, a congenial neighborhood that would



become home for the extended family for nearly 90 years.

Gabriel was one of the founding members of the Alpine Lodge #9, Washington. Concetta was a healer. She was a member of the Ladies Auxiliary of Vittoria Lodge #76. Concetta had eight brothers and sisters, all of whom remained in Italy, as did her parents. In addition to his brother, Frank, Gabriel had a brother Dominic, who settled in Cleveland.

Although Gabriel and Concetta faced their share of struggles as immigrants, they also found many things in their favor. Coincidentally, their son Frank's nickname is "Lucky," a moniker that proved to be true many times over in his lifetime. Before Frank was born, his father made the bold decision to take a chance on making a life in Washington instead of permanently remaining in Italy with his father. As a boy, Frank pulled a wad of cash from a burning mattress on Ohio Street. As a young man, Frank gained permission to date his future wife, Jean, when her father mistook him for his more well-to-do cousin. Now in his 90s, Frank and his wife Jean live a rich and full life in the warmth of the Italian neighborhood where he grew up.

July 2017



Gabriel and Concetta Catanese Insana

## Family Tree of Frank Insana

### Frank's Father:

- Gabriel Insana, b. 10-9-1894, San Pier Niceto, Messina, Sicily; d. 11-11-1980, Washington

### Frank's Mother:

- Concetta Catanese, b. 12-4-1900, San Pirnigeto, Messina, Sicily; d. 5-14-1957, Washington

### Gabriel and Concetta's date and place of marriage:

- 1-20-1920, Sicily

### Gabriel and Concetta's Children:

- Mary Ann Insana, b. 11-29-1921; d. 2-13-1999; m. Robert Roux, b. 11-14-1919; d. 2-10-1969
- Anthony V. Insana, b. 4-3-1923, Washington; d. 8-8-2018; m. Georgette
- Anna D. Insana, b. 12-4-1924, Washington; d. 8-4-2013; m. Carmen C., b. 10-10-1917; d. 3-31-1990; m. — LaSalvia
- Frank J. Insana, b. 8-3-1926, Washington, m. Jean Lucciola (b. 1-10-1929, Canonsburg, PA) on 1-22-1950
- Carmella (Nancy) Insana b. 3-25-1932, Washington; m. Carl W. Fish, b. 2-17-1927; d. 2-22-1983; m. 2nd Russell D. Podboy, b. 12-14-1919; d. 1-4-2012

### Frank's Paternal Grandparents:

- Antonio Insana and Maria

### Antonio and Maria's Children:

- Frank Insana (died in U.S. from flu)
- Gabriel Insana, b. 10-9-1891, San Pier Niceto, Messina, Sicily; d. 11-11-1980, Washington
- Dominic Insana (lived in Cleveland)

### Frank's Maternal Grandparents:

- Frank and Anna Previta Catanese

### Frank and Anna's Children:

- Concetta Catanese, b. 12-4-1900, San Pirnigeto, Messina, Sicily; d. 5-14-1957, Washington
- Frank
- Peter Catanese, m. Carmella
- Samuel
- Joseph
- Mariano
- Rose
- Ann
- Frances

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

July 16, 2017; 11:30 am; home of Frank and Jean Insana

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Others Present:** Jean Insana (spouse), Diana Insana Mooney (daughter)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Let's start out with some basic information. Where were you born?

**Frank Insana:** Over here in America. When my dad [Gabriel] came over, he got hooked up with another Insana, who owns a garage.

**TC:** What's his name?

**FI:** Frank and Esther Insana.

**TC:** Were they cousins?

**FI:** Yes. Their fathers were first cousins. [Gabriel and Frank] were second cousins.

**TC:** Did your father [Gabriel] come here by himself?

**FI:** He would come over here with his brother, Frank, and dad, Antonio. They'd work the coal mine. In the coal mine, it was about only three feet high. They'd work on their knees. His brother [Frank], on one of the trips here, got the flu and he died. That's when they all went back to Italy. Then, my dad came back. He'd wanted to stay here on one of the trips. [My dad's] father was taking him back to Italy and my father said he wanted to stay [in the U.S.] to see if he could get a job. [My dad] went to an Italian boarding

house. They were all Italian. He'd stay here, work in the mine, then go back to Italy.

**TC:** Do you know what street the boarding house was on?

**FI:** No. I just got this off of him. He didn't talk too much. My dad was very strict. My brother and I were sort of wild. But we didn't dare to challenge him. He was law and order. We were afraid of him, actually. Both of us were. I wasn't the youngest, but I was always kidding around with my sisters. There were five of us. I always made jokes. For example, my mother would clean broccoli. I saw her clean it, running water on it. Back in those days, they didn't have any way to get those little bugs off the vegetables.

**Diana Insana Mooney:** Pesticides.

**FI:** Yeah, they didn't have that. She'd have it in boiling water and that. But if I'd find one, I'd yell, "I found one!" Then nobody wanted to eat whatever my mother cooked. My dad would say, "You come here. Sit right by me." He'd hit me to be quiet. See, I was the agitator. Nancy was the youngest.

**TC:** There were three brothers that came

over here to the United States. Frank, your dad [Gabriel], and Dominic?

**FI:** I never knew that Frank. My father would visit Dominic in Cleveland.

**TC:** Did your father have any other brothers or sisters in Italy?

**FI:** No, I don't know any other.

**TC:** Jean, did you have an occupation?

**Jean Insana:** I was a seamstress and worked at the hospital.

**DIM:** You were a seamstress at Bobbie Brooks. Then, when that closed down, you went to the hospital.

**JJ:** I worked at the courthouse first. Then, from there, I went to Washington Hospital. [At Bobbie Brooks] I did the hemming part.

**DIM:** She used to make me a lot of clothes.

**TC:** Frank, you said that you worked at Brockway Glass. How many years did you work there?

**FI:** 40.

**TC:** What did you do there?

**FI:** I ended up as a quality control inspector. They offered me a foreman's job three times. I turned it down.

**TC:** You retired as a quality control

inspector.

**FI:** Yeah, I started there when I was 16.

**TC:** Frank, were you in the military?

**FI:** Yes, I was, during the Second World War.

**TC:** What year did you go into the service?

**FI:** I got drafted. I was 18. But they turned me down first. I always had a red mark on my completely flat feet. I got drafted again for the Korean War and was told by the draft board that anybody who could walk or crawl was going. I was sent to Fort Knox, and when they went on a long march, I'd fall out because my flat feet hurt my ankles. I had a good sergeant. He was Indian. He'd looked like my brother—black hair, dark skin. He'd offer me a pint a whiskey. He took to me. Nobody gave me any problem.

**TC:** Were you in the Army then?

**FI:** Yes. They later gave me a medical (honorable) discharge again because of my flat feet.

**TC:** How did your mom and dad meet?

**FI:** My dad was a smart man. When he was in the coal mines, he said, "I'm working like an animal here." You only got paid in carts you'd fill up. But for a guy who didn't get an education beyond fifth grade, he was a smart man. The coal mine owner asked if anybody knew

how to drive a car or truck. My dad put his hand up. He said he'd driven Italian cars. He never knew how to drive. But he wanted out of the mine. The coal mine owner later fired him because he drove too fast. My dad later went back to Italy when the Italian government offered to pay for the trip if he enlisted in the Italian army. While at the front line, a sergeant came by and asked if any of the infantry men knew how to drive, and my father raised his hand. So his sergeant said, "Pack your stuff. You're going to the Mobile outfit." He sent him back from the front.

**TC:** Let's talk about your dad. He went back and forth [between Italy and the United States]. Do you think he met your mother over there?

**FI:** Oh yeah. They got married over there.

**TC:** Did they have any children over there?

**FI:** My oldest sister, Mary. My mother was pregnant [with Mary] coming over on the boat. But she [Mary] was born in America.

**TC:** Do you know anything about your mother's family?

**FI:** My grandmother was Maria. We have pictures of her. She looked like a nurse. She had a white uniform on. She was a good-sized lady. I think she was watching somebody over there in Sicily.

**TC:** Was she from Sicily?

**FI:** Yeah. They married over there.

**TC:** She was from Messina also. Do you remember what year your oldest sister was born?

**DIM:** November 29, 1921.

**TC:** You said that your dad came here because of Frank Insana, the second cousin who was already here.

**FI:** [My dad] said the first chance he had, he was coming to America, to make some money. The family wanted him married. He went back to Italy. That's where he courted my mother. My mother's side was a little well-to-do. My dad's side was very poor.

**TC:** Did any of your mother's family come here?

**FI:** Yes. She had a big family.

**JJ:** The uncle came.

**DIM:** Pete was his name. He was [Concetta's] younger brother. Aunt Carmella and Pete Catanese.

**FI:** She had a lot of brothers and sisters.

**TC:** What did your dad do in Washington?

**FI:** Somehow, one of the relatives told him to come to Little Washington. That was the Insanas. They stayed in a little shack.

**JJ:** On Woodland Avenue.

**FI:** Yeah, somehow they got [my dad] in a factory over here.

**TC:** At Brockway?

**FI:** Yeah, but before that, he worked as a laborer. He helped build the Washington Trust Building. They stayed in a little beat-up shed. That's what my mother told us. It wasn't very big.

**TC:** When he brought your mother over, they stayed in that house?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** That was Ohio Street?

**FI:** It was off of Ohio Street. One of the alleys where the junkyard was. They eventually built a house there. There's a story behind that. My dad saved his money. He built a house there on Ohio Street and next door was Joe Colosi. He was a paisano. He was a very good friend of ours. Somehow, we were at a christening up on Glenn Street. Pete Insana was christening a kid. Someone came in and said, "Hey, there's a house on fire on Ohio Street!" My dad put us all in the car.

When we got there, our house wasn't on fire. It was the house next door. Joe Colosi, he was the treasurer of the Alpine [Lodge #9], and somebody tried to rob him—a father and a son. They knew all the Insanas were up on the hill [Glenn Street] for the christening. After [the robbers] cleaned it out and found whatever they wanted, they torched it.

[They had] a five gallon can and they were throwing gasoline. Well, my mother would can, and she had one of those little pots on a pilot light on a little plate. The [robbers] didn't know. They were throwing gas. When all those fumes eventually got to that [pilot light], Boom! That gas got on both of them. They found the father dead in the cellar and the son they didn't find until a day later. He was further down, in the back yard. It killed both of them. The firemen were putting water on my dad's house. A train came by and cut the hose. No water was spraying on my dad's house. So it caught on fire.

**TC:** You mean they [the robbers] died from the fire?

**FI:** Yeah 'cause they wanted to burn the house down. They'd lived in the boarding house across the street. They figured they could rob and torch it. No one would be the wiser.

**TC:** How old were you when this happened?

**FI:** I think I was five years old. Now, my dad had that house. He didn't have it paid for.

**TC:** Were you born in that house?

**FI:** Let's see. That's where I was born—down there.

**TC:** So, Mary and Tony were born there?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** Annie was born there.

**FI:** Annie was next and then I came in. Then Nancy, the youngest.

**TC:** Nancy was born there, too?

**FI:** I think, yeah, because my dad had that house built.

**FI:** My dad had to walk from Ohio Street—that's Tylerdale—to [Hazel Atlas #1 on South Main Street] every morning. He did work with his hands. My dad was a strong man. He did a lot of labor work.

**TC:** Do you remember what year the fire happened?

**FI:** I was five and I was born in 1926.

**TC:** So, 1931. Did your dad build the second house?

**FI:** No. He wanted to get away from having to walk from Ohio Street. There was a house for rent. It was only a two-room house, one room downstairs, little kitchen, same upstairs. He said he had five kids and would split the rooms.

**TC:** Did he rent the house or buy it?

**FI:** He rented it.

**TC:** It was two doors down. Did it have a South Street address?

**FI:** Yeah, South Street.

**TC:** The number?

**FI:** No, all I remember, we had five kids there. Mr. Rocco felt sorry for my father. Dad said we'd make it last. He really wanted to get up here. In one room upstairs, he had put a curtain down the middle. There were two rooms up there. One was his room. We kids shared the other one. My sisters on one side. We didn't dare look on the other side, me and my brother.

**TC:** So you grew up there?

**FI:** Yeah, that's where we grew up. My dad was a hard-working man. [My brother] Tony and I were hotheads. He was almost three years older than me.

**DIM:** Well, when did you move into this house (Frank's current residence)?

**FI:** When I got on at the factory. That's later on. During the war, they drafted everyone [age] 45 and down. Then, they got to me and the high school kids. I was a senior and I was 12B. You had to be in 12A. So I went to Miss Sickie, my homeroom teacher, and said, "I'm quitting." She said, "What! Don't quit. Let me check your schedule." They treated me really great.

**TC:** Was this Wash High?

**FI:** Yeah. I told [Miss Sickie] that I was quitting 'cause I got orders to go to the Army. I was 18! She changed my schedule to get me from 12B to 12A. She got me deferred for three months. As soon as you pass into 12A and you're 18, you go. They were waiting on me. That's

what happened. It all worked my way. People were very good to me.

**TC:** There was an elementary school around here. Did you go to elementary school?

**FI:** Just 1st Ward.

**JJ:** There was a 5th Ward.

**FI:** Before our house burned down on Ohio Street, we were on Woodland Avenue. It was a spooky house. My brother and I would holler, "Hey, we heard a noise up here!" It was a shack, is what it was. My dad said, "Yinz be quiet!" He come up with a hammer and nail, and nailed the door shut. We stayed there, then, all of a sudden, we heard a big bang. The whole ceiling downstairs fell down! There was all them bugs in there—running all over the place. "Get your clothes! Blankets on!" We walked from Woodland Avenue down to Allison Avenue where Joe Colosi lived. Pounded on the door. [Joe Colosi] said, "What happened? Come on in. You boys double upstairs." He had two boys and he had a girl. Their girl bunked with ours, put a blanket down the middle for the boys there.

**TC:** What else can you say about your dad?

**FI:** We never challenged Pap. Pap gave an order, we did it. Dad would tell Tony, "You watch your brother. If he gets hurt, I'm coming after you." My brother, Tony, told me later on why he used to say he

couldn't take me with him. He never wanted me around. I'd be madder than hell. Then I'd walk around the curb and I'd find money. Eventually, they nicknamed me "Lucky." Another time, my mother's talking to an old lady across the street. She's burning a mattress. I looked in and my mother told me to get away. I took a stick and I'm picking. I see what looks like a handkerchief. I knocked it out of the fire and I opened it up. A wad of money. I pulled my mother. She said, "What do you want? Where'd you get that money?" I said, "Outta that mattress. It belonged to that lady."

**TC:** What was your mother like?

**FI:** My mother was a very nice lady. Typical Italian, short, black hair. Very friendly. She was a perfect mother. She always stuck up for the kids.

**TC:** Did your parents speak Italian?

**FI:** Oh yeah. We all did, except Nancy never did.

**TC:** The whole family spoke Italian.

**FI:** We all talked Italian. We were going to school, we're talking Italian. They had to send Annie back. Me, I picked up a little American from Ohio Street up Goat Hill. That's where I went to school. Annie talked all Italian. My mother talked all Italian to us.

My dad said, "You try to talk American to them so they know American not Italian!" Eventually, we picked it up.

**TC:** Your dad had to learn English because of working.

**FI:** Oh, yeah. He was a hard-working man.

**TC:** He learned to speak English pretty well.

**FI:** No. He had broken English. But he made friends with people. He was a very friendly man, my dad. But he was strict as hell. Oh!

**TC:** Your neighborhood, over on Ohio Street, was it an Italian neighborhood?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** When you moved to 64 South Street, was this an Italian neighborhood?

**FI:** Yeah, because you had the Pacillas, Albanos—these are all Italians here.

**FI:** My dad saw this house and right away told my mother he wanted to buy it.

**TC:** And is this house [60 South Street] the one you were given when you got married?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** Did your mom and dad stay over there [at 64 South Street]?

**FI:** Yeah. They were over there. We were all in a row.

**DIM:** Aunt Mary lived down the street.

**DIM:** The house is torn down, but, she lived five houses away, down the street.

**JI:** Pacillas lived next door.

**TC:** So what was it like to be in this Italian neighborhood? Were there traditions? How did people get along with each other?

**FI:** Well, everybody who was Italian here got along with my family. Mr. Rocco Proia (landlord) told all his kids, “You don’t bother this family.” They treated us real good.

**DIM:** Didn’t you have a garden?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. Mr. Rocco had land up in Nokomis Park across from Trinity. He gave my dad a stretch of land. He said, “You can put a garden in, Mr. Insana.” He made a homemade wagon. We pulled it up there.

**TC:** So you’d walk over there to attend to the garden?

**FI:** Oh, yeah, we’d raise tomatoes, peppers. Anything.

**TC:** Did you help?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. You had to work.

**TC:** You said your mother canned.

**FI:** Oh, yeah, she canned everything.

**TC:** Was she a good cook?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. When I married [Jean] in 1950, she was cookin' for me. Hamburgers! I couldn't even eat 'em! But, I didn't say nuthin'. Then, I looked at her. I said, "Hey, hun, when you see my mother cooking down there, go down there and watch her." This is the God's truth. I give her credit. She watched my mother. She ended up cooking like my mother. The food that I was used to, she picked it up.

**DIM:** 'Cause her mother died when she was 11.

**TC:** So you had to help take care of the family?

**FI:** Oh, she's got a big family.

**Jl:** My dad, he took care of the family. As for me, I only went to school. Canonsburg High School.

**TC:** How did you two meet each other?

**FI:** I was down at the carnival at Canonsburg—me and I think it was Adam Ray. We went to the carnival just to fool around. We were standing there. It was on a weekend. He said, "Hey, Lucky, that girl's laughing at us!" Across the street, they were walking. I said, "Let's go up the street—across the street—and we'll walk right towards 'em." I was always bold. In Washington, I didn't do anything because it was too close to home. Dad would've beat the hell outta me. I tried to get her address. She told me. I had to get her to repeat it. I said, "Oh, you're down by St. Patrick's

Church. You go down that hill." She said yeah, so I came down. I made a date to take her to a movie. I got down to the railroad track. I thought, "What if she gave me a dead end?" I got out of the car and walked. I saw the tracks. I said, "Holy shit!" Then I looked. I saw a road. There was a guy whistling. I said, "Hey buddy! You know where Jean Lucciola lives?" He laughed. He said, "Yeah, go down this street. Third house." I said OK. It was her brother, Tony. But see, Jean said her dad run everybody out that wanted to date her. But he didn't run me out. You know why? He checked me out. [He thought] the Insanas got a lot of money. He had the wrong Insanas! He had the ones who owned the garage. My dad was poor.

**TC:** Did your dad ever tell you what life was like in Sicily? In Messina?

**FI:** My dad had a real strict dad. This is the truth. My dad would fight him. He'd tie my dad up in the cellar. My grandmother had to come down to feed him.

**TC:** Were they poor?

**FI:** Yeah, they were poor. My mother's side was well-to-do. They owned a nice farm. She had a lot of brothers.

**TC:** Do you think she was glad she came here?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. It was paradise compared to Italy. My mother's side, anything they grew in Messina, was bigger than ours. My mother would always brag about it.

**TC:** Did they ever tell you how they got over here?

**FI:** Well, he got a free ticket. Somebody told him, you join the Italian Army. So, he signed up for that. In a month, he ended up on the front. Something hit him. He says to these guys from Florence, "You better quit that." Boom! Another pebble hits him in the back. He says, "You son of a guns!" His rifle was there. This was on the front line. He went to get his rifle. Before he could turn around, they ran like snakes! They jumped in the weeds and said, "That crazy man's gonna shoot us!" The sergeant came and said, "What are you going to do—shoot your own people?" [My dad] said, "I told them to leave me alone. They're throwing stones on me." Then, the sergeant gave the guys hell. But you don't shoot your own men! My dad said, "OK."

They had to haul the cannons up in the mountains. He's away from the front. He had to drive up a mountain. A guy with a white patch would tell him, pitch black, and these are cliffs. You go off the road, you're dead. He would tell you, "Four inches to the right. Hold it." No light. They were at war. [My dad said], "Before I got to the top, my hand was shakin'. I don't think I made it." Then here comes the sergeant. "Congratulations! You passed." [My dad] was a smart man, but you wouldn't know he was smart. He didn't go to school, maybe 5th grade.

**TC:** It strikes me that your father was a survivor. A person with the ability to adapt and survive.

**FI:** He knew what to do. I didn't even know how. You couldn't communicate with my dad. He was so strict. Over here, I was 18, going to the Army. I had to be in bed at 9 o'clock. Everybody! He went to bed at 9 o'clock; you went to bed. Tony, when he got on shifts, he'd sneak in. He'd climb up by the rain spout. He'd bang, "Let me in." My dad never caught him.

**TC:** What kind of father were you? Were you the same or different?

**FI:** Oh, I treat my kids all equal.

**TC:** Not too strict?

**FI:** No. Well, I'm strict. But equal. You listen to me, what I tell you. I don't hit you for no reason at all. But if you don't, I'm coming after you. I treat 'em all fair. All my grandkids respect me. All of 'em. I don't abuse none of 'em. My dad had a mean dad. I heard my dad say, "I had a mean father and I don't treat my kids like a dog." That's what he called his father. A mean man.

**TC:** After your mom and dad got married and settled here, did they keep in touch with the people over in Italy? After they were married, did your dad go back?

**FI:** They never went back. He wrote to his parents. My mom did the same to her parents.

**FI:** They were all strict as hell.

**JJ:** Well, they were old.

**FI:** They were used to the father eats first at the table. The kids come after. They don't eat when the father eats. He's number one. My dad was a very fair man. He never abused not one kid. Hit 'em for nothing. Never!

**TC:** What did you do for social activities here on South Street?

**FI:** I wasn't allowed to go into the street and run around. My dad was very strict. My brother, he had more liberty. He always chased me home.

**TC:** What kind of games did you play around the neighborhood?

**DIM:** Baseball?

**FI:** Yeah, ball. Usually ball.

**TC:** Who were some of your friends around here?

**FI:** We were all friendly with all of them. Frank Pacilla. The Rays. That's who they were running around with.

**TC:** Did your parents belong to any of the Italian groups?

**FI:** My dad was in the Alpine [Lodge #9]. He was a founder. One of the originals.

**TC:** Did he ever talk to you about why they formed the Alpine?

**FI:** Well, no. He wouldn't talk about that. See, the Colosis were founders, too, and Victor Schepise. He lived on Park Avenue.

**TC:** So, these older Italians, they formed the club?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** Do you think they formed it as a social club? What was their purpose?

**FI:** They'd play cards. They'd throw the bocce. They did it for drinks.

**TC:** It was mostly men.

**FI:** They did it for the men. You'd win. Your partner'd win. They set you up. My dad was a good card player.

**JJ:** He went to Sons of Italy.

**FI:** Yeah. When we came up from Ohio Street, he went to Sons of Italy.

**TC:** Over on Maiden Street?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** Did your mom or dad listen to Italian radio shows?

**FI:** Why, yeah, my mother would more than my dad.

**TC:** What about Italian newspapers?

**FI:** He had one coming to the house. I don't know when he started getting it. I think it was from the club.

**TC:** Did your parents ever become involved in politics?

**FI:** No.

**TC:** What about religion? Did you belong to a church?

**FI:** Yeah, Catholic Church.

**TC:** I.C. Church?

**FI:** Yeah.

**TC:** Was going to church important in your family?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. We all had to make a Holy Communion and Confirmation. All of us.

**TC:** Did your parents become American citizens?

**FI:** Yeah, eventually they did. They had to first learn to talk American.

**TC:** Your dad didn't have much of an education.

**FI:** No. Maybe 5th grade.

**TC:** And your mother?

**FI:** Same thing.

**TC:** But did they encourage education? Did they want you and your brother and your sisters to get an education?

**FI:** Oh, yeah. We had to.

**TC:** Did your parents experience any discrimination in Washington? Discrimination against Italians?

**FI:** As far as I know in the neighborhood, nobody did.

**TC:** Was it hard to get opportunities to work?

**FI:** Probably for Pap it was. But I wasn't with him, you know?

**DIM:** Did your Dad end up working at Brockway?


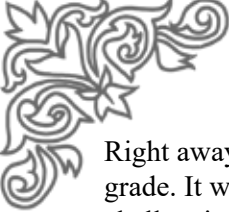
**FI:** Yeah. Hazel Atlas, it was. The Insanas got him in.

**TC:** Did a lot of Italians work at Hazel Atlas?

**FI:** They didn't for a while. They wouldn't hire 'em. People from Number 2 didn't like Italians. For some reason. The one who did the hiring lived on Main Street. My dad, around Christmas, made homemade wine. This guy says, "Do you have any wine?" He gave him two gallons or whatever. Then came the "How about you do me a favor?" I think Mary was the one old enough to work. "Can you get her in the factory?" But she got in over at Atlas. Next came Anthony—the hothead. Then Annie. Right down the line. Took all of us.

**TC:** It sounds like your dad, even though it was hard to get in the factory, he used his brains to advance.

**FI:** Italians stuck together. You know? You'd fight the other neighborhood if they picked on one guy. They came to the playground. A Black kid took my ball.



Right away, I got in a fight with him. 6th grade. It was always a black guy always challenging me. I was almost as tall as I am now when I was 13, 14. I grew like a weed and I stopped.

**TC:** You said the people in the neighborhood, especially the boys, would stick together. You would have conflicts in other neighborhoods. But what about Italians in other neighborhoods? Did you get along with them?

**FI:** Well, when they came here. Old hothead, me. Joe Barbella, he said something, did something to me. Right away, I'm fighting him. My brother broke it up. I was ready to fight.

**FI:** You didn't mess with somebody in the area. They'd come after you.

**TC:** Let me ask you one more thing about growing up as an Italian American in Washington, PA. What are your thoughts about it? What last words do you want to say?

**FI:** Very good neighborhood. We got in where we had no trouble. We showed respect.

**Frank Mancuso**  
**Son of John Mancuso and Bella (Lucchese)**  
**Locust Mancuso**



*Theresa and Frank Mancuso*

Frank Mancuso, known as “Fuzzy,” is the oldest child of John and Bella (Lucchese) Locust Mancuso, immigrants from Italy. John began working as a shoemaker in Italy at the age of 11 or 12 and brought his skills to Washington when as a young man he arrived with friends who had ties to the city.


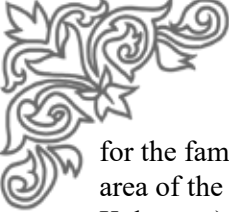
John found work in a coal mine in Pineville, KY, before returning to Washington and getting a job with the B&O Railroad. He worked for the railroad for 40 years, starting as a laborer and retiring as a watchman at the South Main Street crossing.

In Washington, John met and married Bella (Lucchese) Locust, whose family had already settled in the city.

Bella, like many Italian immigrant wives, was a homemaker.

They were handworking people who raised six children. After a day of labor on the railroad, John would repair shoes. For some time, he operated a shoe repair shop on the corner of Jefferson and Woodland avenues in Tylerdale. Unfortunately, the Black Hand burned his shop down because he would not pay protection money. John bounced back from that setback, continuing to repair shoes in a room of the family home.

The family of six children lived in rented houses on Oregon Street, Prospect Avenue, and Maiden Street. With the help of his oldest son Frank, John built a small house



for the family on Fulton Street in the area of the West End called Calorama (or Kalorama). All six children slept in one room of the four-room house.

In a pre-interview with his wife Theresa, Frank recalled that his father built the house with scraps of lumber from the B&O Railroad which he carried on his shoulders for a half mile. Like their neighbors, the family had an outhouse. For bathing, a large laundry tub was used in the kitchen. Later on, John built a modern addition to the front of the house.

As a youth, Frank enjoyed playing ice hockey with friends on West Maiden Street when it was frozen. The hockey stick was a piece of wood and the hockey puck was an empty can. In the summers, boys from South Street, Park Avenue, Prospect Avenue and other nearby streets played in a softball league sponsored by the YMCA. "Good wholesome fun," Frank said.

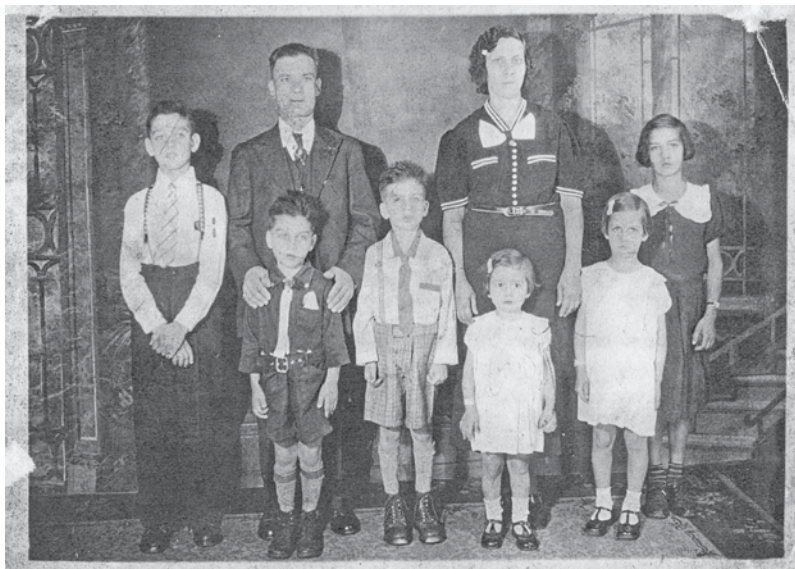
Frank became interested in the rodeo during his youth. Cowboy movie stars inspired his desire to perform. At 12 or 13 years old, he won an amateur contest for his singing and guitar playing. As a teenager in the early 1940s, he rode a Highlander steer at the annual King Franklin Wild West Show that was held on the grounds of what is now the Crown Center on West Chestnut Street. When he entered the Army in 1945, he became an entertainment specialist in the Third Army Rodeo. He performed for military personnel in Germany, riding broncos and

bulls, and doing trick and fancy roping. "I wanted to be a cowboy," he said. "Dream fulfilled."

Frank and his wife Theresa had four children. Although Frank earned a living as a welder and factory worker, he never abandoned his love of performing. He sang and played professionally under the name "Frankie Daniels" on WPJA radio in Washington and WWVA radio in Wheeling. On WWVA, he performed with his idol Big Slim. "He's still my hero," Frank said.

Frank acquired his nickname "Fuzzy" as a youth when he went to a barber and said, "Give me one of those fuzzy teddy bear cuts."

February 2017



John and Bella (Lucchese) Locust Mancuso with children, l. to r.  
Frank, Albert, Leonard, Angie, Evelyn, Grace



Bella (Lucchese) Locust Mancuso



Frank Mancuso performed for U.S. military personnel in Germany during World War II.



Frank Mancuso performed as "Frankie Daniels."

## Family Tree of Frank Mancuso

### Frank's Parents:

- Giovanni (John) Mancuso, b. 4-29-1893, Brancaleone, Calabria, Italy; d. 2-29-1964, Washington; emigrated 1903
- Bellemonte (Bella) (Lucchese) Locust, b. 12-8-1909, Torremaggiore, Italy; d. 6-22-1957, Washington  
Married at Immaculate Conception Church, 6-25-1925

### John and Bella's Children:

- Frank "Fuzzy" Mancuso, b. 9-11-1926, Washington; d. 8-13-2019, Washington; m. Theresa Victorick (b. 10-28-1934, Washington) on 9-20-1952
- Grace Mancuso, b. 11-24-1927, Washington; d. 12-10-1993; m. Floyd (Vic) Almo
- Albert Mancuso, b. 8-11-1929, Washington
- Leonard "Shorty" Mancuso, b. 1-14-1931, Washington; d. 12-22-2006
- Evelyn Mancuso, b. 4-27-1932, Washington; m. Michael Pirazzo
- Angie Mancuso, b. 5-9-1934, Washington; d. 1-29-2015  
m. Richard Myers

### Frank's Paternal Grandparents:

- Frank and Concetta Benavoli Mancuso

### Frank's Maternal Grandparents:

- Leonardo (Lucchese) Locust, b. 1873, Foggia, Italy; d. 10-8-1930, Washington; emigrated 1913
- Filamena (Evelyn) Petrone, b. 4-30-1881, Torremaggiore, Italy; d. 3-24-1961, Washington; emigrated 1916; m. Giuseppe Coppola, 9-16-1899, Torremaggiore, Italy; m. 2nd Leonardo Lucchese

### Evelyn and Leonardo's Children:

- Bellamonte (Bella) (Lucchese) Locust, b. 12-8-1909, b. Torremaggiore, Italy; d. 6-22-1957; m. Giovanni (John) Mancuso
- Michael (Lucchese) Locust, b. 1-1-1919, Washington; d. 1-3-1988; lived in Akron
- Mary (Lucchese) Locust, b. 11-10-1920, Washington; d. 8-3-2007; m. Robert Rue; m. 2nd Louis Ruscello
- Carmela (Lucchese) Locust, b. 10-10-1923, Washington; d. 6-28-2010; m. William Reedy; had 13 children

### Evelyn and Giuseppe's Children:

- Teresa (Rose) Coppola, b. 10-15-1900, Foggia, Italy; d. 5-31-1979; m. Frank Mastrangelo, d. 1964; m. 2nd Ralph Macre; lived in Canonsburg
- Giuseppe (Joe) (Coppola) Capo, b. 1904, Foggia, Italy; d. Washington

### Leonardo Lucchese's daughter from first marriage:

- Maria (Mary) Lucchese, b. 8-2-1897, Foggia, Italy; d. 10-10-1978; m. Samuel Sanpietro

### Filamena (Evelyn) Petrone's parents:

- Michele Petrone and Rose Settanni

### Leonardo Lucchese's parents:

- Leonardo Lucchese and Mary Nicola

## Interview

### Date and Place of Interview:

February 11 and 27, 2017; Citizens Library, Washington

**Interviewer:** Sandra Mansmann

**Also present:** Theresa Mancuso (Frank's wife) and Tina Calabro

**Transcribers:** Halie Tucci, Liz Terek, and Tina Calabro

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

### February 11, 2017 Interview:

**Sandy Mansmann:** We have Frank Mancuso, our first subject in our project. Frank was born on September 11, 1926, in Washington, PA. You were born at home, is that correct?

**Frank Mancuso:** I was born on part of the property that my boy owns over there now. There was a house over there on the corner. And it's been exactly 89 years ago.

**SM:** Is that how old you are?

**FM:** I'm 90. There was a murder over there. They had a family that lived in Bellevue. Their name was Young. There's a small road leading off of Baltimore where the Oregon Street Grill is at. At that time, my mom and my dad lived in that corner house. So they found the body right next to our fence. It was a young lady by the name of Thelma Young.

**SM:** Next to the fence of your property?

**FM:** Yeah ... There was a lot of people they picked up but they had the wrong people. A lot of people said the fellow who did this was a fellow by the name of Bob Dreamer. But as a kid, all of us kids, he had an old truck, Bob did, and if he

was going someplace, he'd take all of us. A lot of people said he didn't do it. I don't know if he really done it or not. I say he didn't.

**SM:** I think this was written up in the *Observer-Reporter* by Park Burroughs.

**SM:** How did you meet your wife?

**FM:** I met her down at the bus station in Washington. That's been a long time ago

**SM:** That was on Maiden [Street]?

[Theresa Mancuso clarification: "I was a waitress at the Andrews Coffee Shop inside the Blue Ridge Bus Station, located next to the Lemoyne House on East Maiden Street."]

**SM:** What was she doing?

**FM:** She was a waitress. And I thought she was pretty nice. And, of course, I was much older. I was probably ... I think I'm eight years older than she is. I was working right up the street at the Sunoco station for a guy. I happened to get down there every now and then.

**SM:** Besides being nice, did you think she was pretty cute?

**FM:** Yeah, still cute.

**SM:** How old were you?

**TM:** You were out of the service. You were 20-something. 23. I was 16, still in high school.

**SM:** We're going to skip back to your early history, your parents, how your ancestors first came to settle in Washington, PA. Take us back.

**FM:** The only thing I know is that when my daddy came here, he came with two other folks. One was Carl Calabro.

**SM:** So they came from Italy?

**FM:** They all came from the same area, the southern part of Italy.

**TM:** Calabria. He's Calabrese.

**FM:** My father was 11 years old. He already had a shoemaker's trade. There was another fellow by the name of Joe. He came from Wheeling. They were all coal miners [in Pineville, KY]. Carl Calabro was a coal miner. Joe was a coal miner. They came together and after they left Kentucky, [my dad] must have come to Washington. I don't know if he had relatives [here], but Carl had relatives here.

**FM:** They came together. My dad did not have anyplace to stay, but Carl had a place to stay. So Carl took my dad with him. Joe probably ventured back to Wheeling.

**FM:** [Frank briefly talks about the shoe shop his father had after he got settled in Washington.] They blew it out in the middle of Jefferson Avenue. It's called the Black Hand. They wanted protection money.

**SM:** What was your dad's first job when he came to Washington?

**FM:** He was a qualified shoemaker. I don't think he had any money to buy a shoe shop [initially] ... I asked my dad, why did you stop here? Could you have found a better place? He said there was a lot of work here. They had the coal mines, the railroad, the glass houses. Loaded with work. He said, "That's why I stopped here."

**TM:** So. eventually he married.

**FM:** I don't know anything about how he met my mother.

**TC:** I saw in your father's obituary that your mother's last name was "Locust."

**FM:** Yes. They called it "Lucchese" [pronouncing it "Lo-Kaze"]

**TC:** Did they Americanize it to "Locust"?

**FM:** Probably.

**TM:** His mother's mother and dad are buried in the Washington Cemetery.

**SM:** Where are your parents buried?

**FM:** In the Washington Cemetery.

**SM:** As you were growing up, where did you go to school?

**FM:** First Ward. I was only six years old. I remember my mother took me up to the school and I was crying.

**SM:** That sounds like a typical first day of school. [laughter]

**SM:** Your siblings were Frank, Grace, Albert, Leonard, Evelyn, and Angie. Anything you want to tell us about any of your siblings?

**FM:** My dad always favored Albert because he graduated from high school. He thought he was really something. I can remember my dad saying, "You better go to school."

**SM:** Did you listen to your dad?

**FM:** No, I didn't listen to him. I visit my daddy's grave and my mother's quite often. I have a [certificate of having completed high school]. I got it out of Richmond, Virginia, somehow, through the military. This is how I got my high school diploma.

**FM:** After First Ward, I went to Bellevue.

**SM:** Is that the four-room frame schoolhouse?

**FM:** Yes.

**TM:** You went to Hayes for awhile.

**FM:** Not too long.

## **February 27, 2017, Interview:**

**Sandy Mansmann:** Today is Session Two with Mr. Frank Mancuso. We took some interesting notes last time, but we want to get back to some specifics that would be related, a little bit more, to Italy and what you remember of the how, why, and where of your folks settling here. We got a little bit of information.

**Frank Mancuso:** I'm quite sure that it was Reggio Calabria.

**SM:** Oh, that was the area that they came from. Can you tell me again: What was your father's name?

**FM:** My father's name was John.

**SM:** You think he came from Reggio Calabria.

**FM:** Um- hmm.

**SM:** From looking at the map a little earlier, that extends the whole bottom portion of the boot. Right? Into the toe? Into the heel?

**Tina Calabro:** Into the toe.

**SM:** Into the toe of the boot. Your dad was probably born in that area since he lived in that area.

**FM:** Probably.

**Theresa Mancuso:** Yeah.

**SM:** You would guess. His birthdate? Do

you know approximately when he was born?

**TC:** The sheet that Theresa filled out—I forgot it at home. It has all that info on it.

**SM:** Ok. Your mother’s name?

**FM:** Bella.

**SM:** What was her maiden name?

**FM:** Lucchese.

**TM:** That was the Italian way. They changed it to “Locust.” It was Americanized.

**SM:** OK. Tina, I’m going to ask you to jump in a little bit. What are some of the statistical things that we need to fill in?

**SM:** We’re going to go to after your folks met. They’ve come to America. I don’t think they originally came to Pennsylvania, right? They went to West Virginia or Ohio.

**FM:** The only thing I can tell you [is] they came to Washington. I’ll tell you why: Carl. It was Carl. Carl had people here. The other fellow, he was from Wheeling, West Virginia. I would say all three—Carl worked for the mine and the other one was a coal miner, too. So, my father ventured to a place, I guess all three went to a place called Pineville, Kentucky. I guess they worked there. I don’t know how long they worked there. I have no idea. They must have come here because Carl had people here.

**FM:** My dad, he didn’t have a place to stay. You know what I mean? So, Carl had people here. So, he stayed with Carl. That would be Sammy’s father. The other one, he may have been here just a short time. I don’t know. I’m just assuming. He ventured back to Wheeling. He must’ve had people there. I don’t know.

**SM:** Your dad was 11 and had some shoemaking experience.

**FM:** He was a qualified shoemaker!

**SM:** How do you make a shoe? Would you know how to make a shoe?

**FM:** Who? Me?

**SM:** Yeah.

**FM:** No.

**SM:** What was his first job here?

**FM:** My dad?

**SM:** Your dad? Something before he went into the mines.

**FM:** I know he bought shoemaker equipment, OK? He had to have a job and he had to have some money. You know what I mean? I don’t know if he had any money when he got off the boat up in New York or what. I have no idea. But the guy who wrote all of the mail to my dad’s people in Italy, his name was Joe Falascino. Remember him? They had one daughter. The daughter married John Tiano. They lived over here on West

Maiden Street, right across from where the old post office is.

**SM:** Did he somehow support your dad or get him started in the business?

**FM:** Who?

**SM:** Joe Falascino.

**TM:** Maybe [Frank's dad] was not educated or maybe he could not write. He always wrote the letters, this man. Then, he would read the ones that came back from Italy. Just like a translator, I guess it was.

**SM:** You said, in order to start his business, eventually he did open a shoe shop, but he needed money.

**FM:** Yeah. In other words, he had to have ... How long he worked in the mine, I don't know. He would have had to work there a certain amount of time so he could accumulate some money.

**SM:** He was there [in the mine] until he came back to Washington.

**FM:** Yeah. I said [to my dad], "Why would you stop in a place like this?" He said, well, when we came here, there was a lot of industry. He said there was a lot of work here. So, that's the reason why he stayed in Washington.

**SM:** So, we don't really know how long they were in Pineville?

**FM:** No. I have no idea.

**SM:** Do you have any idea how long after they moved to Washington that he was able to actually open his shoe shop?

**FM:** No.

**SM:** But it was always on Jefferson Avenue?

**FM:** The first shop he opened was on Jefferson Avenue.

**SM:** Until the Black Hand burned it down?

**FM:** [laughs] They wanted some of that protection money. He turned around and bought a gun.

**SM:** After that happened, did he then move to a different location? For his shop?

**TM:** He went to B&O for a long time.

**FM:** My dad was with B&O probably 40 years.

**TM:** That's probably how he earned the money.

**SM:** So, while he worked for the railroad, he also still had a shop.

**SM:** Would you know today, if you drove up Maiden Street, could you guess where it was?

**FM:** Oh, yeah, I would know. Yeah.

**SM:** Do you know what's there now?

What would have been there that we might be able to look for?

**FM:** You know where the First Ward schoolhouse is?

**SM:** Yes.

**FM:** OK. That was Maiden Street and down there where the Coca Cola plant is, you know? The new section that they put in up there. What was that called? ... OK. On Maiden now, where the First Ward School was, if you come out of the schoolhouse, and made a right to cross the street, you would cross ...

**SM:** Jefferson Avenue?

**FM:** No, that would be Franklin. If you went part way down, going this way [gestures], where the big railroad trestle's at, they had a row of houses down there. I also remember the Mikey, across the street from the old schoolhouse. He was in the battery business. You know what I mean? I remember him quite well.

**SM:** We're going to need a map of Washington to remember all these. [laughs]

**TC:** You know, all that area was redeveloped. It's new. We remember it when it was a grid. Well, kind of a grid. Chestnut Street had bars.

**SM:** Bars and churches!

**TC:** Bars and churches. [laughter] A pizza parlor.

**FM:** Like I said, you cross the street and headed towards the big railroad bridge, you know what I mean?

**TC:** Mm-hmm.

**FM:** When you cross the street, from the First Ward schoolhouse, you walked down through there. It was all houses down there. There was no industry on the right. There was no industry on the left either until you got down about two or three blocks. Then, there was a big railroad trestle there. Sometimes it would bring trains in and sometimes they would bring them in on this trestle, you know what I mean? I remember one time; they had a hell of a big fire there. A big one, you know what I mean? One of the big Malley engines, they called them, that Malley engine must have been a scene. We were talking about it the other day. [inaudible] Close to 80 or 90 feet long. A big engine.

**TC:** What did [your dad] do for the railroad? What kind of work?

**FM:** I would say, uh, repair railroad tracks, putting ties and stuff in—it was all the bull work, you know what I mean?

**SM:** Labor.

**TC:** Manual labor.

**SM:** You were born on Oregon Street?

**FM:** Far as I know.

**SM:** Where is that?

**TC:** We're talking about West Maiden. You go West Maiden and it actually goes right up to Hill House Pizza. Before it goes up the hill, you go to the right, Oregon is right there.

**SM:** That would have been a mill?

**TC:** That's where the mill was. There's a bar there still. Oregon Grill or something like that.

**TM:** The flour mill.

**FM:** That was over on Wheeling Street.

**SM:** So, when you get off of Maiden and go up to Hill House [Pizza], what is that actually called?

**TC:** The hill that goes up is West Maiden—the one that goes right up to Park Avenue. That's West Maiden.

**SM:** Oregon goes to the right?

**TC:** Mm-hmm. You're saying that was a flour mill.

**TM:** Yeah, they had a flour mill.

**TC:** Do you know the name of the mill?

**TM:** I have seen the flour mill. [Frank] used to go down there and buy flour for his mom.

**FM:** The flour mill was mostly on ... partially on Wheeling and then the other street ...

**TM:** Mill Street!

**FM:** Mill Street! That's it! Mill Street.

**SM:** Mill Street. Washington Steam Flour Mill. It was built in 1844 by Samuel Hazlett and Daniel Dye. Mill Street at Wheeling Street.

**TM:** I remember when they tore that down. The creek was right there.

**SM:** The "Waynie" went that way too. Wasn't it the Waynie Trestle [for Waynesburg and Washington Railroad]?

**TC:** Mm-hmm. Right there. 'Cause on Mill Street, one side of the street is houses and the other side is the railroad track. It's elevated.

**SM:** And the moving company.  
[inaudible]

**TM:** Our son happens to have, at this time, on Oregon Street, an auto mechanic, Mancuso Automotive. Where the Coca Cola plant [is] ... you can drive up that hill and you'll see his establishment.

**SM:** So, the son owns Mancuso Auto? Where was the house on Oregon? How far in?

**TM:** It was close to the mill, I think.

**SM:** If you turn at the mill, would it be on the right hand side?

**TM:** Depending on where you're coming from. From West Maiden, make

the first right onto Oregon. Where he was born, [is] across the street, close to the mill.

**FM:** I was born right across the street from where the Oregon Street Grill is at. There's a small road that they cut out, I don't know if you remember this or not. More like a shortcut, you know what I mean? That's where Bob Dreamer was supposed to have killed Thelma Young.

**TM:** Is the house you were born in still there?

**FM:** No, that's the house that they tore down.

**TM:** They tore it down. There's a really short street there. Very short. It's even hard to drive. I just would drive on it maybe once every five years. Very short. That's where the house, where he was born, was next to, right?

**FM:** There was, across from where the beer garden is, on this side [gestures], as you start up this small, little road, you know what I mean, it hooks on to Baltimore Avenue up there, on the right. There was a girl [Thelma Young] that lived there. Her mother was Stella Riddle ... Does that ring a bell?

**FM:** Well, Stella Riddle, she was a good-looking girl. I mean, she was a pretty woman. She lived there on the corner, you know ... Well, I was born in that first house there.

**SM:** How long did you live there as

a kid? When did you move from that house?

**FM:** I mean, I was a year old.

**SM:** You grew up in Washington.

**FM:** I grew up in Washington.

**SM:** When you first left Washington, it was for what purpose? Were you in the military?

**FM:** Yeah.

**SM:** But that wasn't the first reason you left.

**FM:** No. One time, I started to hitchhike to go to California. [laughs] I got as far as Kansas City, I think. I must have been 700 or 800 miles from Washington. Well, I couldn't get no ride. So, I just come back home.

**SM:** So, you didn't get to California the first time you tried.

**FM:** No. [laughs]

**SM:** You got as far as Kansas.

**FM:** That's it.

**TM:** How young were you?

**FM:** How young? Too young. Probably, maybe 15, 16.

**SM:** Ok, so now, you're back in Washington.

**FM:** Yep.

**SM:** And what are you doing?

**FM:** I ain't doing anything.

**SM:** But you were out of school by that time.

**TM:** He did not graduate.

**FM:** I didn't graduate. But I did get the GED.

**TM:** He only went two weeks to Trinity. He didn't seem to find his way around. He had a hard time. He decided to quit, and he went down the road with the circus ... You went with Everett Daniels who was a cowboy and had this show after the big circus. They called it the Western Show and it only cost a quarter more to see it. You'd get a little crowd and that's what he did after.

**TM:** So, he did that, then he rodeoed. Well, that was after he rodeoed in Washington. The circus, correct? You went with Daniels after. He rodeoed anyway. Then, he went with the Wild West Show.

**FM:** See, out there where the [Washington] Crown Center is, all that property out there belonged to the B&O Railroad. It didn't belong to Chadwick. He's the guy that, well, the guy's name was Earl Chadwick. He was a big B.S.er [laughs]. Whoever he worked for, I don't know who he worked for, those people must've rented the property from the

B&O Railroad. It didn't belong to Chadwick.

**TM:** [Frank's parents] were married here [in Washington].

**TC:** [His] mother was already here.

**TM:** Only about 15, 16. There's eight years, ten years difference.

**TC:** What are some of your best memories from childhood?

**SM:** Were there family traditions? Celebrations? Anything?

**FM:** I didn't bother with none of that –not too many of my relatives because I wasn't any better, you know what I mean? They all wanted to work, and I wanted to ...

**TM:** Play.

**SM:** You wanted to play cowboy! You wanted to go to Hollywood, you told us!

**FM:** There was a guy who come here one year. His name was Billy Southworth. Does that ring a bell? Billy Southworth? He was the manager of the Boston Braves. The ball team! I didn't know who he was until about a few years after that. They came here to sign a fellow by the name of Hess Hart to play professional football. The Morbel family–Brady Morbel–he was the mayor of Washington. He had a brother by the name of Roy. Roy lived up on the hill. Another one, his name was Ralph. Ralph Morbel. Then,

there was another brother, I think. I think it was Bob. Well, that was a good memory when I ran into Ralph. I saw Billy Southworth. He come to my house. This was in the wintertime. He'd never seen a Yankee Jumper before. Do you know what a Yankee Jumper is? A jumper? Yeah. No?

**SM:** Like a sled.

**FM:** So, he ventured up to my house. I lived over on Blaine Street. Right below Blaine, there was Vance's Greenhouse. There was Sam Magario. I don't think you knew him.

**TM:** Tell them the story about the Yankee. He was playing in his yard.

**FM:** Anyhow, he came up to my house and rode the jumpers over everything. We were talking. I remember, I sold him one for 35 cents and the other one for 50 cents. So, later on, after that, I was always pretty close with Ralph Morbel. He was a good-looking guy. Always had a good job. I had walked into the Oregon Street Grill. That's how it was. After this, you know, we got to talking and Ralph said to me, "Do you remember the guy that came up to your cellar and bought the two Yankee Jumpers?" I said, "Yeah!" He said, "Did you know who that was?" I said, "No. Who was he?"

He said, "That was Billy Southworth, the manager of the Boston Braves." I said, "Now, you tell me now."

**TC:** I have a question for you. I get the

impression that, for you, the American Dream was to find your own path, to do what you wanted to do—which, you wanted to be a performer.

**FM:** Yeah.

**TC:** You had talents and you had the interest. You had a vision for yourself. You were able to reach your vision through work.

**FM:** Well, the guy that I was really interested in was Big Slim. He was born and raised in Bluefield, West Virginia. His people, I mean, his dad was pretty well-to-do. He used to be, before he came to Washington, he was an engineer for some big railroad company. But he still wasn't satisfied. So, Doc Williams—in other words, Big Slim was on the radio in Pittsburgh. This is how he met Doc Williams.

**TM:** The first radio station, KDKA.

**FM:** I got to know Doc Williams pretty good. Doc Williams, now, was sitting on his front porch. He said, "You know, Frank, I brought Big Slim from Pittsburgh to Wheeling." This guy was a real good person, you know. So, I met him on, oh, yeah, I remember now, all the tenors out of Wheeling, they all went out on personal appearances and stuff like that. They all had amateur contests. So, I won the amateur contest here in Washington. I had an old beat up guitar that wasn't too hot, but I wasn't too hot either.

**TM:** What was your age then? 12? 13?

**FM:** Maybe 12 or 13 years old. I can't remember that far back. There was another guy there. I think that was the first time I ever met Cowboy Stewart. This was at the Eagles, I think. We were talking and he said, "Are you going to get in the amateur contest?"

I said, "I don't know."

It was a big thing then. It was pretty big. They had some good singers on there, and they had one group. It was a quartet. Bradley. Do you remember the Bradleys off the hill up there? Bill Bradley was the oldest. They were pretty good people. In fact, I ran into Bill Bradley in Germany. I came over there with the rodeo. It was a pretty nice place.

Just as it pulled in, I told the truck driver, "Let me off right here." They had a big bar there. I walked in there. Guess who's in there? Bill Bradley. He was in charge of a football team. I looked at him. I said, "You look like somebody I know." Then, he told me who he was. I had met Bill Bradley before this. I didn't know him real good, you know ... Anyhow, I had a beer in there. We were talking this and that and all that kind of stuff ...

**TM:** So, how did you get started? In regard to your venture in life? You wanted to become a big entertainer and you wanted to sing. But you met Big Slim and he was that. He was your idol and you met him where he had horses and a barn, right?

**FM:** He's still my hero.

**TM:** But you were only about 12 when you met Slim. Well, when you used to go to the barns with the horses when he was working the horses in whatever he did in the local area here.

**FM:** Oh, he just come out of Canada.

**TM:** You were always under his wing. Always. Until he died. We have always kept in touch with this big entertainer called Big Slim from Wheeling, West Virginia. WWVA. That's how he sort of got started and learned a lot.

**FM:** It was always written in his contract [with WWVA] that, as long as he lived, he always had a 15-minute program there.

**TM:** Before my time, you used to be on the radio. Where at?

**FM:** I was on WJPA. There was a lot of radio stations.

**TM:** What was the one? What was the station you were on?

**FM:** It was on a station in Canonsburg.

**TM:** It was close here and you would go several times a week to play. I didn't know you then. But you used to tell me.

**TC:** I have a question about your dad. Was he glad that he came to America?

**FM:** Well, I'm quite sure he was. I was the last one to see my dad alive. He had a

stroke.

**SM:** How old were you when your dad died?

**FM:** I was already fully grown.

**TM:** We were already married. He died after the wedding.

**TM:** [Frank's] grandfather died at a very young age. [Frank's] dad was an only child, to my knowledge. [When Frank's dad came to America] that was the last he saw of his mother. He was between 11 and 12. He had the trade of a shoemaker. We do not know how he learned that. Could have been his dad and most likely was. When he came here, he left his mom.

**FM:** I asked [my dad], "Who did you name me after?"

He said, "I named you after my dad." He told me his daddy was a big man. My dad wasn't too big, you know.

**SM:** Did you know your grandparents? Did you ever meet them?

**FM:** No. You mean on my dad's side? No. I was going to go there [Calabria] once 'cause I was already over there [in Italy for the military]. I went down to talk to somebody. They had a plane going there maybe two or three times a week. I think the name of the air base was "Capatana" Air Base.

I told my grandmother in a letter, "I'm

going to get out pretty soon." I asked her, "Do you want to come to America?"

So, I told my mother these things I was going to do. She said, "I don't want you going there." She was afraid maybe somebody would knock me off or something. I said I was going to bring daddy's mother [to America]. It never did materialize, you know. [My mother] was against it and she was worried about me. I didn't go.

**SM:** What about your mother's parents?

**FM:** My mother's parents—my grandfather's last name, I think, in Italian they call it "Lucchese." His first name was Leonard. He had to be a pretty good person.

**TM:** We have pictures of his mother's parents.

**SM:** Did you meet them?

**FM:** No, I never met them.


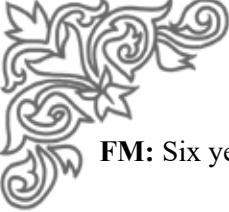
**TM:** Your mother's parents? You did. Your mother's mother.

**FM:** Oh. I just—I remember my grandfather on my mother's side. I remember him.

**TC:** Your mother was born here, correct?

**FM:** No, my mother was born over there.

**TM:** Her parents brought her. She was six.



**FM:** Six years old.

**FM:** My grandfather was married twice. On my mother's side, you know. My mother had—you remember the Sanpietros that was on Jefferson Avenue? Well, that was my mother's half-sister. Then, there was Rosie.

**TM:** Rosie Mastrangelo from Canonsburg.

**FM:** Yeah. That was another half-sister.

**TM:** She married this man and had two children.

**SM:** What was your mom's first name?

**FM:** Bella. Then, there was a half-brother. His name was Joe. If I'm not mistaken, I think, Coppola.

**TC:** I'm wondering if we could maybe wrap up now. Maybe have some final words? Is there anything else that you would like to say about your experience as an Italian American?

**FM:** I'm proud to be what I am, you know. I'm an Italian. I'm proud to be. I can't be anything else. Yeah, I had good parents.

**TM:** Hardworking people. Good providers. He was, too.

## Joe Mancuso

Son of Domenico Mancuso and Maria Manfredi Mancuso


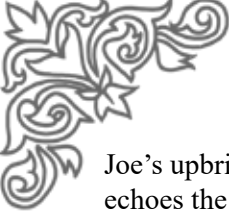


Joe Mancuso is a colorful individual. Ninety-five years old at the time of this interview, he is one of the oldest of his generation of Italian Americans in Washington. Even more significant, he lives in the same house where he grew up on Woodland Avenue in the Tylerdale neighborhood of Washington.

Woodland Avenue was a close-knit Italian neighborhood in those days. Joe recalls every family who lived on his block and the surrounding streets. Until recently, many of his lifelong friends (most of whom have now passed away) gathered to shoot the breeze in the garage he transformed into a museum of local

Italian American sports and entertainment heroes. One of those heroes was Joe's younger brother Gus, a celebrated boxer.

Joe was also a boxer in his day, but his stories focus more on his two stints in the Navy, first in Europe during WWII, then in the south Pacific and Japan. His ship, the USS Andromeda, provided support to the D-Day invasion of Normandy in 1946, and Joe rarely misses a chance to remind younger people to remember those who fought and died in the risky operation that led to the defeat of Germany in WWII. It should be noted that Joe was known as something of a rogue in the Navy; he candidly shares those stories as well.



Joe's upbringing as an Italian American echoes the stories of many others who grew up in Tylerdale with close ties of support and the lifelong friendships. However, Joe's family suffered a tragedy that altered the typical trajectory. When Joe was seven years old, his father fell ill and died. In those days, losing the parent who was the family's breadwinner was a serious situation. Joe's brothers Frank and Gus, his sister Clara, and Joe, himself, provided for their family. Their mother, Maria, took care of the home until she herself fell ill. Joe and his siblings took care of her until her death at age 99. Joe Mancuso's story is a testament to the resiliency of the immigrant spirit.

March 2017



Maria and Domenico Mancuso





Joe Mancuso, 1943



Maria Manfredi Mancuso



Gus Mancuso (Joe's younger brother) and fellow boxer, Sammy Angott, are celebrated in Joe's garage museum.



## Family Tree of Joe Mancuso

### **Joe Mancuso's Parents:**

- Domenico Mancuso, b. 1877 Savelli, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 1927
- Maria Manfredi, b. 1880, Savelli, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 1979

### **Domenico and Maria's Emigration:**

- Domenico emigrated to U.S. in 1919 or 1920; Maria emigrated to U.S. in September 1920

### **Domenico and Maria's Children:**

- Rose Mancuso, b. 1898? Savelli, Catanzaro, Calabria; remained in Italy
- Clara Mancuso, b. 1900, Savelli, Catanzaro, Calabria; m. James Manfredi
- Frank Mancuso, b. 1908, Savelli, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 1972; m. Sophie Perts
- Joseph Mancuso, b. 7-24-1921, LaBelle, PA; d. 3-15-20, Washington; m. Mary Cullinane, b. 11-26-1928, Wales; d. 1-17-1994; m. 2nd Rose Boznok, b. 4-14-1917, Benwood, WV; d. 1-18-2005
- Domenic "Gus" Mancuso, b. 1925, Arden, PA; d. 2011

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

March 13, 2017; 1:00 pm; home of Joe Mancuso

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Transcriber:** Cheri Duball

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Joe Mancuso:** Do you want to tell them my age? 95.

**Tina Calabro:** 95 years old. So, you were born in ...

**JM:** 1921. LaBelle, Pennsylvania.

**TC:** And when is your birthday?

**JM:** July 24th.

**TC:** And how do you spell LaBelle?

**JM:** L-A-Big B-E-L-L-E.

**TC:** Pennsylvania?

**JM:** Yeah. We were only there until about 1924 or '25 I think. Then we moved to Arden in '25. My younger brother was born there. Gus. He passed away a few years ago.

**TC:** And LaBelle is a place that is near a coal mine?

**JM:** Yeah, it's a coal mining town. A real small village. Then we came to Arden and Arden is the same thing. A small village. It had a coal mine there. And my dad was

the barber for the community. Twenty-five cents for a haircut. And if they didn't have it, he told them it was all right.

**TC:** And what was your father's name?

**JM:** Domenico. He died in 1927. 50 years old. My mother was a widow all them years. She died in 1979.

**TC:** And your father, what year was he born?

**JM:** 1877.

**TC:** And he was born in the town of Savelli?

**JM:** Yes. That's in Calabria.

**TC:** Catanzaro, right?

**JM:** Yeah. Catanzaro is like the county.

**TC:** And your mother's maiden name?

**JM:** Maria Manfredi.

**TC:** And was she from the same town?

**JM:** Uh huh

**TC:** And what year was she born?

**JM:** 1880. She died in 1979. She was in a wheelchair 25 years. We took care of her. My sister was living then, and my nieces and nephews and everybody, and we took care of her all them years. 25 years. She was 99 when she died.

**TC:** And was she born in Savelli also?

**JM:** Uh huh.

**TC:** I got your daughters' names. There's Joyce Mancuso Baxter and Dolores Mancuso Conway. Your first spouse was Mary Cullinane and your second was Rose Bosnok.

**TC:** What day did you get married to Mary?

**JM:** We got married August 28, 1950.

**TC:** What day did you get married to Rose?

**JM:** Rose, we got married November 1980.

**TC:** Where did you get married to Mary?

**JM:** Boston, Massachusetts. See, we were going to get married in church, but she said we'll put it off so we got married by a justice of the peace. Later on, we were supposed to get married in the church but she kept putting it off. I kept putting it off. We never did get married in church.

**TC:** And where did you marry Rose?

**JM:** Down here in St. Hilary. But I had

to get an annulment. Took me almost a year to get my annulment because I was married by a JP. I had to get an annulment from a priest. He helped me out. He was the one who got it for me. And then we got married in November.

**TC:** You're retired. What kind of work did you do?

**JM:** Well, I had all kinds of jobs at first. I delivered papers when I was young and going to high school. I was supposed to be on the football team but I was missing practice and the coach got mad because I had to deliver papers. I had 35 customers. I delivered the Washington papers. They had two papers then. The Reporter in the morning and at night was the Observer. They combined them together now. I worked for Andy Brothers Tire Company. I worked for the Washington Importing Italian Store. I delivered all over Washington. Then I went with the county bridge department after I got out of the World War II. That was the last job I had. My buddy, we worked together, I worked I think two years with the bridge department, 1949-1950. My buddy had a good friend that was building a big factory down around West Mifflin. Continental Can. They had three factories: Canonsburg, McKees Rocks, and Wheeling. They closed them three down and made one big one down there. 2,200 workers. Half of them were women. And I had to travel back and forth, me and my buddy, John Molinaro. It's by the Allegheny Airport. The factory is still there, the building. Continental Can had over 100 factories. Closed them all up. We made beer cans,

and oil cans, and everything.

**TC:** How long did you work there?

**JM:** Well, I got 26 years and then I had four more because I was in the Korean War. They gave me them four years and made it 30. But I actually worked 26 years there.

**TC:** And then what did you do?

**JM:** Well, then, I retired. 1982.

**TC:** So let's go back to your growing up in Washington.

**JM:** I was born in LaBelle. My brother was born in Arden. He was born in '25; I was born in '21.

**TC:** What's your brother's name?

**JM:** Domenic, but they called him Gus.

**TC:** Any other brothers or sisters?

**JM:** Well, my brother Frank was the oldest one.

**TC:** He was born in what year?

**JM:** 1908. He was born in Italy. In 1920, when my mother came, she came with him and my one sister, Clara. Rose stayed there. She got married and stayed there. I never got to see her.

**TC:** What year was Clara born?

**JM:** I think she was born in 1900.

**TC:** And do you know what year Rose was born?

**JM:** Rose was born in 1917.

**TC:** What year did Gus die?

**JM:** He died just a few years ago, 2011.

**TC:** And Frank? When did he die?

**JM:** He died in 1972.

**TC:** And Clara?

**JM:** Clara? I can't remember when she died.

**TC:** Your brother, Gus, what kind of work did he do?

**JM:** He was a beer salesman. He was a boxer before that.

**TC:** Frank was born in Italy.

**JM:** He worked down here at the Washington Tin Mill. Back in them days, it was 35 cents an hour, back in the early 30s.

**TC:** And then Clara, was she a housewife?

**JM:** Yeah.

**TC:** What was her married name?

**JM:** Manfredi. I think they must have been my third or fourth cousin or

something. That's why my mother was mad at my brother-in-law. Same name, you know.

**TC:** And then Rose, do you know if she got married?

**JM:** Yeah, she got married but I don't know the name of the husband. I think she died in childbirth. She was young. My mother cried for I don't know how many years on account of that. My other sister, Clara, could read Italian and write Italian. She would write to them back and forth.

**TC:** Where did your parents meet? Did they meet in the town that they grew up in?

**JM:** Yeah.

**TC:** Did you ever see the church where they got married?

**JM:** No. I didn't get to see much when I was there because we had to get back aboard ship. I didn't go to the cemetery or nothing.

**TC:** What do you remember about their years of courtship?

**JM:** Well, all I know is that my mother worked hard when we went to LaBelle. Like I said, I was just a baby. Then we went to Arden and the same way with how she cleaned the house. She was real clean. She worked hard, poor thing. Then, like I said, my dad died in 1927. She was a widow from '27 until 1979. Twenty-five

years in a wheelchair here. We took care of her. That's when everybody was living here.

**TC:** Is this your family house?

**JM:** Yeah. We came here in 1925. '25 or '26, around in there. My brother was born in Arden in '25. He was a baby when he came here. One of these houses was \$3,500, but nobody had no money. So my sister Clara came here and she got married right away. So she lived on Allison Avenue. So we stayed there. I was just a baby then. Because the house wasn't ready yet. People were still living here. Then they moved out and we came here.

**TC:** So your dad, Domenico, he came first to the U.S. and he went to LaBelle to the coal mine? Do you know what year he came?

**JM:** Right after World War I. 1919 or maybe the first part of 1920. Because my mother didn't come here until September 1920. That's when he went to New York to pick her up.

**TC:** So Maria came in 1920 and your dad came the year before. They had three children already, Rose, Clara and Frank. Clara was about 20 years old and Frank was about 12 years old.

**TC:** Why did Rose stay back?

**JM:** Well, she got married.

**TC:** What year was she born?

**JM:** I don't know when she was born actually.

**TC:** So they went to LaBelle but left there pretty quickly and went to the coal mine in Arden.

**JM:** They were in Arden about two years there.

**TC:** Why did your parents come to the United States?

**JM:** Well, they were all poor. There was no kind of work. All they did was plant gardens. That's how they lived, off their gardens. There was no factories or nothing. Only factories up north above Rome. Just like over here in America, the south was poor and the north was high-class.

**TC:** And you said before that when the Italians came, they worked in the coal mines, that it was all they could do because they couldn't speak English.

**JM:** Yeah, coal mines or steel mills.

**TC:** Did they have any relatives already living here?

**JM:** No. They had friends. Paisanos they called them. That's why everybody stayed in one section of the town. All of Calabrese stayed here on Woodland Avenue and Allison. But they knew each other in the old country.

**TC:** Who were some of their friends?

**JM:** Oh, I can name them all! Sacco,

Levato, Paletta, Costanza, Belcastro, Mandarino, Allegro, Cava, Ruffalo, Canatero ... but they went by Kennedy. They changed their name to Kennedy. Cava. They changed their names; Cavasini and they shortened it to Cava. They had a store here where the column is. See the Pulaski Club over here across the street? That was a store then. Then there was Veltri. They had a store, too, up above, a few doors up. Just a regular, what do they call that, a mom and pop store. Everything was cheap. What you did was, you went on it with a book, and at the end of the month you paid. Everything was cheap. Bananas were five cents a bunch, milk was five cents, Coca-Cola was five cents. Everything was cheap.

**TC:** So there were a lot of people that came from that same area and they were friends?

**JM:** Yeah. Zacharia, Alteri (it was "Gualteri"), Spadafore, Colosi.

**TC:** And they all settled here around Tylerdale?

**JM:** Yeah. The ones that came from the other part of Italy, they were up on Prospect Avenue.

**TC:** Did your mother and father keep in touch with relatives in Italy?

**JM:** Yeah, we had an aunt and cousins. My mother didn't do no writing. Then my sister would come up with the letter and she would read it to my mother.

**TC:** What was this neighborhood like when you were growing up?

**JM:** Oh, it was a good neighborhood. Nice! When somebody got sick, we never went to the hospital. People would come to the house and bring oranges or apples and they would talk. I messed my leg up when I was a kid. I got it caught in the spokes of a bicycle. We didn't go to a doctor. In fact, they didn't have an Italian doctor. Finally, an Italian doctor did come. His name was Sposato. He was our first Italian doctor. That's when they could talk Italian to him, see? His mother and my mother were real good friends. They lived up by the ballfield there. My mother used to walk everywhere. The streetcar was only a nickel, but they didn't even have a nickel. Then later on, he died and Dr. Carlett ... no, Carlett was before him. That's right, Sposato came after Carlett. And then Dr. Badiali.

**TC:** Carlett was before Sposato?

**JM:** Yeah, they shortened the name from Carletto or something. He's buried up at the IC cemetery. He was a good doctor. In fact, like I told you, I was five or six years old in 1927. I had to start school then; Clark School is right here. So my dad, I'll never forget, bought me a hat that had a feather in it. In those days, we wore pants that came to your knees. We didn't wear long pants in them days, kids. So he took me to school in September. A parent got to bring you to school. So, September, October, November—then, he got sick. He had to go to the hospital. He had kidney problems. Back in those days, there were

no Italian doctors either. We had a Jewish doctor, Dr. Reuben. He was one of the main doctors. So, me and Mrs. Muoio, that was another Italian family, M-U-O-I-O, they lived across the street. (Later, they went by "Moyer.") She and my mother and me went up to the hospital to see my dad and he passed away while we were up there. My mother started crying. My mother wore black for five, six years after that. She took it real hard. She loved my dad. My dad was a good guy. So there she is with three boys here; my sister was married. Frank was still single then and he worked at the tin mill, 35 cents an hour. That's what we were living on. So then, later on, the mine pension from the miners' union came. It was only \$10 a month. She had it pretty tough, my mother, I have to say that.

**TC:** So, your older brother, Frank, he basically took care of the family?

**JM:** Well, he was like the head [of the family] because he was the oldest. He was like in charge. But he worked. Like I said, I would have to go the meat market and go down and get tenderloin for 25 cents. That's what my brother would eat because he worked. Me and my younger brother, we got the bone. We would chew on the bone.

**TC:** Who did Frank marry?

**JM:** He married Sophie. Her last name was Perts. P-E-R-T-S.

**TC:** Clara's husband, what was his first name?

**JM:** Jim. James.

**JM:** This was taken in 1928 here on Woodland Avenue, me and my brother, Gus. I was six or seven.

**JM:** There was a Syrian family. Well, they were Lebanese, and they lived down below. He was a photographer. He took a picture of us, a big picture.

**TC:** So you said all of Woodland Avenue was Italians.

**JM:** Yeah, there were Italians. Two Polish, one Irish, and all the rest were Italians.

**TC:** What did people do in the neighborhood? Did they have any events or parties or clubs?

**JM:** Well, the Alpine came later on. Before that, all they did, like I said, they worked in coal mines and glass factories too. Hazel Atlas. They didn't pay nothing either. They didn't have no union or nothing. They used to give them the worst jobs in the plant. They didn't get the good jobs. They couldn't be the operators. After World War II, if you were a foreigner, you didn't get the good jobs. Then there was Molib [Molybdenum] Steel Company, it's torn down now, out here by Jessop Steel. If you were a foreigner, you never got a job there. You had to be English. If you were a foreigner, you couldn't get a job. East Washington, nobody was allowed over there unless you lived there. If you were from town here, you couldn't go over

there. They were the rich people.

**TC:** Were there other types of discrimination that you felt?

**JM:** Oh, yeah. All the time. They called you dago. If you was a foreigner, like I said, you got the dirty job. You never got the good jobs. Then after World War II, there was more Italian Americans in the service than any nationality. We had almost two million Italian Americans in the service.

**TC:** Besides working in the coal mine, your dad was a barber?

**JM:** He was the only one in Arden. When they'd get a haircut, they come to our house. He only charged a quarter. If they didn't have a quarter, he didn't charge them nothing. Then when he came to this house, he didn't do more barbering because he got sick.

**TC:** Did your mother ever have to go to work?

**JM:** No, none of the mothers worked here. None of them. They stayed home. All of them. She did the cooking, worked in the garden, washed the clothes.

**TC:** Was your mother a good cook?

**JM:** Yeah!

**TC:** What kind of meals do you remember?

**JM:** Well, the main was naturally

spaghetti and meatballs. Sometimes, rigatoni. But very seldom did we ever have steak. Well, like I said, for my brother only because he was working. I never ate meat when I was kid. I ate the meatballs. The meatballs were made with pork and beef. Eggs, cheese, breadcrumbs. Yeah, it was good. The ones you get now in these restaurants, they don't taste good. They just make beef. You got to have pork in them.

**TC:** You were seven years old when your dad died. So, your life changed dramatically. What was your life like as a kid after that?

**JM:** Well, I don't remember too much. All I remember is going to school. That's all I can remember. All the guys who were all the same age as me on the street were all like brothers. For clothes, my mother would sew. We never bought new clothes when we was kids. We felt bashful going to school, you know. The other kids were dressed up nice. We were clean, but we had patches on our pants. The shoes were old.

**TC:** Did you go to Wash High?

**JM:** Yeah.

**TC:** And you graduated?

**JM:** Yeah. I was working in 11th grade. My brother quit in 11th grade. He didn't graduate. I was in 11th grade. My brother played football for Wash High. My brother, Frank, worked at the tin mill. In them days, if you had a relation

to a worker, you could catch a turn and they would take you in. So I had to sign papers and I was only 15 years old. It was summertime, you know, vacation. My brother took me down to where he worked. Some women worked there too. I got the tongs and I had to pick up the sheet out of the oven and put it on a cart. Man, that was hard work! My brother, Frank, he knew how to do it. And I kept doing it. So one day, it was in the summertime, I was working and the superintendent come by. His name was Mr. Brile. He was Catholic too. He said, "Son, what are you doing here?" I said, "Working, sir." He said, "Working? Shouldn't you be in school?" I said, "Well, in September I go back." This was in August. He said, "Well, you don't want to work here. Go to school. Graduate." I had one more year to go. So I went back to school. I wasn't working steady. I was just catching a turn. I was making 35 cents an hour. It was no money.

**TC:** Did your parents learn English?

**JM:** My mother, just broken. She didn't learn too well. Just a little bit.

**TC:** And your dad?

**JM:** No, he didn't learn. I don't remember him too much because he passed away when I was a kid. All I can remember of him, from when we lived in Arden, he took me to the show. The show was only 10 cents at the Court Theater. Him and my brother, Frank, and I. We caught the streetcar and came to Washington. That was a big deal. I never went to a movie in

my life! Well, I was just a kid. The name of the movie, I can't think of but I can remember one of the guys that played in it was Leo Carillo. He was a Mexican, but he was a good actor. He owned a candy factory but he was a gangster. If somebody would come in that he didn't like, he'd give them a piece of candy and that meant that this guy was going to get shot. I can remember a little bit of that. I think that's the only time he took me to the show because he liked the movies.

**TC:** Did you go to church a lot when you were growing up?

**JM:** Oh, yeah. IC [Immaculate Conception] was over where W&J [Washington & Jefferson College] is now. On Lincoln Avenue.

**TC:** Did a lot of Italians go there?

**JM:** Yeah. The ones from Prospect Avenue, from everywhere we all went to church. Then, like I said, in 1932 or '33 they started building the new church. So we had to go there then. On Sunday, we had to walk all the way up IC. All of us kids together, you know. A big bunch of us, six, seven, eight of us. I got baptized on Lincoln Avenue then in the new church I got Communion and Confirmation. My godfather was John Massaro. My Confirmation sponsors were Fortunato and Clara Rotunda.

**TC:** So, it sounds like you had all your friends here and you would play together, go to school together ...

**JM:** Yeah, we played all the sports together. Football, baseball, but we didn't have equipment. We couldn't afford equipment. We had regular clothes on. We played on the ballfields down below here. It's called Ramage Field now, but in those days it was called Tyler Mine Field. The mine owned it. That's where we played football and baseball. Basketball we played in the alley. We had a bushel for the basket.

**TC:** Would you say you had a happy childhood?

**JM:** Oh, now considering everything, I think we lived through it, God willing. And like I said, they're all gone, all my buddies. I got a couple now, but they're not the original. I don't know if you know Paul Ciccone? He lives up around Prospect Avenue. His mother was a DeMaria. Her brother was a cop, Dominic DeMaria. Well, that's this guy's uncle. He's in his sixties. He never got married and on Sundays, he brings me a bowl of soup once in a while. He lives with his aunt. She's in her nineties. He comes down and keeps me company for two hours on Sundays. Then, I had Pete Insana. I don't know if you know the Insanas. He died a few months ago. He used to come every Sunday too.

**TC:** Is there anything else you wanted to say about growing up as an Italian-American?

**JM:** Well, like I said, they were prejudiced against us. A lot of people didn't like us because we were Italian. But after the war was over, it changed. That's when

it changed. After World War II. Like I said, a lot of factories wouldn't hire you if you was Italian or a foreigner. Polish or Italian, you couldn't get the good jobs; you always got the dirty jobs. The worst jobs in the plant. Like in Hazel Atlas. I didn't get a telephone until 1951, I think. We didn't have no phone because my mother couldn't answer the phone anyway. So what's the use of getting a phone? But my sister had a phone. I always put her number down. But a lot of times they called me to the factory and she never came up and told me. I never got hired. I must have put 15 [applications] in at Hazel Atlas. Maybe 25 or 30 in Number One. And Number Two, a bunch of them. Everybody worked in them factories, all my buddies. Yeah, they all worked in them glass factories, but I never got the call.

Then later on, like I said, I sold papers when I was a young kid, 10, 11, 12 years old. Then I went to Andy Brothers, recapping tires. They didn't pay nothing either. 15 dollars a week. And we worked hard. I had to take care of 12 molds, 12 passenger molds and two truck molds. We had to put the tires in there to bake. They had to bake for one hour and then we put the rubber on them. A couple of my buddies worked there too. I knew everybody. Then later on, this one guy worked for Washington Importing that was on Jefferson Avenue then. So Washington Importing was an Italian store. So he was going to quit and I knew him. He said, why don't you get my job driving a truck. I said, geez if I could drive a truck, that would be a big thrill for me because I got my driver's license

when I was a senior in high school. But I never drove nothing because I didn't have no car. So he quit and I took that job over. I had it for about a year. I quit Andy Brothers and I went there. So, I took care of Washington County. Every week I had a delivery. I took care of Bellevue and I knew everybody in Bellevue. Tylerdale. They didn't pay nothing either. 15 dollars a week. And I worked 10 hours a day and Saturdays I would work until 11 at night. Never got no extra money.

**TC:** I'm going to ask you to repeat the story that you told me about my grandfather, Mike Matullo. You said you could remember him coming through the neighborhood and convincing people to buy a Maytag wringer washer.

**JM:** But they didn't have enough money. That was the first one we got. We had to pay so much a week or a month or whatever it was. It wasn't expensive, but it was expensive to people here because nobody had money. Everybody was poor. We had to go on welfare and you know what they gave us? They give us big blocks of cheese, some flour. We had to go down to Clark School and get them. They gave us flour to make bread, cheese. I think they gave us a can of milk. We never got fresh milk.

**TC:** Powdered milk?

**JM:** Powdered milk, that's what it was.



---

**Joe Mancuso talks about his military service:**

**TC:** Your military service I know is a lot, so tell ...

**JM:** I was getting drafted in 1942. They sent the draft notice to me and I didn't want to go in the Army. So I said I'm going to join the Navy. Back in those days they had recruiters every place. So I went up to the Navy recruiter and said I wanted to join up. He said they would send me to Pittsburgh to get examined. That was in September 1942.

So I got examined and they said everything was all right. So I came back, and they said we aren't going to call you right away—just go home and wait. So, December 10th, they called me and told me I needed to go to Newport, Rhode Island, for boot camp training. In those days, they only had three boot camps: Newport, Rhode Island; Great Lakes around Chicago, and San Diego. The officer said that it was pretty close to the holidays and told me go home for the holidays and they would call me after. So January 2nd they called me to go to Newport, Rhode Island. That's when I went on the train in Pittsburgh. And I took training for three months. They put me on the USS Andromeda. It's an AKA—an amphibian ship and has 24 landing crafts on it. We took troops and waited for invasions on our ship. There were 15 AKAs and 15 APAs.

The APAs had more troops than cargo. We had more cargo than troops. We still

had troops, you know, but not as many as APAs.

I got so much to tell. When you leave boot camp you go to Pier 92 in New York. The Navy took over that pier. It was big—a lot of luxury liners used to come. The Navy took it over. That's where they tell you what ship you're going to go on. So we go on and they have the alphabet. Everybody who has M goes under M and they start calling us. About 50 of us and everybody's name starts with M. They said, you're going to the Brooklyn Navy Yard to get your ship. We didn't know nothing. What do we know? I never left Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio. That's all I was. I never saw the ocean until I was in the Navy.

So we're in two open trucks, about 20 in each truck, going past Madison Square Garden. 8th Avenue going down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. And on the marquee, they had a big marquee at Madison Square Garden, "Tonight W&J versus Creighton. Basketball. Championship." I couldn't believe it! Then it said, "Friday night, Sammy Angott versus Willie Pep!" Willie Pep had 62 straight wins. I'm hollering and the guys said what's the matter? I said the college is in my hometown and the fighter is from my hometown.

So we get down to the ship, a brand new ship just out of the Navy yard. Brand new. AKA-15. First, there was a battleship there, the USS Iowa and we went on that. We thought that was going to be our ship and took our bags. And the guy said no, the next ship. The Andromeda was tied up next to it. Brand new. No crew on it—just a skeleton crew.

We got on there and we didn't know nothing. Dumb. They started talking to us and more sailors came aboard and we started filling up. They said we were going to take on cargo and troops. We started loading up troops and tanks and jeeps and ammunition until the holds were filled up. We didn't know where it was going. Before that, I asked one of the officers if I could get liberty. He said the ship was sealed, no liberty. I couldn't go see the basketball game and felt real bad. But then we went on maneuvers in Chesapeake Bay. Then we headed out into the Atlantic, 15 AKAs, 30 ships all together and they had escorts. Destroyers. Three on one side and three on the other because there was a lot of German subs in the Atlantic at that time. They called them, uh ...

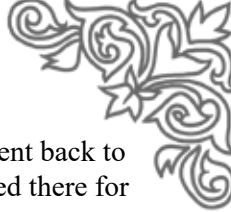
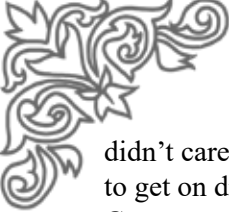
**TC:** U-boats?

**JM:** U-boats, yeah. Wolfpack they called them, the U-boats. They traveled five or six in a group and bombed ships left and right. The Merchant Marines, when they went over, they didn't have no escorts because they didn't belong to the Navy and they were bombing them all the time. Torpedoing them. So after we get so far out to sea, finally the Captain makes a speech. He says we're going to North Africa. We're going to make an invasion of North Africa. North Africa is like Europe. A lot of people don't know that. Because France, Spain, Italy, and England owned all the countries in North Africa. Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt. But the savages were in the central part of Africa. So he tells us where we're going,

and we don't know nothing or what was going to happen. So it took 14 days because we had to zig-zag on account of the subs. We had to wear life jackets 24 hours a day.

We finally got there and made the invasion. We got a little bit of opposition but mostly the opposition was in the western part around Casablanca. We were up in northern Morocco. Oran was the capital. Spelled with an "O." It was a big city. Big buildings. France owned that. Spain owned some of Morocco. Italy owned Libya. Egypt was England. So we didn't get too much opposition. We unloaded everything. That was our homeport. We stayed there. Pretty soon we go on maneuvers again and then we come back. They said we were going to be invading Sicily. We brought on a lot of troops again. I think we came back to the States and got some more troops and went back to North Africa. We waited and went on maneuvers. That was the biggest ship's invasion at that time before Normandy. So we're going to Sicily in convoy, hundreds of ships. It was real nice and smooth. And the last day, they call it D-Day, and then H-hour was at two in the morning. That's when we started unloading troops and equipment.

So we're going into Sicily and a storm comes up, it's real rough, wind was blowing, and a lot of soldiers got seasick, and then they had to climb down a rope ladder to get into landing craft to take them to the beach. It was dark, you know. Pretty soon a lot of them guys say, "I can't wait to get off of this ship." Because they



didn't care about the Navy. They wanted to get on dry land. I said, "Yeah, but the Germans are waiting on us over there." Someone said, "We don't care."



So we unloaded there. We had 24 landing craft and lost 11 of them on account of the storm. So we finally got unloaded and everything and they did a lot of bombing. We was shooting the German aircraft. We would send up flares first and they would light up the whole thing and then they would drop the bombs. In the meantime, our paratroopers was up there ready to come out of their planes. And we was shooting and you couldn't see nobody. And we shot a lot of our own American planes down. They never talked about that, but we know for sure they did because I met a few of the paratroopers later in Italy in Naples. They said, "We landed in trees on some farms and it was all confusion. Messed up. You guys wasn't shooting at the German planes. You didn't know our planes was up there too." I felt bad about that, you know.

Then we come back to Oran and stayed for a while there. We were going to invade Italy. Salerno. We had problems there too. In the meantime, Italy was with Germany at the time. They surrendered. They quit Germany; they came with us. The Germans over here, the Italians over here, and we're coming in by the sea. And the Italians was in between. They didn't know which way to go. We captured a lot of them. The soldiers captured a lot of them and put them in some kind of stockades or something.

After we got done there, we went back to North Africa and then we stayed there for a while. Then they said Eisenhower was going to invade Normandy. That's France on the east coast or west coast, wherever it is. So we brought some troops up to England, Portsmouth and Liverpool. The ships were all getting ready for the invasion. We was going to go with them too. They told us: Your ship and five or six other ships are going to southern France, back to the Mediterranean.

So we unloaded our troops there and went back to North Africa through the Rock of Gibraltar. They said we're going to invade southern France. I went over the hill; I was in the brig for a while. Then they put me on a destroyer. Later on, the war was over. Germany surrendered. So we come back to the States in a convoy. Our ship was like this because we got a couple bombs real close, it cracked our seams, and we were taking on water. We went to Ireland and picked up troops that got killed. We picked up their belongings because all the ships were empty. Except one ship wasn't empty.

So we were going up towards Iceland and Greenland in the North Atlantic. It was real rough. It was snowing and cold. A lot of the guys got seasick. I asked the quartermaster up on the deck, "How's come that one ship is real low in the water? We're all empty, most of us." When you're empty, you're up high. He said, "You know what's on that ship?" I said, "No." He said, "There's Scotch on there." You know who it belonged to? Joe Kennedy. He was the ambassador to



England at the time. He bought all that Scotch because they were going to throw it away. He paid one dollar a case. There must have been thousands and thousands of cases.

We come into the Boston Navy Yard, because that's where we were heading to get repaired. Some went to New York, some went to Norfolk, and some went to Boston. In the buildings, the office workers were waving to us, the people, you could see thousands of them. So we stayed there in Boston to get repaired, get repainted, and camouflaged. We went on liberty, me and four other guys. Instead of staying in Boston, we went to New York on a train 'cause we didn't have to be back until seven the next morning. In New York, there was drinking and dancing and having fun and everything. So it's about three or four in the morning and I said, "Well, we better get the train and get back to Boston." One guy says, "No, we ain't been home for over two years. We're going to catch a train and go home for the holidays." Because it was in December. I said, "No. I don't want to leave. All of my buddies are on the ship. Besides that, I don't have no money. I'm broke." He said, "I'll buy you a ticket. I got \$12." It was only \$12 to Pittsburgh.

Before you know it, I'm on a train going up towards Albany, New York, on New York Central. Then over towards Buffalo. On the way up, each guy was getting off certain towns. I was the last one to Buffalo, New York. We came into Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh and Lake Erie. It's a shopping center now.

**TC:** Yes, Station Square.

**JM:** Station Square. That's where I got off at. Then, I hitchhiked home. Well, I'm home and it was the 23rd or 24th of December. So, I'm going out and having a good time and everything. Pretty soon, a straggler notice comes to my house. It says \$25 reward for the capture of Joe Mancuso AWOL. I couldn't get in touch with the other guys. They must have all went back. The ship was supposed to leave New Year's Day for Panama to go to the South Pacific. See, Germany surrendered already. So, I figured I'd be back before New Year's. So that was on the 26th or 27th. So, the 27th I went back to Pier 92 and I didn't know the ship left.

**TC:** You went all the way up to Boston?

**JM:** No—New York City. That's where all the piers where the luxury liners used to come. Navy took that Pier 92 over. That's where you caught your ship. They told you what ship you were going on.

**TC:** So you got on a train and went all the way up to New York?

**JM:** Yeah. So, I went to Pier 92 and said, "USS Andromeda." He said, "It left Christmas Day for Panama." So they put me in the brig there. The brig was two cruisers, the USS Olympia and the USS Seattle. They were cruisers but they wasn't in use. The Navy took them over and made brigs out of them. So I had to take my uniform off and they put old uniforms on us with "P"s on the back. And there I was on these ships with all

kinds of different sailors because a lot of sailors all went over the hill at the same time. They said, "Are you going to put us in the ..." Police had them ... When guys would get drunk, they used to put them in there ... it's not a car ... what do they call that?

**TC:** Is it called a hold?

**JM:** No, it's some kind of a paddy wagon that got just slits. And there was like five, six, seven of us in there. We didn't know where in the hell it was going. They put us back in our uniforms, our regular uniforms. We're going up through the Bronx, New York, and I'm looking through the thing. Past Fordham University and I knew Fordham University was in the Bronx. So, we're going up a little bit more and pretty soon we stop and we get out. Hart's Island; it's a little island. It was a civilian prison. The Navy took it over and you had to go over by ferryboat from the Bronx over to the island. It was a small island and that's what they called Potter's Field. They used to bury guys that didn't have no family. They used to bury them there. It was real small; you could walk around it in a couple hours.

So we go in there, get in the building, and we had to take our uniforms off. They give us striped uniforms. A lot of people don't know stuff like that about the Navy. Two uniforms they gave us. It was cell blocks because it was a regular prison, you know. You know who stayed there one time? Mae West was there for ten days. She took too much clothes off or something. Indecent exposure.

**TC:** Now what year was this?

**JM:** 1945. January. Yeah, right after New Year's. In the cell block there was 90 of us. Real long cell blocks. Forty-five on one side. Forty-five on the other side. And the guards were Marines. They were only privates, but they brought them back to the States and made guards out of them. We had to treat them like they were officers. So if you seen one of them, and they say, "Attention," whatever you were doing, you had to stop. Freeze. And they come over and they go like this. If you shaved and they said you didn't shave, you had to go in there and dry-shave. Just water. And every time you seen them you had to say sir, sir, sir. If you didn't say sir, they'd get mad.

So soon someone said, "Well, you're going to trial." I was there three or four days. We worked rock piles, we made mops, we made brooms. Different buildings. There was about five or six buildings there. It was a small island, but a lot of buildings there. So they said, "You're going to trial," so I had to put my regular uniform back on. We went on the ferryboat back to the Bronx, down to Brooklyn, New York. So I was in the waiting room, bunch of sailors, all going to trial. So an officer, a Navy lieutenant, comes to me and said, "I'm going to represent you, Mr. Mancuso." I says, "OK." Pretty soon they called different guys and pretty soon they called me in that room. We go in and they have officers, six admirals on one side of the desk and six on the other side. I had to stand at attention and they were reading my records and everything. One

admiral says, "Mr. Mancuso, you was in a lot of action." I says, "Yes, sir!" He says, "Yeah, I can see that. What made you miss your ship?" I said, "Sir, they told us we was going to leave New Year's Day and in fact it left Christmas Day. I didn't want to go over the hill. One of my buddies got my ticket for a train. And before I knew it, I was on the train. But I thought the ship was going to leave New Year's Day and I would be back in time."

So we went a little bit more. I didn't get no read off of them, so I went back to the brig. Then they put grays on us. Two sets of grays instead of stripes. No more stripes. So going to work, we had to march everywhere with our hands folded. Double time. And then we went to the mess hall. We had to wait until the other outfit got done and then we stayed there and then we went in and we sat down. Everybody sat down together. You had one egg, one piece of toast, and coffee. That's all. And then you had to get up and go outside and we marched. Every place we went, we had to march. Double time. And it was cold.

So a few days later the read-off comes and they called me in the office. They said, you got three months in the BCD. BCD is Bad Conduct Discharge. So that was my sentence. Some guys got six months. The most you could get in that brig was a year. Then if you had more than a year, you went to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. That was the big prison. Officers and everything was up there. So it was time we had to go work pounding rocks, making mops and brooms, and marching. Calisthenics 5:00

in the morning. In the cell blocks there was double beds, one on top and one on the bottom. There was 45 on one side and 45 on the other. At night they called them. That's how they counted us. 2, 4, 6, 8 ... and they always got 90. If they didn't get 90, they figured somebody escaped. One guy tried to swim across but never made it because it was a pretty good distance, you know, maybe at least a half a mile.

So after a month or two, it was the beginning of March, they called me in and says, "You're going back to duty." He says, "Your sentence is down to 60 days." On account of my good conduct. I was so glad. Everybody thought I was going home. I said, "I ain't going home. Probably going to catch another ship." So they took me out and brought me back to Pier 92 again. So I stayed there for about a day or so. He called me in and says, "You're going to the USS Ebert Destroyer 768."

That's when we got escorted by destroyers before that. And at the end, we was escorting ships ourselves. So I felt bad on that ship because I didn't know nobody, you know. It was all strangers. My buddies was on the other ship. So we take off and we're getting ready to escort a bunch of ships to Normandy. They was still fighting there. They couldn't take it. They was losing a lot of troops. They lost 2,500 for the first day in the invasion. They couldn't swim, they had them heavy packs. Poor guys drowned.

So we went into the [port of] Le Havre, France, and the ships started to unload.

We went back and forth in the English Channel checking for submarines. Pretty soon we came back to the States, and we come to New York, and they say we are going to go to the south Pacific. So six destroyers in a squadron, we traveled together.

So we headed down towards the Panama Canal, through the Canal, and up to San Diego. We stopped there for a while and they gave us liberty. I met a girl there. She was a swimming instructor for college. Real nice. Peggy Boylan. I got a picture here somewhere. Maybe it's upstairs. When I was married, I had pictures in a shoebox hidden in the attic. My wife never saw them.

So I was with her, dating her, going out dancing and drinking in nightclubs. So the last day I had liberty but I had to be at work at seven in the morning. That's when the ship was going to take off for Pearl Harbor. So I'm with her, you know, in her apartment and I says, "I got to go, honey. If I miss, I'm on probation from before." I had a year's probation. I says, "If I miss this ship, they're going to put me away for 20 years." She was crying. She goes, "Don't leave me. I love you," and this and that. And she was a pretty girl and I liked her. I says, "Well, Peggy, I got to go. I don't want to miss my ship." "Please, please stay," she kept begging me and begging me. This was at four in the morning. So I took off and I kissed her and said, "Don't forget to write." I said, "I'll write to you first."

As soon as I left her place, there was

a bus coming by and I got on that bus. It was going to the Navy yard that was maybe about a mile away from where I was. So I got on the bus and he went to the Navy yard and he let me off. The Navy yard was big too and where the ship was docked was a good piece away. So I got off and I start running towards the dock and I had to go a good piece. Maybe from about here to the ballfield. So I'm running and our ship was tied to the dock, and they were taking the lines off. The other five ships was gone! I jumped aboard and the guy told me, "Get down below and put you dungarees on." He said everything was OK. It was almost 7:00. It was about five minutes to seven. I went and put my dungarees on and everything was OK.

We went to Pearl Harbor. We were going to invade Okinawa and Iwo Jima. They put us on patrol for Japanese subs, six of us. In the meantime, we're on maneuvers there. We dropped what they called ashcans. They were on the fantail and then they would go down below and they would explode. That's how they used to get the subs. So with our subs, when we was on maneuvers, we used dye. Blue-green dye to make you think you got the subs. So in the meantime, that captain from one of the subs called our captain and he says, "We'll transfer five of your men to our sub and we'll transfer five from the sub on your ship. Would that be all right?" And our captain says, "Yeah." So down below deck, they had a deck of cards and they said the five highest cards gets to go on the sub. So I happened to get a king, I got one of the high cards.

So five of us went on the sub and five of them guys came on our ship. So, we're still on maneuvers and the guy says, "You want to see your ship?" It was real close quarters on the sub. Underneath my bunk was a torpedo. Everything was real close on the sub. You get confused. So he puts the periscope up and he says, "Take a look. See if you see your ship." And I saw my ship. So after a few days, I went back aboard my ship and we was on maneuvers a little bit more and took off for the Mariana Islands and the Marshall Islands. We was looking for Japanese submarines. Then we went to the Philippines. So in the Philippines, they just got invaded by Americans and the Navy took over the Philippines just then when we got there. So we're coming in the Leyte Gulf by Manila. We're going to replace six of our destroyers. They're on their way out and on one of them was my brother! He was on the 702, the USS Earl Johnson. So I told a guy to flash over and he flashed over and he said, "Yeah, your brother is on that ship." But I couldn't see him; he was too far away. I never got no contact with him. See my mother was a widow and he wasn't supposed to go in the Navy. One son was supposed to stay home when one brother is left and the mother can't be by herself. But in the meantime they took him. He was going to get drafted too, so he joined the Navy too right after I did. And that's where I saw him, I didn't see him, but met him over in the Philippines.

So we're in the Philippines and we're on maneuvers looking for Japanese submarines and they said we're going to invade Japan. It's going to be a big invasion.

First, they dropped the first atom bomb when we were in the Philippines. We all clapped and wondered if they were going to surrender. The captain on the speaker said, "Don't get excited. They ain't surrendered yet." Three days later, they dropped the second atom bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, one right after the other. So they dropped the second one and two days later they did surrender. We were going to escort LSTs into Honshu, that's part of Japan. That was going to be a big invasion. They said they were waiting on us and if we would have invaded, they would have killed a lot of Americans. So in the meantime, after they surrendered, they said, "Well, we're going to go to Tokyo Bay anyway." We was going to escort LSTs. They were big invasion ships with the flaps that come down. They were real big with tanks and jeeps on them. They were landing craft that were the biggest ones.

So we're going through the China Sea. In the meantime, there's lots of floating mines. If they hit your ship, they'll blow it up. The mines were pretty big, you know. They were as big as that thing there. Our captain was up on the deck with a rifle shooting at them, blowing them up. They were coming close to our ship. Well, they were close to all the ships because we were in the China Sea going up towards Iwo Jima and Okinawa into Japan, Tokyo Bay. So we finally keep going up through the China Sea and past Okinawa. They just surrendered Okinawa and we didn't stop there. A big typhoon came. We lost our liberty boat. It was real bad but it was the tail end of a big

typhoon. We finally got into Tokyo Bay. It was dismal there. All the ships sank, and you could just see the mast because the Japanese sunk a lot of their own ships. They didn't want us to capture their ships. And everything was flat. We were at the coast and Hiroshima was a little farther inland, but we didn't go there. We went to Yokohama and Yokosuka. They were bombed by regular bombs; they didn't get bombed by the atom bombs. The only thing that was left were safes. Everything was flat. You could hardly see any civilians.

Later on, we got a liberty and ten of us went with an officer. This one girl, she was underground, she was a teenager I guess, they wore kimonos, they didn't wear regular clothes, they wore kimonos. She come to me; I smoked then. I had cigarettes in my pocket and I couldn't understand Japanese. She was talking Japanese. She pointed to the cigarettes and I gave her three or four of them. She went back under some tin plate there, I guess that's where they were living, underground there. So, we kept walking around there, me and our ten guys and the officer. The officer had a gun because he thought maybe there was going to be booby traps. Meanwhile, there was a building over there still standing a little bit. I broke away from the gang and went over and opened the door and there was a silk factory. Japanese women were working on sewing machines. They saw me and they all left their machines and went in the corner. They were scared. They thought we would shoot them. They put their heads down and they were

talking in Japanese. In the meantime, my officer saw me going and he got mad. "Mancuso! Come over here! What's wrong with you? There might be a booby trap over there!"

So I went back there and later on we went back aboard ship. We stayed there for a while. I didn't like it there at all. It was, like, dreary there all the time. So finally they said we're going back to the States. In the meantime, they were letting guys that had points to go back on different ships back to the States. I had the points but I couldn't go because I was on probation. I had to stay. So the ship, we're leaving and we're going up towards Alaska. Well, we went to a town in northern Japan called Hokkaido. We were the only ship there. We saw a lot of white girls there; they were nice looking girls. We thought they were American. Here, they were white Russian women. See, Russia was real close to Japan at that time. But there was no bombing or nothing there. We didn't stay there that long.

We got in our convoy and we took off. We said we're going back to America. So, coming back, Aleutian Islands, Alaska, down the coast of California, and we stopped in San Francisco. We stopped there, but we didn't get liberty. We went to Long Beach and L.A. We stopped there and we got liberty there. Then I went back to San Diego and I tried to call that girlfriend of mine, but I couldn't get ahold of her. I think she got married because I think she wrote me a Dear John letter later on when I was in the Pacific.

So later on to Panama and then from Panama up to Norfolk. And then in April I got discharged. 1946 April. Then I went to Bainbridge, Maryland, that's where I got discharged.

**TC:** What year did you join the Navy reserves?

**JM:** When I was getting discharged, I stayed in. 1946. Like a dummy, I stayed in. I don't know why. I couldn't wait to get out of the Navy. Everybody wanted to go home after the war was over, you know. Nobody wanted to stay in the service. Like I said, in 1951, that's when they called me to go back in the Navy for the Korean War. I was working at Continental Can at the time.

**TC:** So you had to go to Korea?

**JM:** Well, I didn't go to Korea. I stayed on the East Coast. What happened when I got in, they made four cargo-handling battalions. It was about 100 sailors in a group and they just started it. What we did, we took a ship, a refrigerator ship from the United States to the Mediterranean and fed the fleet. After we fed the fleet, we come back empty and stayed for a while. We'd get another refrigerator ship and go back over again. A lot of times, we'd go to Cuba for three or four months and bring the officers' stuff down there. Things like that.

One time, a cement ship came from Puerto Rico to Cuba, Guantanamo, and they were going to enlarge the airport. This ship had a million sacks of cement on it. It's all they had on it, it was all cement. Four big

holds filled with it from the bottom to the top. We had to unload them because they were going to extend the airfield on account of the jets. The jets needed a longer field. The ones with the propellers didn't need a longer field. So, we started working. We had shorts on; it was 82 every day down there in Cuba. We were swallowing dust 'cause the bags would break. We'd go in the water. They had a big garbage can with ice with water in it and some of the cement would go in there. We'd spit concrete.

So we left the ship one day and went up on the dock to our captain. It was a lieutenant then because we didn't have captains then; it was lieutenants and ensigns. He said, "You're all going to go to trial. But I'll tell you what we're going to do. You work down there for an hour, then we'll send another group down and yinz come up on deck, and back and forth like that. You won't be down there all them hours." That was better.

Finally, we got the last bag and he gave us liberty. Back when I was in Cuba, Battista was the dictator. We were allowed to go to the cities. We were in Santiago, the other end of Havana, the southern part of Cuba, 600 miles away. It was a big city, the second biggest city. We were allowed to go there then. We had liberty and drinks were 15 cents a mixed drink, ten cents for a bottle of beer. Hotel rooms, two dollars.

In fact, I put in for short duty there. I would have stayed in if I had short duty there. So we kept that up. It was a good duty, like I said.

We'd go to Naples and get liberty in Naples. French Riviera, what happened was we were in Nice and me and my buddies we went ... there was only one hotel then on the beach. Big hotel. I can't think of the name of it; I think it was called the Riviera. It wasn't built up then like it is now. So me and my buddies was in the hotel and we were dancing and drinking and having a good time. So, I told them, "We're on the Riviera. I want to go swimming." I had my bikini with me. I brought it just in case. They said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to go swimming." The hotel was real close, from here to the garage. You could walk right to the beach. So I left them. I said, "You guys coming?" They said, "No, we're going to stay here and dance." I said, "OK, well, I'm going to go take a dive."

I went down there and there were tents there. You took your clothes and put your bikini on. I dove in the water and I don't remember no more. I woke up the next day and I'm in the brig. Not the brig. They called it the Bastille. That's what they called the jail in France. I'm on a wooden bed-like, sick as a dog. I mean, I was really sick from that wine, too much wine. Well, like I said, I dove in the water and that was it, I don't remember. The door is that thick, it had some holes in it. I didn't have no shoes, no kerchief and my whites were all full of red wine. I said [unintelligible]. That's the police, the guards. Finally, one opened the door and came in. Most of them guys could speak Italian, too, on the Riviera. They spoke two languages because Italy used to own

them years ago. So I said, "What did I do, sir?" in Italian. He told me, "Nothing bad. We brought you in here for safekeeping." I said, "I got all my stuff?" He said, "Yeah, we got all your stuff. You don't have to worry."

So in the meantime they let me call ... I don't know if I called the ship or something. They called the ship, I think, the guards. They said, "They're going to come pick you up, but you have to catch a train and go to a town called Hyeres." That's where our ship was anchored. We were empty then; we already got rid of all our stuff. This was in 1955, I think it was. That's when I got out, December 1955. So I got my clothes on and everything, went down to the railroad station, and caught the train. I got a newspaper to cover myself because the train was filled up and they were all looking at me. I was the only sailor on that train, they were all civilians. Finally, I got down to that city and they came for me with a Jeep and got me, some sailors in France. Then the liberty boat came and took me back to the ship. Then they had a captain's mast they called it. I was restricted to the ship. Then we left the Riviera and went to Valencia, Spain, but I didn't get liberty there. The other guys got liberty, I couldn't get it, I was restricted. Then we went back to the states and waited for another ship. I was really one sick dog, I'll tell you. I can't remember nothing. I dove in the water and that was it. It's a wonder I didn't drown.

## Angela Valitutti McVeagh

Daughter of Giovanni (John) Valitutti and Christina Peduto Valitutti



*Angela Valitutti McVeagh and niece Christine Stack*


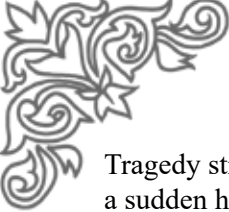
The life story of Italian immigrants Christina Peduto and John Valitutti includes many chapters about finding success while adapting to change.

Christina and John were born, raised, and later married in the village of Bellosguardo, province of Salerno, in the Campania region of southern Italy. While still single, John traveled to Western Pennsylvania to explore work possibilities. After serving in the U.S. military in Europe during World War I, he returned to Bellosguardo to marry Christina and bring her to the U.S.

After short stays in Bridgeville and Pittsburgh, the couple settled on Washington's East Maiden Street, an area where several other immigrants from their village lived. Their longtime

home at 132 East Maiden Street, with a large garden in back, was known as a warm and welcoming place. The popular Elks Club was located next door. The Sons of Italy club was across the street.

John worked as furnace mason for Hazel Atlas glass until his high blood pressure mandated a change in the type of work he did. With Christina's excellent cooking as inspiration, John went into the restaurant business in the 1930s. His first endeavor was the Union Grill, which still operates in its original West Wheeling Street address under different ownership. Its name is a nod to the rise of unions in that era. John went on to establish three other popular restaurants in downtown Washington, including the Diamond Grill on West Chestnut Street.



Tragedy struck when John died from a sudden heart attack in 1948 at age 53. Grief-stricken, Christina and her two young adult daughters carried on. Daughter Anne, then 25, an accomplished cook with a degree in business, and her husband Henry Stack, launched Stack's Homestead in a Victorian mansion at 368 East Maiden Street with Christina's recipes and expert assistance. They later relocated the restaurant to Main Street, across from the Washington County Courthouse, and enjoyed success there as Stack's Cafeteria for 35 years.

Christina urged daughter Angela, then 19 years old, to continue work on her teaching degree at Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University) in Pittsburgh. From an early age, both daughters had been encouraged by their parents to pursue higher education and careers, a message that was quite progressive for females in Italian working class families at the time. John and Christina's legacy of hard work and risk-taking served both daughters well as they moved forward with their mother after their father's unexpected death.

John and Christina's warmth and caring for others is also their legacy, said their daughter Angela, a retired elementary teacher in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. These traits led to long-lasting friendships and a natural ease in the restaurant business. "He liked people to be included," Angela said of John. Christina was often involved in helping people write letters to relatives back in Italy. Angela and her sister Anne enjoyed speaking their family's

Bellosguardo dialect to each other until Anne passed away in 2017.

Christine Stack (Anne's daughter) never had the chance to meet her Italian grandfather, but spent nearly everyday of her childhood in the company of her beloved grandmother and namesake. She describes her grandmother Valitutti as a "strong woman with a wonderful heart full of love."

Every year since the 1930s, Italians who emigrated from Bellosguardo and their families have held a reunion in Washington Park's stone pavilion, a structure that John Valitutti helped to build. Attendance is always strong, said Angela, adding that she is thankful to the younger families who keep the reunion going.

July 2019



Angela Valitutti McVeagh with photo of her father



Christina Peduto Valitutti, c. 1930



John Valitutti (left) at Bellosguardo annual picnic, Washington Park, 1940s.  
John, a stonemason, helped build the pavilion where the picnic is still held.



Anne Valitutti Stack and daughter Lisa Stack Locke, 2015



## Family Tree of Angela Valitutti McVeagh

### **Angela's Parents:**

- Giovanni (John) Valitutti, b. 2-19-1895, Bellosguardo, Province of Salerno, Campania; d. 1948, Washington
- Christina Peduto, b. 4-15-1897, Bellosguardo, Province of Salerno, Campania; d. 4-5-1993, Washington

### **John and Christina's Date and Place of Marriage:**

- June 9, 1920, Bellosguardo

### **John and Christina's Children:**

- Anne Valitutti, b. 2-23-1924, Washington; d. 2-14-2017, Pittsburgh; m. Henry Stack, b. 9-22-1924; d. 2-5-2005
- Angela Valitutti, b. 12-24-1929; m. William John McVeagh (b. 10-7-1927; d. 11-1-2013, Pittsburgh) on 6-21-1952

### **Angela's Maternal Grandparents:**

- Donato Peduto, b. Bellosguardo
- Amelia, b. Bellosguardo

### **Donato and Amelia's Children:**

- Vincent Peduto, lived in Pittsburgh
- Michelina, m. Joseph, lived in Cleveland
- Two other sisters lived in Italy

### **Angela's Paternal Grandparents:**

- Michele Valitutti, b. Bellosguardo
- Angelina, b. Bellosguardo

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

July 15, 2019, 11:00 am, home of Angela Valitutti McVeagh

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Christina Stack (niece of Angela Valitutti McVeagh)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro and Angela Valitutti McVeagh

**Tina Calabro:** Angie, can you tell me what your date of birth is?

**Angela Valitutti McVeagh:** I was born December 24, 1929.

**TC:** Were you born in Washington?

**AVM:** I was born in Washington and I was born at home.

**TC:** Where was home?

**AVM:** Home was on East Maiden Street in Washington.

**TC:** What was your father's name?

**AVM:** My father's name was John Valitutti.

**TC:** What was his birthdate?

**AVM:** His birthday was in February. I'm not sure.

**TC:** Do you know the year?

**AVM:** I'm not sure of the year.

**TC:** Where was your father born?

**AVM:** My father was born in Bellosguardo.

**TC:** Your mother's name?

**AVM:** My mother's name was Christina Peduto.

**TC:** Was your father "John" or did he have an Italian first name?

**AVM:** It's Giovanni. Yeah, he had an Italian name.

**TC:** But he went by John?

**AVM:** Yes.

**TC:** What was your mother's birthday?

**AVM:** My mother's birthday was April 15th.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**AVM:** She was born in Bellosguardo.

**TC:** Do you have brothers and sisters?

**AVM:** I had one sister.

**TC:** What was her name?

**AVM:** Anne. She's Christine's [Stack's] mom.

**TC:** So, Stack is her married name? Anne Valitutti Stack?

**AVM:** That's right.

**TC:** Christine is right here so, Christine, when was your mother's birthday?

**Christine Stack:** February 23, 1924.

**TC:** Do you remember the date she passed away?

**CS:** It was Valentine's Day, two years ago.

**TC:** 2017. Angie, do you remember the date of your mom or dad passing away?

**AVM:** My mom passed away in, she was 95 years old. I want to say '93. I'm not sure.

**TC:** Angie, what is your husband's name?

**AVM:** My husband is William John McVeagh.

**TC:** What was his birthday?

**AVM:** His birthday was January 7, 1927.

**TC:** What day did he pass away?

**AVM:** He passed away on November 1, 2013.

**TC:** Where was he born?

**AVM:** He was born in Pittsburgh.

**TC:** What date did you get married?

**AVM:** June 21, 1952.

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**AVM:** In Washington, PA, at Immaculate Conception Church.

**TC:** What was your occupation?

**AVM:** I was a teacher in the Pittsburgh Public Schools for 30 years.

**TC:** What did you teach?

**AVM:** I taught 3rd, 4th and 5th grade.

**TC:** Did you stay at a certain school?

**AVM:** I was at two different schools. I was at Belmar in Homewood for four and a half years. I was at Linden School on Linden Avenue for 23 years.

**TC:** What year did you retire?

**AVM:** I retired in 1993.

**TC:** What was your husband's occupation?

**AVM:** He was a chemical physicist. He worked for Gulf Research. When the community colleges came to be, he was a chemistry professor at Community College of Allegheny County on the

North Side [of Pittsburgh] for 30 years.

**CS:** She's 65 right now.

**TC:** Wonderful. Did you have any military service?

**TC:** So, maybe '53?

**AVM:** No, I did not.

**CS:** I have a younger brother, Henry Stack.

**TC:** Christine, what was your father's name?

**TC:** His birthday?

**CS:** Henry Stack.

**CS:** October 13. He just turned 60 this October.

**TC:** What day was he born?

**CS:** He was September 1924.

**TC:** Going back to Angie: you and your sister were the only two children in the family. What kind of work did your dad do?

**TC:** Where was he born?

**CS:** In Crafton.

**TC:** What day did he pass away?

**CS:** He passed on February 4th about 10 years ago.

**TC:** Do you have brothers and sisters?

**CS:** I do. My oldest sibling was John Stack. He was born June 18, 1949. He is deceased.

**TC:** I'm sorry to hear that. Then, Lisa is your sister?

**CS:** Lisa is my sister. Lisa Locke is her name.

**TC:** What's her birthday?

**CS:** August 18.

**TC:** What year would she have been born?

**AVM:** My father, when he came to the United States, worked as a stonemason and he worked for Hazel Atlas. He used to go and line the furnaces that Hazel Atlas had for making glass. But when I was about 11 years old, my father had high blood pressure and problems in that respect. He went into the restaurant business and he bought a restaurant, which he called the Union Grill, which still exists. It's at the corner of Main and Wheeling Streets [in Washington]. It didn't have a kitchen, just a small workspace. They only sold spaghetti. My mother used to make the sauce at home, and she would go on the streetcar and carry the sauce to the Union Grill.

My father named it the "Union Grill" because that's when unions first came to be, in that year. My mother would bring the sauce there and make the spaghetti there. It was a small working space until a kitchen was established. The Union Grill

was under the William Henry Hotel. It still exists. He owned three other restaurants after that.

He had a cousin who lived in East Liberty [in Pittsburgh] that was having a problem finding work in the East Liberty area where he lived, so my mother and father called them to Washington. My father bought another restaurant which was called the Three Star Bar and that was on Main Street. I would say it was South Main Street, not too far from the Union Grill. He owned two other restaurants after that in the year 1947.

He had established a restaurant across from Immaculate Conception Church. He called some cousins who lived in New York, in the Bronx, to come and help work there. They lived in the apartment above our house on East Maiden Street where we were living at the time. That uncle made pizza and it was one of the first pizza shops in Washington on Chestnut Street. He stood in the window. There was a huge area where they cooked the pizzas in the window. He flipped the pizzas in the window and people could see that.

That was the third restaurant. He also owned one across from the Basle Theater. I'm not sure of the name of that one. My mother ran that one. It was right across from the Basle Theater. My mother took care of that one. We also ran one on 132 East Maiden Street. My father had built an apartment for us upstairs. There was a beautiful bar built. After everything was ready, my father and mother heard

that they could not have a liquor license there because Washington & Jefferson College had bought the land across the street which was a girls' seminary. It was empty. That land was empty.

That's how the lower end of Washington & Jefferson College came to be. It was right across the street from where I lived. They had to turn that restaurant into a restaurant-soda fountain. The students came and ate there. We didn't have that one very long.

It had two dining rooms downstairs. It had a big kitchen. Christine's mother was only 16 years old at the time, so she got a lot of her experience working alongside my mother at that restaurant. They ran that one. My father became a restaurateur around age 50 because he had high blood pressure and suffered. He could not do the other work anymore.

At one point, he built a house on East Prospect Avenue. That's when my sister was born. She lived in that house. Scovottis'. I don't know if they still live in that house. That house is still there. My dad had built a big house on East Prospect Avenue.

**TC:** So, your dad actually built the house?

**AVM:** Yes!

**TC:** So, with some of these restaurants, did he also have to renovate them and build them?

**AVM:** Well, actually, yes! Each one of

those restaurants he started separately and brought somebody in. Oh! He'd say, "You can pay me as you work." My dad never asked for compensation from anyone. He was willing to start people very young. My mother would come, and it was only spaghetti they served. Later, a new kitchen was established. It became larger. I'm sure there's a very large kitchen there now. It still exists. It's one of the few that still exists of those four restaurants that my dad owned.

**TC:** With all of his building skills, did he renovate the kitchen and made it just what it needed to be?

**AVM:** He might've had help starting the kitchen out. He did.

**TC:** You helped with the restaurant as well.

**AVM:** When I was in college, I helped with the restaurant. I came home and helped my sister with Stack's Homestead that she had on East Maiden Street. That was right across from 5th Ward School.

**TC:** [To Christine] Did your mom also work in her parents' restaurants?

**CS:** My mom, she was young. My mom was very fortunate, in her day, that she got to go to college—Temple [University]—and was having a pretty good time. She ended up cutting that short and coming home because that was when her father died.

**AVM:** When I came home, my father

died at age 53. You can see from the picture, he was a young man.

**CS:** But that had a big influence in her coming home. [My mother] helped my grandma.

**TC:** You, Angie, were in college when your father died?

**AVM:** I was a freshman in college. I finished the semester. In fact, I was thinking of coming back home and staying with my mum. My sister was married in the meantime. I decided that was not a very good idea. My freshman year, I had met my husband and he lived in Oakland, not too far from Mount Mercy College.

It's now Carlow [University]. But it was Mount Mercy when I went there. I went back and forth. I was homesick. I used to go back and forth. Every weekend, I would come home. But, after I met my husband, I stayed a lot of the weekends.

I went with my husband for five years. He finished, came out and went into the service. He was in the service when he was 18. He graduated from Central Catholic [High School in Pittsburgh]. Most of the young men had to join the service. He was there two years and came home. Then, he went to the University of Pittsburgh. We both finished college at the same time. We both finished, went through the summers and I finished. We had gone together five years before we were married. So, we pretty much knew each other.

**TC:** Christine, your mother went away to college, which would be very unusual for her at that time and also, Angie, for you as well. What did your mother plan to study at Temple University?

**CS:** She wasn't too sure. We talked about that in her later years. She enjoyed going there because she had really good friends there and she wanted to be with her girlfriends. She talked more about going to Atlantic City and having fun than she did about the academics.

**TC:** Did she finish a year of college?

**CS:** I believe it was a year.

**TC:** Then, she came home and met your dad in Washington?

**CS:** Yeah. In Washington, my dad was at Washington & Jefferson.

**TC:** He went there and graduated from there. She met him, then they got married. What was your father's planned career when he was at W&J?

**CS:** He was on the GI Bill, so he was a little older than some of the younger, college guys. It seemed that when the two of them met, knowing that my mom was very much in the food business because of her mom, he just sort of followed the plan.

Right after they got married, they opened what was called a Homestead so she could have her own little restaurant. It was at 368 East Maiden. My grandmother

was at 132. They were right down the road.

**TC:** That was the one called The Homestead?

**CS:** Stack's Homestead.

**TC:** Your mom brought all her restaurant expertise to her marriage and her partnership with your dad.

**CS:** Yeah, my mom had an amazing knack and passion for cooking. She wrote poems. She used to write poetry when she was very young and wrote a beautiful poem about how she learned to bake bread by standing next to my grandmother. She learned about the flour, about the dough. She always had it in her blood to make really wonderful food. Then, she got a little creative and ventured outside the traditional Italian cuisine. She would read recipes upon recipes upon recipes. I still have boxes of them. So, she was very much into all kinds of good cooking.

So, shortly after they were married, they built the Homestead and we resided there. We had a very interesting upbringing. She had two rooms on the first floor that had big mahogany sliding doors. Each of those were [in the] dining room. We still have the book of who signed. There were so many different people coming and going there.

There was a famous boxer who came in there once. They were thrilled. But, after so many years, both my mother and

father, more my mother probably, she wanted something bigger, something a little different. So, at that time, they decided to open Stack's Cafeteria. As a family, we resided in 368 [East Maiden] for a while, but then we eventually moved to Trinity Park.

**TC:** Do you know how many years they ran Stack's Cafeteria?

**CS:** I can just guesstimate, 35 years? It wasn't just the Cafeteria as Aunt Angie said earlier, it was right across from the courthouse so that was steady stream of daytime business, but they also did catering on the weekends, every weekend. We grew up knowing how to roll cabbage rolls. We grew up learning how to crank and grind meat. They had their own staff, but that was our life. Even when we were too little to work, we were in the backroom while they were working events.

**TC:** Angie, your mother and father taught themselves the restaurant business. What do you think interested your parents in owning a restaurant? Why did they choose that? I know your father had to change professions because of his health, but what made him say, "Restaurant! That's what we're going to do"?

**AVM:** I think it was the fact that my mother was an excellent cook. We used to have company at our house every weekend. We had relatives. Either [my mother's] brother and his wife came, or we had relatives in Bridgeville that came to Washington and were fed. We had many meals around the dining room table.

My mother was also known for baking cakes. She used to bake wedding cakes for people. She made beautiful Italian sponge cake. I think that the fact that my sister and I, especially my sister, grew up on the end of the stove. She was right there with my mother. She was the other hand. She was [there] constantly and I think that's why ... I don't remember my father cooking, but my mother was an excellent cook.

I can't say that I was a cook at all. But, when I got married and I had five children, I had seven of us to cook [for]. You quickly learn how to put food on the table. But [my mother] was excellent. She had a great knack for putting things together.

She made wonderful cookies. I wish I could still do that. We have a recipe that was passed that we call "Nana's Biscotti." Christine's sister in California has kept a lot of those recipes. I recently [talked to] a young lady that was making a cookbook for her senior project at Shadyside Academy. I gave her the recipe for Nana's Biscotti.

My mother was an excellent cook. In fact, my father used to come home from the restaurant and eat at home. We ate dinner together. My mother had that special knack for making great, great food. It passed on to Christine's mother.

**CS:** I do want to add that my mom did study at Bradford School. Back in Washington, those were the business classes that she used to take. She did

get her business degree with the hopes of doing something with that [but] when her father passed away, she ended up doing more with Nana to help her.

**TC:** [To Christine] Did your mom continue to live in Washington all her life?

**CS:** She lived in Washington until 1979 and at that time ... we [grandmother, mother, brother and Christine] decided to move to Pittsburgh to be closer to Aunt Angie and a lot of cousins.

**TC:** (To Christine) You were out of high school?

**CS:** I was. I was at Carlow.

**TC:** You went to Carlow also.

**CS:** Yep. We were that kind of family. My grandmother's name is Christina, so I am her namesake. How nice is that? We're very close with our cousins and we all gather around bread. Every Friday was pizza day so Nana would make a pizza there. She'd come here and make bread and pizza. So, we all got to enjoy the fruits of her wonderful labor.

**AVM:** She made pizza in cookie sheets.

**TC:** Christine, I don't think I got your birthdate.

**CS:** March 12, 1956.

**TC:** Were all of your siblings out of high school when the move was made to

Pittsburgh? Henry, the youngest brother?

**CS:** He was in his senior year.

**TC:** He finished here?

**CS:** He was at IC and finished at Saint Anselm's.

**TC:** [To Angie] Let's go back to your mother and father; did your mother have any brothers or sisters?

**AVM:** My mother had three sisters and a brother. A brother was Vincent Peduto and lived in Pittsburgh. A sister, Michelina, lived in Cleveland, Ohio. Once a year, we went and visited. Her husband's name was Joseph. The two other sisters were in Italy.

**TC:** Your dad—did he have any brothers and sisters?

**AVM:** I don't know of any brothers and sisters. I don't know their names. If he did, I don't recall any. None lived in the United States and I've been to Italy six times, but I don't remember meeting any brothers or sisters there. I did meet a sister of my mom's. In fact, my husband and I stayed with them.

**TC:** So, you were able to connect with your mom's family?

**AVM:** Yes.

**TC:** Angie, your five sons, what are their names?

**AVM:** The oldest is William “Bill.” “Tim,” Timothy. “Dan,” Daniel. John and Edward.

**TC:** What are their birthdays?

**AVM:** My son Bill was born the 24th of April. He’s 66 years old. Timothy was born March 30. He is 64 years old. My son Dan is 60 years old. He was born on the 21st of April. John lives in Florida. He was born on the 15th of December. He is 58 years old. Or will be this year. Eddie was born March 17th and Eddie is 54.

**TC:** As far as you know, were your mother and father the first ones in their families to come to America?

**AVM:** I don’t know that. I think maybe. I don’t know if her brother was still in Italy at the time because the brother became the executor of the estate of the property in Italy. I don’t know if anyone else was here when they came.

**TC:** Did your parents meet in Italy?

**AVM:** Oh yes. They knew each other in Italy, yes.

**TC:** What did they tell you about their meeting each other, their courtship?

**AVM:** I don’t know. I guess I’d say they were going together. When he left the United States, he was working over here. He left the United States to go back and serve in the first world war. He already knew [her]; they had known each other. I think that probably the idea was that eventually they would get married and

come to the United States. He had been here.

The Italian government granted them passage back to the United States. From the citations that my father got when the war was over and the fact that they were married [by] then ... I have their matrimonial certification. He came here to earn money, then he went back to serve in the first world war.

Then, they both came back to the United States. They didn’t come directly to Washington, though. They lived for a short time in different places, but not very long. They lived in Bridgeville a short time.

What I remember from my mother talking about Bridgeville was that it was a little house and the reason they stopped in Bridgeville was because my father’s great aunt lived there. They were the ones who would come on weekends to visit my mother and dad. My mother [and father] lived a very short time in Bridgeville. One of the stories she used to tell—and thank God she told a lot of stories so I knew a little of the background—she would go down to the tracks and pick up coal.

Coal would fall off onto the tracks and she’d take it back to put it in the furnace in the house they lived in. To me, that bothered me. My mother was great about talking about her life. They also lived in Pittsburgh for a very short time with [my mother’s brother] Vincent. Because he was the only boy, and there were three

girls, he inherited the property in Italy. When Uncle Vincent died, that property went to his wife. She inherited what he owned in Italy and it was for her to pass on to somebody. She did pass it on to someone else. When I visited Italy, that property belonged to a cousin of mine. His father had bought that property. I have a picture of the property. Every time I've gone back to Italy, I've made sure I made a trip there.

My mother still had a sister who lived there—a sister and her husband. I stopped to visit relatives in Naples. I wanted to see. Actually, my oldest son was the first one to go there. My oldest son Bill, when he graduated from Catholic U, he took a trip to France and Italy. He couldn't speak a word of Italian. He could speak French. When you go there, many of the people speak English anyway. I'm at a loss now. If I want to speak Italian, I have no one to speak Italian to. My sister and I used to talk [in Italian]. It was great.

**CS:** They would go from English to Italian. I'd think, "Uh oh. They're talking about us."

**AVM:** I think about her ... I have nobody to speak Italian to.

**TC:** [To Angela] Did you say your mother had one sister in Italy or two sisters?

**AVM:** There were two still in Italy. I met one who was in Italy. I never met the other one. My mother had three sisters and a brother Vincent. He lived on the North Side [of Pittsburgh]. He was in the

restaurant business on Perrysville Avenue, and they made chocolate. We'd get a big chocolate egg at Easter. He moved to Dormont. When I was in college, I went on a weekend to visit. One summer, I worked in Dormont at his restaurant. Pete Flaherty [former mayor of Pittsburgh] lived not too far away and he would come in and eat. My uncle Vincent had two sons. One is deceased. One, Don Vincent, works in Las Vegas, has a house in Las Vegas.

I have two [other] cousins [on my mother's side], but I don't hear from them. One of them came on my 25th wedding anniversary. We were close because of my mother's sister, Michelina. We went to visit those cousins. Every summer we made a trip.

We would go to Atlantic City with my uncle Vincent. He drove. My mother, sister and I would go to Atlantic City. That's how we ended up at the shore every summer. Now, we go to Ocean City.

**TC:** Let's go back to the restaurants. The Union Grill.

**AVM:** Three Star Bar.

**TC:** On South Main Street.

**AVM:** There were two on Chestnut Street and I'm not sure of the names. One was a pizza shop and [it was] the first pizza shop in Washington. I'm not sure of the name. It was right across the street from

Immaculate Conception Church, in that vicinity. The other one was across from the Basle Theater on Chestnut Street, but right around the corner. It's where Herd's drug store used to be at that corner. My mother ran that restaurant [the Diamond Grill].

**TC:** When your dad passed away, which restaurant was active?

**AVM:** When my dad passed away, I think the Union Grill was still active. One of those bars, he brought a Valitutti cousin, Generose, he brought him from East Liberty to come here and help with the Three Star Bar.

**TC:** So, your dad had the Three Star and the pizza shop.

**AVM:** Generose was involved with the Three Star Bar because my dad wanted to make sure his cousin had an occupation. They rented a house right across the street from us at 132 [East Maiden]. It used to be a fraternity house. It was vacant and adjacent to W&J.

**TC:** So, the Diamond Grill, your mom and dad opened that just before he passed away?

**AVM:** Yeah, he didn't have it any longer, I don't think.

**CS:** He didn't have it. He sold it.

**AVM:** He was going to go to Pittsburgh.

**CS:** He was on his way to open a new restaurant.

**AVM:** That's right. He actually owned it. He had actually started it.

**CS:** I don't believe he had it in Washington. Right? He was going for a new one.

**AVM:** When he came to Pittsburgh, he was going to open [a new] restaurant.

**TC:** Angie, what year were you a freshman in college?

**AVM:** 1947 was my freshman [year] and I graduated in '51 ... my dad passed away in February of '48.

**TC:** The restaurant at 132 East Maiden, your mother opened it on her own?

**AVM:** Well, the restaurant at 132 became a restaurant, actually a soda fountain, but my dad was part of that. He couldn't get a liquor license because W&J had purchased the land across the street. It used to be a seminary. It was a huge building. It was a girls' seminary, but it was empty. W&J was going to be across the street. You were not allowed to have a restaurant with a liquor license that close to a college, a school.

**CS:** Nana had it. I mean, they refinished it downstairs and she made two apartments right in the front, right in the back. So, she renovated and became a landlord for income.

**TC:** Did she continue to have a restaurant thereafter?

**CS:** That's when my mom and dad were working and that's how that happened.

**TC:** It morphed into 368 East Maiden with your mom and dad?

**CS:** Nana still lived at 132. But she had a little house in the back that she rented. She had apartments upstairs. That became her source of income. Just because Italians hang together, we were always underfoot. When we would walk to school, we'd pass Nana's house on a regular basis, say hello. We saw her every day. My mom and [grandmother] continued to just be together.

**TC:** Did your grandmother help your mom and dad with the restaurant?

**CS:** She sure did. Usually from her home, but Nana helped raise us more than anything because my mom was very, very busy. My mom and dad worked seven days a week. We would have our meals at Nana's. Every Sunday we had a big family dinner because my parents were off. So, six days a week. She became a permanent fixture in our lives as we were growing up.

**TC:** [To Angela] Going back to your parents when they arrived here, they lived in Bridgeville. Then, they lived in Pittsburgh for a little bit. Then, they came to Washington. What brought them to Washington?

**AVM:** My father was still a stonemason. He was still working at Hazel Atlas.

**TC:** Was Hazel Atlas just in Washington?

**AVM:** I don't know. It was pretty

extensive. I'm not sure. I know a lot of people worked for them in Washington. That's when my dad built that house on Prospect Avenue.

**TC:** Did they live in that house?

**AVM:** Yes, they did because my sister was born in that house. Scovottis owned it for a long time after that ... Nicolellas lived on that street too. I remember Mrs. Nicolella used to cook and her husband built an oven outside. She used to bake bread out there. We used to go sit under their grape arbor. It was in the back. They lived next to Macchiarolis. They used to call the hill behind that house "Gallows Hill."

I used to go visit Evelyn Nicolella and her mother. Her mother baked outside. There was a little road in the back. Jane Macchiaroli [Kamp] was my godmother. Her daughter, when she was 11 years old, was in my wedding. I still connect with her. She lives in Los Angeles. She is in her 70s now.

We had fun going to visit them. They had chickens up in the back. We lived on Maiden Street. Gallows Hill wasn't far. We used to walk to Rescinitis' house on Dewey Avenue. When Anne went to college, she went to Temple because she was friends with Toni Resciniti.

Toni went there and majored in music. She was a music teacher. She and Anne were very close with Molly Bamonte. Bamontes had a restaurant at the corner of Maiden Street, too. There was a gas

station there as I remember but they had a restaurant not too far from 368. That's where my wedding reception was—at 368 in the backyard.

We stayed pretty close and there were Italians around us, but I did not know that there were so many Italians [near] Washington High School. I don't remember any Italians being in my class of '47. Of course, I married my husband and my husband is Irish.

**TC:** You were born in Washington?

**AVM:** I was. I was born on Christmas Eve.

**TC:** Your parents were immigrants from Bellosguardo. There were a lot of people from Bellosguardo in Washington. Who did your parents know? Who were the closest people from their area?

**AVM:** The Nicolellas, yes. Evelyn Nicolella.

**CS:** Joe.

**AVM:** We were very close to that family. Jane Macchiaroli [Kamp] lived next door to the Nicolellas.

Macchiarolis. Further up the street were other Nicolellas. They had the restaurant.

**CS:** The Cozy Cottage.

**TC:** When you were growing up, you were, in a sense, in an Italian village.

**AVM:** Right!

**TC:** What do you remember about the older people—the people in your parents' generation or even older than that?

**AVM:** I do remember Zia Luigia [Merlo]. She was older than my mother and they would come talk about the things—business. They lived right at the corner of East Maiden Street. Behind them, Raphaelles lived. I'm not sure about the street. My mother was friends with them. But she came every day to visit with my mother until I went to college. She was a lovely lady. They had maybe a cup of coffee together.

I do remember the day that war broke out. I was ironing in the kitchen of 132 East Maiden. Zia Luigia [Merlo] was with my mother and the second world war broke out. It was announced on the radio.

**TC:** How would you describe your mother's personality?

**AVM:** My mother was outgoing. She could write in Italian and anybody who needed letters written to send to Italy they would come to my mother. Or she would interpret. She was friendly with Raphaelles and friendly with [Zia Luigia] Merlo. [Zia Luigia] Merlo's daughter lived in Bridgeville, but she would come home every weekend to be with her mother. I don't even know if her house is still there anymore.

Then, the Sargents [original name Sargento] lived down the street. Before Sargents there was another family. Josephine [Tucci] and her husband were pharmacists.

**CS:** Tucci. They were very good friends.

**TC:** How would you describe your father's personality?

**AVM:** My father always liked people to be included. If someone needed work, he'd be like, "It's okay, you can pay things later." We lived at 132 [East Maiden]. It's a big, old Victorian house. They were going to tear down the house next door. So, there was a little house behind it. My dad had it moved behind our house at 132 and that's where Carmine Nicolella and his wife lived.

**TC:** Is the house at 132 East Maiden still standing?

**AVM:** Yes.

**CS:** It's a chiropractor's office.

**CS:** 368, though, was a big, beautiful house with the crystal. It was purchased many years ago when we moved to Trinity Park, by a Washington family. They never trimmed a bush. So, it's so overgrown. It's sad. Would you mind if I told you a little bit about my grandmother?

**TC:** Sure.

**CS:** My grandmother was a very strong woman. She was widowed very young and she had her daughters. She was absolutely determined to make sure that they behaved themselves ... But she had such a wonderful heart. My grandmother was rich with love and forgiveness. Back

in the day, when people would get into trouble before marriage, or that sort of thing, my grandmother was always the first there to help. She was so supportive. She loved her grandchildren so much. She never fell for the trick that my brother, John, used to play. He'd say, "Nana, who's your favorite? I know it's me." She'd laugh. She'd say, "You're the first, but I love everybody the same." If you talk to my cousins or my sister, we all felt the love and just, she was a wonderful woman.

**AVM:** She was 95 years old [when she died].

**CS:** Still, everyone was at her bedside when she was ill. She commanded such respect from us. She could have raised a hand [to us], but she never did. She was a wonderful woman.

**TC:** [To Angela] It sounds like your parents were very busy people. Always working. Making a living. But they always had good hearts and time for people. Would that be true?

**AVM:** Yes, they did. They had time for everybody. People would drop in. They wouldn't call to say they were coming. They just came.

**CS:** At college, even when I went to Carlow, even when I had my own apartment, we still went home on Sundays for dinner. We would bring our friends, who at the time thought that was weird food. It wasn't until many years later that it was very fashionable. We were very wealthy

from that perspective. We would bring any chair to the table that we could find. There were some guests that had chairs with legs that'd break. There was a time, my college roommate was enjoying dinner with us one Saturday or Sunday and Nana was at the head of the table and then, all of a sudden, my roommate disappeared because the leg of her chair fell off. My grandmother had the best sense of humor.

She laughed and poor Karen was on the floor. My grandmother could not contain herself. We had a lot of funny things. She used to dress for Halloween at times. Her favorite, one year, I borrowed a nun's habit from the Immaculate Conception convent. I'm not saying how I got it. My friends and I put it on, and we would laugh.

Nana got ahold of it. She put on that habit and went to Zia Luigia's house first. She said, "Hello, my name is Christine. I want money for the poor." She laughed so hard she wet herself.

**AVM:** She loved to be part of the party. She loved to party.

**TC:** Back in those days, when you were growing up, what kinds of things brought the Italian community together?

**AVM:** Well, that Bellosguardo picnic is still going on. It is in August—around August 4th or 5th. But they have had that for years. The men used to get it together. I have pictures of my dad cooking with Mr. Nicolella, sampling the stuff to see if

it's ready. They still do that; bless the rest of the young people still carrying that tradition on.

I have a [relative] Mary Ann Capozzoli [Scott], her father [John] was from Bridgeville, and was my godfather. When my dad passed away young, [her father] came and gave me away [at my wedding]. His daughter [Mary Ann], two years ago, visited me with one of her sons who lives in Greentree. She still comes [to the picnic]. I haven't heard from her this year. She wanted to know if I was going to the Bellosguardo picnic. I said, "Mary Ann, I won't be here. I'll be in Ocean City." She said someone related to her, it may be her son's daughter, they were going to go to the Bellosguardo picnic because she had a relative that wanted to go. They came from Florida.

**CS:** Also, Nana was very, very religious. She had multiple Bibles. She had notes. She had statues. She prayed every day, many times. She actually watched the soap operas. Guiding Light. The Search for Tomorrow. She made current day mindfulness a part of her day. She prayed novenas everyday and went to church on a regular basis.

**AVM:** She was very stylish. She liked to dress up. When Christine's mom [Anne] got married, [our mother, a widow] was still in black. She had a beautiful hat with a plume. I would go and help buy her shoes. She wore little shoes. Even around the house, she had beautiful clothes.

My son, Bill, learned to cook around her.

He learned how to watch her roll meatballs and he is an excellent cook. My son, Tim, is a good cook, too, but he wasn't around Nana cooking as much as Billy was. Bill still talks about her recipes, what she cooked and how she cooked.

She loved to dress up. She always looked great going to church.

**TC:** [To Angela] You and your sister both went to college. That would have been unusual for the daughters of Italian immigrants at that time.

**AVM:** You're right, you're right!

**TC:** What was your parents' viewpoint on that?

**AVM:** They wanted to be sure that we got a good education. My father died and he had just opened that restaurant with a cousin in Pittsburgh and he did not have a will. When he died, I was a freshman in college, and I wasn't sure I wanted to stay there. My mother was going to be by herself. My sister was married but I wanted to come home ... I used [some of my inheritance from my father] to go to college.

I didn't know anyone who had applied to colleges. I applied at colleges that were nearby—Mount Mercy of Pittsburgh. Pitt didn't have any dorms, any place to live. I decided on Mount Mercy because they had beautiful houses across the street.

That's when they were building Antonian Hall. Mount Mercy was expanding. They

expanded all the way to Terrace Street. [Carlow] even bought the house that [my husband] Bill's mother and dad lived in. I knew of other women who were there from Washington. I thought it was a good place to go. Although I was homesick. I used to go home all the time.

**TC:** [To Angela] You spoke about your sister and you speaking Italian up until the time she passed away. Did you all frequently speak in Italian to each other?

**AVM:** Oh yeah! We did. My mother learned to speak English from the neighbors, and she was fluent. With an accent, but, yeah.

**CS:** My mom tells a story that she went to school and didn't speak English until 1st grade at 5th Ward.

**AVM:** No, I didn't either.

**CS:** [My mother] came home and taught them. She would learn a word a day and come home and teach them.

**TC:** Both you and your sister spoke Italian when you started school?

**AVM:** Yes.

**TC:** That was your primary language?

**AVM:** Yes.

**TC:** But you knew some English?

**AVM:** Let me say this: I learned that the Italian I was speaking was the Italian of

the village. There is a more fluent Italian that you know. Miss Paris lived further down the street. She would fix clothing and my mother would take clothes to her. My mother used to sew our clothes. My sister and I had pants that were made from flour sacks. But she also made pretty, pretty dresses.

She would take stuff to Miss Paris and I would ask my mother why Miss Paris pronounced things a different way. My mother had Americanized [her Italian]. I learned that also when I went to Italy. People thought I was from a certain area because I had that accent from Bellosguardo. My Italian made me afraid to say things sometimes.

If you wanted to ask something, you didn't ask the soldiers or anybody, you asked the older people that were sitting on a bus. It was the older people who would answer you.

**TC:** Did your parents belong to any Italian lodges or community organizations?

**CS:** Elks, which was next door to 132. Then there was Sons of Italy.

**TC:** What about Italian language newspapers? Did they ever read one?

**AVM:** Yes, my mother used to get that.

**TC:** Did they listen to Italian radio shows?

**CS:** She used to have a collection of records.

**AVM:** There was opera on, on Saturday afternoon. I don't know about radio shows.

**TC:** You talked about religion being an important part of your parents' life and for you, growing up. Was everybody a member of Immaculate Conception Church?

[sounds of agreement]

**TC:** Did both of your parents become U.S. citizens?

**AVM:** Yeah, they were both citizens. I don't know if I have a record of it.

**TC:** You talked about many things your mother did—speaking the language, visiting with friends, cooking—did she do any gardening?

**AVM:** Lots of gardening.

**CS:** There was the entire backyard and it wasn't a small one. She was so meticulous. She had the bricks looking like a professional farm. We ate from that. She canned everything that she grew.

**AVM:** Even when my sister and I were growing up, Dad would rent a piece of property. It was right off Maiden Street. At the end, there was a lot of property that you could rent. My sister and I would go and plant corn. Then, we also had a garden in the backyard at 595 East Maiden. There was a garage with living quarters upstairs. Our baby bed was up there. It was a cradle that rocked.

There was a train that ran there behind that garden. We would go and bring that produce home. Even when [my mother moved to Pittsburgh], she made a garden there.

**CS:** Then we got a garden plot at the cemetery.

**AVM:** Right here off of Forbes Ave.

**CS:** You could rent garden plots as long as you had people go down there [and tend them]. It was wonderful. [My grandmother] had to be in her 80s. She was down there every night with my mom and dad. It was always such a part of her.

**TC:** I would assume that she brought some of that knowledge of how to garden from Italy.

**AVM:** Yes, they had gardens. I visited the house where she lived. There was a garden in the back.

**TC:** What other skills and talents would you say your parents brought with them from Italy?

**AVM:** My mother knew how to crochet. She knew how to embroider; she knew how to sew. She sewed our clothing until we got a little older. Then, we used to go to the Kiddie Shop, which was right by the Union Grill. We'd buy our clothes there. She knew she could do everything with her hands.

**TC:** It sounds like your parents were

young when they came to the U.S. Did they ever talk to you about why they came here? What were they hoping for? They could've stayed.

**AVM:** Oh, they could've, yeah. [My mother's] other two sisters stayed. My father had already been here. He was here working.

**CS:** Opportunity.

**AVM:** There were many other Italians that they knew here and would come back, back and forth, that this is the land of the future. This is where you will move, move ahead.



## Joe Molinaro

Son of Salvatore (Molinaro) Miller and  
Vincenzia DeSarro (Molinaro) Miller





*Joe and his wife, Claudia Molinaro*

Joe Molinaro is the youngest of 12 children—ten boys and two girls—born to Salvatore (Molinaro) Miller and Vincenzia DeSarro (Molinaro) Miller, natives of Nicastro in the Catanzaro area of Calabria.

Salvatore and Vincenzia's early years in the U.S. exemplify the dynamic of "chain migration." Salvatore first came to the U.S. in 1908, then returned to Italy several times—each time returning with a new immigrant. Vincenzia, whom Salvatore had met in Italy and planned to marry, arrived in the U.S. on her own in 1910.

When Vincenzia arrived, the couple was immediately married at New York City Hall in order to make it possible for Vincenzia to enter the U.S. (They used a cigar band as a wedding ring.) Five months later, the couple moved to Scranton, PA, where relatives lived, and were married a second time in a Catholic church. The couple remained in Scranton for a couple of years and had two children there, before moving to Washington, where other relatives lived.

Salvatore was a born entrepreneur in the West End of Washington. He ran a grocery store, a construction business and



a moving company. He was also known for the barrels of wine he produced, including during Prohibition.

Salvatore was also known for establishing a community football team called the Poundstown Club. He built a team clubhouse (which is still standing) at the corner of Addison Street and Hart Avenue. The second floor of the building became the family home. The team was later renamed the Washington Generals.

Vincenzia was a devoted mother and homemaker who enjoyed living in close proximity to Italian neighbors in the West End.

When Salvatore died in 1960 at the age of 75, the size of his funeral spoke about the regard with which he was held in the community. The streets around Immaculate Conception Church were closed for the hundreds of relatives and friends who attended the funeral, his son Joe said.

When Salvatore first came to the U.S., he was told that “Miller” was the American name for “Molinaro.” From that point onward, Miller became the alternate last name for the family. Salvatore and Vincenzia’s oldest son, Guy, used it throughout his life. Joe, their youngest son, used the name throughout his school years, but was told that he had to use Molinaro when he enlisted in the Navy.

April 2018



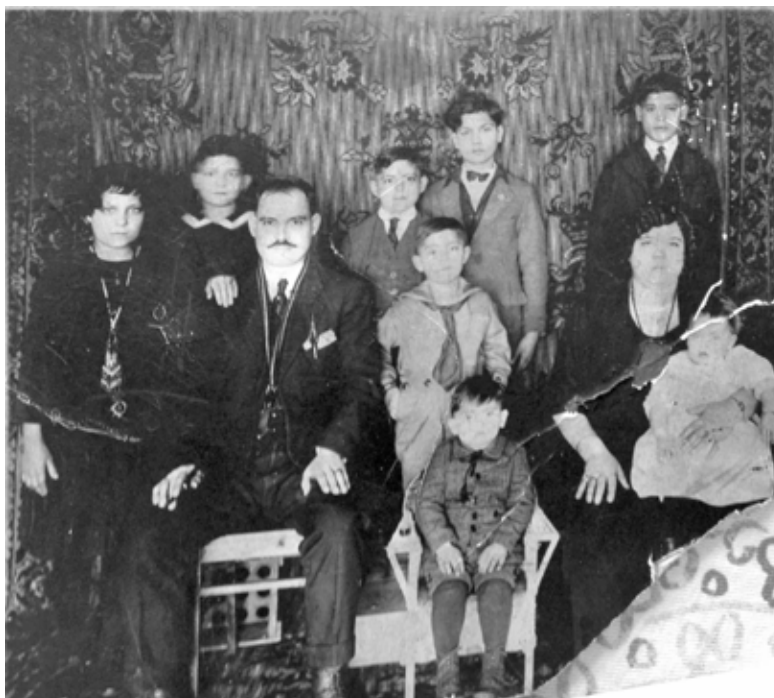
Salvatore and Vincenzia DeSarro (Molinaro) Miller



Salvatore and Vincenzia DeSarro (Molinaro) Miller stand behind relatives, Joseph and Antoinette Interval



Maria Cognetto (center) with children, Salvatore (left) and Catherine



Salvatore and Vincenzia with their children: Mary and Frank (left), Tony, Guy, John, Pete (middle, from top to bottom), Thomas “Tinker” (right), and Angeline (on her mother’s lap)



The 1934 Poundstown Football Club founded by Salvatore (Molinaro) Miller.  
Number 11 (middle row) is Thomas “Tinker” (Molinaro) Miller.

## Family Tree of Joe Molinaro

### Joe's Father:

- Salvatore (Samuel) Molinaro, b. 12-26-1885, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 11-9-1960, Washington; emigrated to the U.S. on 12-24-1908 on the ship *Madonna* from Naples; became a citizen 3-19-1924

### Joe's Mother:

- Vincenzia (Virginia) DeSarro, b. 8-20-1891, Nicastro, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 4-26-1974; emigrated to the U.S. on 8-2-1910 on the ship *Oceania* from Naples; became a citizen 12-17-1945

### Salvatore and Vincenzia's date and place of marriage:

- 8-4-1910, New York City Hall;  
1-10-1911, Catholic church in Scranton, PA

### Salvatore and Vincenzia's Children:

- Gaetano (Guy) (Molinaro) Miller, b. 6-15-1911, Scranton, PA; d. 9-12-2000
- Thomas (Tinker) Molinaro, b. 10-4-1913, Scranton, PA; d. 9-12-2002
- Mary Molinaro, b. 10-12-1915, Hays, PA; d. 6-20-2004; m. Joe Gilliate
- Tony Molinaro, b. 9-23-1916, Washington; d. 12-18-1999
- Frank Molinaro, b. 7-7-1918, Washington; d. 11-26-1997; m. Rose; owned Rosie's Bar on Wylie Avenue.
- John Molinaro, b. 6-20-1920, Washington; d. 8-31-1979

- Pete Molinaro, b. 6-29-1921, Washington; d. 8-20-2018
- Angeline Molinaro, b. 1-4-1925, Washington; d. 4-14-1993; m. — Swan; m. 2nd — Hickman
- Samuel Molinaro Jr., b. 12-9-1926, Washington; d. 8-17-2012
- James Molinaro, b. 8-7-1929, Washington; d. 9-9-2004
- Carmine Molinaro, b. 6-7-1931, Washington; d. 1-20-2018
- Joseph Molinaro, b. 4-5-1933, Washington; m. Claudia Ward (b. 3-16-1937, Washington) on 1-8-1955

### Joe's Paternal Grandparents:

- Gaetano Molinaro and Mary Cognito

### Gaetano and Mary's Children:

- Antonio (Tony), b. 1872; lived in Hays borough of Pittsburgh
- Salvatore (Samuel), b. 12-26-1885, Nicastro, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 11-9-1960, Washington
- Francesco (Frank), b. 1891; m. Rose
- Gaetano (Guy), b. 1895
- Angeline, b. 1896, lived in Waynesburg
- Caterina (Catherine), lived in Cleveland

### Joe's Maternal Grandparents:

- Tommaso (Thomas) DeSarro and Maria Stenliani

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

April 12, 2018, 1:00 pm; home of Joe and Claudia Molinaro

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Claudia Molinaro (Joe's wife)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Joe, what is your date of birth?

**Joe Molinaro:** April 5, 1933.

**TC:** So you just had a birthday?

**JM:** I turned 85!

**TC:** Where were you born?

**JM:** Washington, PA. At home.

**TC:** Your father's name?

**JM:** Salvatore.

**TC:** What was his birthdate?

**JM:** He was born in 1885. December the 26th, 1885.

**TC:** Where was he born?

**JM:** In Italy.

**TC:** The name of the city?

**JM:** Catanzaro. I think my mother was from Nicastro. They changed that name now. There's a new name for Nicastro in Italy.

**Claudia Molinaro:** It doesn't show on a map.

**JM:** It was Nicastria in Italy in Calabria.

**TC:** Your mother's name?

**JM:** Her Italian name was Vincenzia, which is Virginia.

**CM:** [spells it out] V-i-n-c-e-n-z-i-a

**TC:** Her maiden name?

**JM:** DeSarro. [spells out] D-e-S-a-r-r-o. Like the barber in Washington. (Claudia re-spells it out for clarification.)

**TC:** And she was born in Nicastria?

**JM:** Italy. Calabria.

**TC:** Her birthdate?

**CM:** August the 20th.

**JM:** See? My wife has all kinds of copies.

**TC:** 1891. And she died April 26, 1974.

**JM:** I think she would have been 83 or 84.

**TC:** [gesturing to photo] These are the children of Salvatore and your mother: Guy, Thomas, Mary, Tony, Frank, John, Pete, Angelina, James, Carmine, Sam ...

**JM:** Petey is still living. Is Mary on there?

**TC:** Yes, and Joe.

**JM:** I was the last of 12. That I know.

**TC:** I have all their birthdays and dates of death, their ages when they died, and where they were born. These two that were born in Scranton, and Mary, born in Hays, why were they born somewhere different?

**JM:** That's where they stopped along the way.

**CM:** That's where they lived for a short time.

**JM:** Maybe. I don't know. I wasn't there.

**CM:** Tell her about when they came on the ship. They did what?

**JM:** They came to New York. My dad asked her how much money she had. She said, 25 dollars. And he took it. [laughs]

**CM:** Tell them about the marriage [of your parents].

**JM:** Well, they got married there and when they went to Scranton, they got remarried. Again.

**TC:** So they got married in Italy?

**JM:** No.

**TC:** They got married in New York?

**JM:** She [Claudia] has it written down. Show it to her.

**TC:** They got married August 4, 1910, in New York City Hall. They married immediately so she could come to the United States. They got remarried January 10, 1911, in Scranton.

**JM:** Okay.

**TC:** You're the youngest of 12. Were there any other children who passed away in childhood?

**JM:** My mother, she should have had 18, so she had miscarriages somewhere. I don't know. It would've been 18 if everyone had lived. I was told that there were two other Joes who didn't make it. But once I come along, I stayed. [laughs] But I don't know where or when.

**TC:** Your date of marriage?

**JM:** January the 8th, 1955.

**TC:** The place you got married?

**JM:** I.C. [Immaculate Conception Church]. I talked my wife into coming to my church to get married. She goes to First Christian Church. I told her, "As long as you go to church, I don't care which one you go to." [laughs]

**TC:** Claudia, are you retired?

**CM:** Yes.

**TC:** What was your occupation?

**CM:** I worked for a time as a cook down at Washington High School.

**JM:** Head cook.

**TC:** Joe, what was your occupation?

**JM:** My first occupation was working at Hazel Atlas Number 1. I was there for awhile and then I went to the Navy. I came back and worked until 1964. I went to Jessop Steel Company.

**TC:** What did you do at Jessop Steel?

**JM:** I worked in various jobs and plus, the hot mill. 10, 12, & 18-inch mill. That's where I ended up.

**TC:** How many years were you there?

**JM:** Started in '64 and I retired in '96. 32 or 33 years. One or the other.

**TC:** Okay, your children. So we have here: Steven born 1958, David 1959, Mark 1963, and Karen 1970.

**JM:** Yes.

**TC:** Let's go on. Your military service ...

**JM:** I started boot camp March 1953. I came home in March 1957. I was in for four years.

**TC:** That was Navy?

**JM:** The thing was, I graduated from boot camp. To be assigned, we had to go to a receiving station. We had to go to Washington, D.C. They put me in Anacostia Naval Yard right outside of Washington, D.C. and in the morning, when you got up, they asked you [to do] different jobs.

One morning they asked, "Can anybody type?" I was a good typist in high school. I said, "Yes. I can type." So, they sent me to work for Navy Relief Society. Worked for an admiral's wife. I could type and she kind of liked me. She said, "I'll keep you here for as long as I can." She did!

Under the circumstances, I wrote letters to different people and I wrote a letter back here to my brother, who was the president of the local union of Jessop, and a letter to Frank Rackley, who was his boss. I came home and told my brother Guy that Rackley gave a hundred and Jessop local gave 50, so I brought back \$150. I said, "Here. I got this money personally!" [laughs]

So [the admiral's wife] said she'd keep me there for a while. Then, that disappeared. She said, "I'm going to get you a job at a receiving station." Like a commissary, you know? I was there for a while.

Finally, I was in [Washington] D.C. for 30 months. Then they told me that I was going to get a shipping commission. A mine sweeper. I have pictures of it in there. On the ship. Got married in 1955. I brought my wife to Washington, D.C.

I brought my wife to Charleston, South Carolina. From there our ship went to Yorktown. We lived in Williamsburg, Virginia. I retired March '57. So, yeah, four years.

**TC:** How did the two of you meet?

**JM:** The whole thing was, I came home on weekends. There were certain guys around and they came up to Wash High. Three girls there. The guys knew them, and I looked at her. They wanted to go to an area.

**CM:** The fairgrounds.

**JM:** I said, "The only way you can get in is to sit on my lap 'cause there's no room." She said, "No." I said, "Hey! It ain't that far." We didn't know each other. So she finally got in. The next day, we went out. Six months later we were married. So I call her a "pick-up." [laughs] It was the best pick-up I ever made! [laughs]

**TC:** That's wonderful. OK, so then, you were discharged in '57. Then it looks like you went back to ...

**JM:** [Hazel Atlas] Number 1. Stayed there til '64. Then, I told my brother Guy, women were fighting for equal wages, I may have to go to Ohio. I didn't want to go there. I mean, if I'd have to go, I'd go. He got me on down at Jessop.

**TC:** That's interesting. You're saying in the mid '50s, 1957, when you came back, that women were fighting for equal rights?

**JM:** Well, for a few years, and I was an officer in the union down there, working with Harry Moore and company, and I said, I must leave because they're going to shut this place down. Women were fighting for equal wages, fighting for different times of work. I told my brother Guy, "I gotta get out."

Harry Taylor, who was a big shot down there, said to my brother Guy, "We just hire them for brother Petey." Petey worked as a guard down there. Brought him in and I was next. Guy said, "That's my youngest brother. He needs a job." They put me on. I had a lot of connections.

**TC:** I'm imagining because at Hazel Atlas there were more women there, because the work ...

**JM:** We worked the noon to 6.

**TC:** Jessop Steel was probably primarily men.

**JM:** All men until later they had women. I worked down there later. I was there for 32 years.

**TC:** Could you tell me something about each of your brothers and sisters?

**JM:** I was the only one who graduated from high school. Back then, they ... went to work. Brother Guy was a smart individual. He became the local president at Jessop Steel Company. The Union. Local 1141.

Then I got hired, and I was there for a few years. My brother Guy said [to Frank Rackley, the boss], "Everything you got for us, now you're going to try to take back!" He said, "I wouldn't do that." So my brother Guy was the oldest, a pretty smart individual. We go by "Miller" [instead of Molinaro]. I graduated under the name of Miller. When I went to the Navy, [they] said, "Son, that's not your name. Your real name is Molinaro." I said, "Well, I graduated with that [name]." They said, "Well, we can see that." But they said Miller is the American name for Molinaro!

My brother Tony worked at the Jessop. [My brother] Tinker worked for a wholesale place on Maiden Street. Once you go past the streetcar line, past the Jessop, is a wholesale place there. He drove a truck and Tinker was a good bowler, he was on TV. One of the best in the city of Washington. Tinker Miller, but it's Molinaro.

**TC:** How did he get the nickname "Tinker"?

**JM:** That's all I knew him by—Tinker. They called him Tinker. For me to tell you how they gave it to him, I'm not sure. But his name is Thomas. I have football pictures of him and my brothers Tony and Guy, who were part of the team. A big shot. They called them "The Poundstown Club." My dad owned The Poundstown Club. They called them "The Washington Generals."

**TC:** What does "Poundstown Club" mean?

**JM:** On the corner of Hart and Addison, my dad built a brick building during the Depression. Later, we had a football team and my dad was the owner of that club. Tinker played. Tony played. Frankie played. Lot of good ball players. Carmine Verno. Joe Steratore. They were like a pro team.

**TC:** Do you know what the word "Poundstown" means? Why did he call it that?

**JM:** From when you "pound" somebody. You know what I mean?

**JM:** [To Claudia] What was the name of that place that Tinker worked at on Maiden Street?

**CM:** Cohen Candies.

**JM:** He was a driver for them. Worked there a lot of years. My sister Mary married Joe Gilliate and had a kid and they got a divorce. Mary's kid runs the First Christian Outreach.

**CM:** It's just the Christian Outreach. Jeannie Allender.

**JM:** My brother Tony worked at Jessop Steel Company. Tony played football for the Washington Generals. Tony had twin boys who went to [Immaculate Conception] school. Tony and Sam. Sam got leukemia when he was young and died.

**JM:** My brother Tony has two daughters. He worked on the hot mill—a big boss

down there on the hot mill. My brother Frank is my other brother. He worked at the [Pennsylvania] Transformer. He was a good bowler, too.

Brother John went to the service before [WWII] started. In 1940. I never saw him until after the war was over. He was away that long. He got wounded. Brother John died at the age of ... what?

**CM:** Oh, geez, he was young.

**JM:** 59!

**CM:** [To Joe] Where was Johnny when the war was on?

**JM:** Johnny was at Pearl Harbor. During the war, when they were bombing, he was there. Brother Petey is still living today [note: Petey died on August 20, 2018]. Born in 1921. I thought it was '22, but it says '21. He worked at the Hazel Atlas Plant. That's down South Street. Petey lived in the Wolfdale area.

Angeline is another sister. [To Claudia] She had how many kids?

**CM:** Four.

**JM:** Four kids. To a Swan. They ended up getting divorced and she married a Hickman. He passed away and she passed away. Sammy Jr. worked at Jessop. Sammy went to the Navy. Out of all my brothers, I was the sixth one to go to the service.

**TC:** All Navy?

**JM:** No, John was the Army. Tinker was in the Army. Pete was in the Air Force. Frank was probably the Army. Sammy and I were the Navy. Sammy, he passed away at the age of 86.

Jimmy is the next brother. He tramped on a rusty nail as a kid and got osteomyelitis. He had over 40-some operations on his body. Holes in it and everything. He lived to be 75. Carmine just passed away. He'd have been 87 this June.

**TC:** Oh, he just passed away in January?

**JM:** Yeah and here I am. Still here. [Points to the date of death column.] We have no date over here. [laughter] That's all I know. As far as what they did, I just know Tinker and Mary lived here and there. Finally, she came back to Washington.

**TC:** [Referring to Tinker] Where did he bowl?

**JM:** Brunswick. Different areas. Then, we had a brothers' team. We won and went to Virginia for the championship. Tinker bowled. Tony bowled. Frank bowled, Sammy and me. Pete McWreath said, 'You're not a brother, but you're on our team!' [laughs] He and Tinker were good friends.

**TC:** Pete worked where?

**JM:** The old Hazel Atlas.

**CM:** Then he went to the Jessop.

**JM:** He was on the police patrol down there. Finally, they let him in. Then, two weeks later, I wanted hired. My brother had said, "Joe may have to leave town and Joe's a good worker." I was. I was a good worker at Jessop and they hired me. Then, they hired my son. Mark will be there for 30 years now. He's going to finally leave. At an early age.

**TC:** Now what about Sam? Where did he work?

**JM:** Jessop. Guy worked at the Jessop. Tinker did for a while. Then he didn't want to. Tony worked at Jessop. Petey worked at Jessop.

**CM:** I don't remember where Johnny worked.

**JM:** Johnny was Continental Can. That's the one that went to Pearl Harbor.

**TC:** Then, James.

**JM:** Jimmy was a janitor at Washington High School. He drove buses. He was there for a good while.

**TC:** What about Carmine?

**JM:** Carmine worked at...

**CM:** A lot of places [laughs]

**JM:** Different jobs. Down there on Jefferson Avenue. Towards Wolfdale for a while. Carmine worked different places. That's all I can say. Then, me. When I was a kid, I set pins up at the Brunswick.

I got hired in high school. We used to say we were a certain age, but they let us in anyway. [laughs]

**TC:** You say the Brunswick. Where was that?

**JM:** Main Street by the State Theater. In that block, in that area. You'd go downstairs. I set pins at those places.

**TC:** Let's go on from there and talk about your parents. You said your father came to the United States six times. Tell me about those six times.

**JM:** Well, I don't know what order now, you know what I mean? Now, Gandy Interval, who ran the Washington Restaurant uptown, [my dad] brought [his] mother over. We're related a little bit along the line. Of all the other names, I don't know them all! But, finally [he] brought my mother over. Had to have sponsorship.

**TC:** These were sponsorships? These were not girlfriends?

**JM:** Yes. No, these were sponsorships.

**TC:** He came here six times. Each time he brought somebody else.

**JM:** Yeah. That needed a sponsor, yeah. All women, as far as I know, yeah.

**TC:** So, you're saying the sixth time is when he brought your mother?

**JM:** The last time, as far as I know.

**CM:** This was when he arrived here.

**TC:** So, 1908 was ...

**CM:** When he came.

**TC:** The first time?

**CM:** We aren't sure of the dates when he came back and forth. We had always just been told that it was something he had done. He may have even done that after they got married but we don't think so. We just think he brought people over.

**JM:** I wouldn't think. But that was what I was told.

**TC:** He got his citizenship in 1924.

**CM:** Back to when they got married, they came into New York and got married in August. We always thought it was funny that he used a cigar band as her wedding ring. He had to get married right there in New York for her to come with him. That's when they went to Scranton.

**TC:** They had to have known each other in Italy.

**JM:** Oh, yes! They knew each other!

**CM:** She once told the story that she met him when he was selling watermelons. That's the only thing I know. We mistakenly never thought about it while she was still here to ask a lot of questions. You're busy with your own family and you don't get a lot of time.

**JM:** Do you know how they get water in a watermelon?

**CM:** No.

**JM:** You plant it in a spring. [laughter]

**CM:** Now, on the paper, on the ship that she came over on, it says on that manifest that she was coming to marry Salvatore Molinaro and live in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It says that right on the ship's manifest.

**JM:** What year was that, Claudia?

**CM:** 1910.

**TC:** The first few times he came, he came to Washington. You said he brought the Intervals' mother.

**JM:** I don't know how far he brought them. They could have come halfway to get here, or I don't know.

**TC:** He knew people here in Washington.

**JM:** Yes. We're related to the Intervals.

**CM:** He had a brother or someone that lived in Scranton to begin with because on his ship's manifest it says he was going to Scranton to be with his brothers. When he was bringing other people over, we don't know anything more than the story of that.

**JM:** My dad had brothers and sisters here, But I don't know who was first.

**TC:** Then, after a couple of years in Scranton, they came here.

**CM:** Uh huh. I looked up when the kids were born, and Tony was the one born here in Washington. The first two were born in Scranton and Mary was in the Hays area.

**JM:** My dad had a brother in Hays.

**CM:** So, we figure they came to Washington sometime in the 1915-1916s.

**TC:** It sounds like your dad had a lot of relatives settling in Pennsylvania, Scranton, Hays.

**JM:** Probably. Yeah.

**TC:** Any other areas?

**CM:** Frank was in Washington.

**JM:** Ohio. Guy went to Cleveland.

**TC:** Do you have a list of your father's siblings?

**CM:** I do.

**JM:** See, there's so many. Just like, I found out that my dad had a brother that I didn't know about.

**CM:** I don't think I have a separate list on that. But I can tell you in a minute here.

**TC:** Your mother's family—did she have any relatives here?

**JM:** She had relatives here. Mrs. Steratore was a DeSarro. Tony DeSarro's dad was Dominic. They were first cousins. DeSarros had a barber shop on Maiden Street across from the bus station.

**TC:** So both your mother and father had relatives here. Did your mother or father tell you anything about why they came here?

**JM:** Probably hard times over there and they had a shot to get into the United States and they came.

**TC:** Now, you said your father sold watermelons.

**JM:** She said that. I never heard that.

**TC:** Did your father ever talk to you about other things in Italy?

**JM:** Only that my dad was sort of a contractor. Gardener. We had a garden all the time. He came to this country and started building homes. He rented 13 houses out. I don't remember him working at a place, but he had a truck. So the kids would work the truck and make money. My dad built that brick building in West End during the Depression. He paid neighbors to work there.

My dad made wine. Barrels of wine. He did a few things that are right, and he did a few things that are wrong. People who liked his wine used to come and he'd give them free drinks and they liked it. Then, they bought some. [laughs] He was

bringing up 12 kids at the time. But he made that wine, and it was good.

When I worked as a shoe shine boy, they knew my dad and they'd say, "Joe, bring some of your dad's wine." [laughs]

**TC:** When your dad came here, what was the first job he had?

**JM:** I never knew him working.

**TC:** Always on his own.

**JM:** That's how I remember.

**TC:** The thing he built during the Depression—that's the Poundstown?

**JM:** That's the Poundstown. We lived behind the Poundstown. We lived different places. We lived out here on Route 40. My dad built a house for my brother Johnny and Johnny didn't want it. We finally moved out there. I had to leave Wash High and got to go to Trinity. I didn't want to go.

**TC:** How old were you?

**JM:** I was a sophomore. At Wash High. I went through second semester of my sophomore year. I was 15 or 16 years old. Once I got to Trinity, I liked it. I ended up graduating. The only one out of 12.

**CM:** I think that with Joe being the youngest of the family, he does not remember his dad working much because his dad was so much older.

**JM:** I never saw him drive. But he got a truck. For the kids to go out and make money and, of course, give him money. He rented houses. We had how many in the West End? Ten houses. Then, he had this one out here. About 13 houses that he helped build. We tore houses down. I learned to become a wood worker. We tore houses down at W&J College years ago, when they were remodeling. We built a house on Broad Street in West End.

**TC:** What's the first house you remember living in?

**JM:** The first house that I remember living in is 150 Hart Avenue.

**TC:** That's in West End?

**JM:** That's in West End. I owned that house. I later owned that house and I owned one of these other houses. Three other houses because different brothers had different houses. When I came home from the Navy, he let me have the house for \$4,000 which was hardly nothing. There were two other houses in the back.

When my dad passed away, my mother said, "You take care of the houses. You keep one and rent out of the back." The next thing you know, I bought the houses. Behind the big brick building, I bought that one. So I ended up having my houses plus the one where I was born, 150 Hart Avenue, then three more houses in the back. I collected rent!

**TC:** Is the brick building still there?

**JM:** It's still there.

**TC:** What's it used for now?

**JM:** People rent it.

**TC:** Do you still own it?

**JM:** Brother Carmine owns it. His wife does because they may attempt to sell. I sold my property.

**TC:** So, you lived on Hart Avenue. Then, you moved.

**JM:** We went from Hart Avenue and, for some strange reason, we went to the brick building.

**CM:** That's right beside the Hart Avenue [house].

**JM:** Then, we went out to that new house. Finally, gave up and came back to the brick building.

**TC:** When your dad built the brick building, what was the purpose of it?

**CM:** He eventually had his grocery store in there. He had a grocery store in the downstairs and ...

**JM:** He had Poundstown in the basement.

**CM:** They lived upstairs from that.

**JM:** I know it as a grocery store.

**CM:** His dad is listed in the census a lot as a grocer. He was listed as a mover—he

had trucks and he moved things.

**JM:** He'd do contract work in different things.

**CM:** A bartender one time. But that's the way he was listed on some of the census.

**JM:** See, all the Poundstown players came there to get dressed in the building downstairs. I used to go to the games.

**TC:** Where were their games played?

**JM:** Washington Park. They played a penitentiary team. In West Virginia, I think. Tinker would know exactly. Carmine Verno.

**TC:** So they went all the way from the West End over to Washington Park to play.

**JM:** Well, that ain't very far. Two miles. Three miles.

**TC:** They would walk?

**JM:** Oh, they would ride. Go by truck! That's when you could stand up [in a truck].

**CM:** Didn't they play or practice out where Suwak Trucking is?

**JM:** Out by Hickman's, yeah.

**TC:** Was your dad a big fan of football?

**JM:** Oh, of course!

**TC:** But that's not an Italian sport. Do you know how he got interested in it?

**JM:** Because of his sons playing for him. Because of my brother Guy being a general manager. My brother Guy didn't play. He had a broken neck from Jessop. That's why he didn't go to the service. My brother Tony had a bad back, but still worked, but they wouldn't accept him. My brother Carmine had a bad eye.

**TC:** It sounds like parents, who had all these American-born children who were doing American things like playing football, your dad just went with the flow.

**JM:** Oh, yes.

**TC:** What else do you remember about your dad's personality?

**JM:** He knew a lot of people. Let's put it that way. He liked his wine. He went to different clubs. He made me join the Alpine Club. I'm still a member today, but don't go. He loved to plant a garden. Taught me how to plant a garden. Taught me different things about wood. He'd send me to Cleveland every summer. I used to cry because I had to go, and I used to cry because I had to come back. [laughs]

**TC:** What was there?

**JM:** His sister Caterina—she was always in a wheelchair. Uncle Guy lived up there and he had a daughter. He'd say, "We come see you and you come see us."

**TC:** Were you supposed to help them out in the summer?

**JM:** That was my vacation.

**TC:** Just you or anybody else?

**JM:** Just sent me.

**TC:** Why you?

**JM:** Because I was the youngest.

**CM:** How did you get there?

**JM:** One year we went, and, in the back we had a seat—a rumble seat. Went to D.C. in a rumble seat. [laughs] Once I got there, I liked it. Dad's sister had a man friend who took care of her. Constantly. He had a farm and we'd ride out to the farm. He liked me, and we had a good time.

He had another relation up there, too. Joe was up there and there was another, Sam, who was related to my dad. Not a brother, but was related.

**CM:** Did you want the names of [of Salvatore's brothers and sisters?]

**TC:** Yeah.

**CM:** There's Frank, Guy, Tony, Angelina, and Catherine.

**TC:** Where did your dad fit into the group, do you know? He was born in 1885.

**CM:** I think he was the oldest.

**JM:** He was born in 1885. Then there was a brother in Hays—Antonio—who was older. Frank Molinaro and Rose had a beer garden on Wylie Avenue.

**CM:** Tony was born in 1872. Frank was 1891. So your dad must've been in the middle. Guy was 1895.

**JM:** That's the one in Cleveland [Guy].

**TC:** That's good to know. He had a brother, Tony, here. He lived here in the United States?

**CM:** I don't have much on them. I haven't been able to find much.

**TC:** Do you know why she [Catherine] used a wheelchair?

**JM:** No.

**CM:** Angelina was born in 1896.

**JM:** She lived in Waynesburg, I think.

**TC:** Tony—did you know him?

**JM:** No.

**TC:** But Frank and Rose, you said, had a bar.

**JM:** Had a bar. Minnie Molinaro was the daughter, Mary was Molinaro. Her son, Gene Steratore, had two sons who are referees for pro football. Gene [son of Gene Steratore] had the Super Bowl

this year. Gene [the father] and I grew up together. Gene lived in Ambridge [PA] at the time. He came home in the summer. The first thing he'd do is come to see me. We'd gone to Wash High together. [After I transferred to Trinity], we [ended up] playing each other. I told Gene, Frank Vito, and Billy Amos—all those boys—"I know all your plays." Nobody won the game. 6-6. Frank said, "I'm glad nobody won the game!" [laughs]

**TC:** Tell me about the name "Miller."

**JM:** All I know is that they told my dad that the American [sur]name for "Molinaro" is "Miller."

**TC:** Who told him?

**JM:** When he came over. That's all I knew at the time.

**TC:** When your dad was told "Miller" was his American [sur]name, did he then use the name?

**JM:** He used the name—both names!

**TC:** He used both?

**JM:** My brother Guy changed his name completely to "Miller."

**TC:** What about the other brothers and sisters?

**JM:** They went to school under the [sur]name of "Miller." But none of them graduated. I went to school and graduated under the [sur]name of "Miller." Then,

when I went to the service, they told me I had to use [the surname] "Molinaro." I said, "The American name is 'Miller.'" They said, "We know that, son, but your real name is 'Molinaro!'"

**TC:** You had not officially changed your [sur]name.

**JM:** No.

**TC:** Your brother, Guy, he became president of the union?

**JM:** Jessop. He was President of the Union. Local 1141. He changed it [his surname] completely to "Miller."

**TC:** Did that help assimilate into American culture better?

**JM:** It must've because he was well-known in the city of Washington.

**TC:** As "Guy Miller"?

**JM:** Oh, yes.

**TC:** Your mother lived until 1974. So, you got to spend time with her.

**JM:** Oh, yes.

**TC:** Until you were about 41 or so. What do you remember about your mother?

**JM:** What I like to remember about my mother is, when I came home from the service, my dad would give me money and she'd say, "Tell your dad that I didn't give you anything." [laughs] So, I had

twice the amount! [laughs] Moms do that.

My mother knew how to cook. She fed the poor. If someone came to the door and asked for something, she gave it to them. Bread. Christmas. Easter. Easter bread, she [Claudia] makes it with colored eggs inside, baked in.

My mother couldn't speak very good English. I taught her to write her name because she always put the accent marks on it. Once she learned to write her name, she made an "X." That's how she signed. [laughs]

**TC:** What were some of her best dishes?

**JM:** My grandson is in the Navy and he trains dogs. He was on the Rachael Ray Show. They interviewed him. It was on TV! They said, "Molinaro? You're Italian! What's your favorite food?" He said, "Sauce." They said, "With meat? Or not?" He said, "Both!" [laughs]

My mom made tripe and potatoes. Tripe—belly of a cow? She [Claudia] won't try it. [laughter] Then we make pasta fagioli. My mother would make all Italian food. She brought her recipes when [Claudia and I] first got married. My mother said, "I ain't got no recipes!" She'd say, "You go like this and that."

**TC:** She was 47 or 48 when you [Joe] were born. So here's your mom, she's had 18 pregnancies. What was it like for her to have had so many children?

**JM:** Getting up first and going to bed last.

**CM:** She was busy all the time. She worked around the house. She was a housewife. She cooked, cleaned, and fed everybody. Got upset if they didn't come home and eat. She thought the boys, especially, should always come home on Sundays and eat. They didn't always do that.

**JM:** Did you ever eat spaghetti sauce with chicken? She made chicken marsala good.

**CM:** By the time we got married, both sets of parents were much older. I don't know much of what they did because they did not do that much at the age they were. They weren't active. They didn't go out to places. They were home all the time.

**JM:** My mother went to visit Mrs. Steratore who lived half a block from us. Dominic DeSarro, who was a cousin, would speak Italian. I learned. I can understand it better than I can speak it. I know all the bad words. [laughter]

**TC:** She was livelier when speaking Italian?

**JM:** Oh, yeah. As far as I know, she never went to school. She came to the United States at a young age. It took me a while to teach her how to write her name.

**CM:** His [Joe's] dad was a tall man—a big person. She was small. Short. She was heavysset. There was quite a difference in their size.

**JM:** Brother Sam's tall. Brother Guy's tall. Pete's short. Me? I'm in between. Carmine is above me. Jimmy's below me. Pete's below me. We're different shapes. [laughs]

**TC:** Did your grandparents come over?

**JM:** Not that I know of. My mother had a sister over there [in Italy]. We used to call and send money.

**TC:** Did you dad have any education in Italy?

**JM:** He must've went to school a little bit because he could write [in] Italian. I don't know how much [education] he had here in America. He was brighter, as far as knowledge, than my mother. My mother knew how to cook and that was enough for me. [laughs]

**TC:** When you were growing up, in the West End, what was that like?

**JM:** As the youngest, I never got anything new. What was leftover—I got it. We never got a lot of toys at Christmas time.

**CM:** Tell them about where your mother baked bread.

**JM:** My dad made her a bake oven outside. She made bread outside. They called it the "bake oven." We still have the pot. She [Claudia] makes bread out of the pot.

**CM:** And pan. That she made bread in.

They had grapevines on their property.

**JM:** We had vines and we'd crush and press them [the grapes]. I have it downstairs. I have the grape presser and the crusher. With the black cherries, he said he wanted to make wine for women. For the family. Not a barrel, but barrels. I went picking and he told me to eat the cherries because they're good.

I was up in the tree singing the song "South of the Border." I sat down on a branch. It broke. I fell, hit the truck, and almost knocked myself out. But I got up. [laughs] Best cherry wine he ever made!

When my dad died, he had the biggest funeral in the city. They had the police take him through town, back around, and bring him down to the Catholic cemetery. The house that I bought from my dad had a bathroom that was a little bit small. The kitchen was a 12x16. I said, "I'm going to have to add a wall." It sounded like it was hollow. I punched a hole through it and there was a barrel there.

I went downstairs and there was a trap door. There was a bathroom down there. I opened the door, the light came on, and there was a barrel there. First thing I did was turn the spigot on and see if there was anything in there. [laughs] There wasn't anything in there. That's where he hid the wine.

There was an African-American family by the name of Platts in the West End. I thought they were related to me. They were good. I like them—Guy, Elmer, and

one person was a guitar player. Mr. and Mrs. Platt were great. Especially the mom. My dad hired them. The dad was the best electrician in the city of Washington. [But] they'd never hire him at the factory. When they had a major problem, they'd call him to come fix it. But they wouldn't hire him permanently. He put the money away for me for Christmas until I told him I'd like to have some of it. He'd say, "You said Christmas, Joe." He wouldn't give it to me.

**TC:** It sounds like your neighborhood had some non-Italians.

**JM:** We had the Simms. We had the Steratores. We had the Gottschalks.

**TC:** You had other nationalities. You had an African-American family.

**JM:** We had African-American neighbors. We had kids like Bob Wagner, who I still know today. We went to school together. He's an athletic director and I see him occasionally. The Barkers. Everybody knew everybody in the West End.

**TC:** When you think about the children whose parents were immigrants, which children still live here in Washington? Are they all gone?

**CM:** Yeah, I don't know. He [Joe] was so young, too. When he was born, one or two of his brothers were already married.

**JM:** Guy was. Guy's first kid is about as old as I am, and he must call me uncle.

**TC:** When your dad died in 1960, it was a huge funeral.

**JM:** He had so many relations. From other places. They had to block off Chestnut Street. For parking!

**TC:** Was it just because of the relatives?

**JM:** And friends! Policemen were his friends even though they'd arrested him a couple times.

**TC:** Did he have a very outgoing personality?

**JM:** He was well liked. That's all I can tell you. Everybody at the Alpine Club loved him. When I was in 5th grade, they had family nights. My mother couldn't talk [English]. My dad would come. I was a little bit ashamed, you know what I mean? Everybody in the class liked him. They told him to come back. But I was leery because I didn't know how he was going to talk to them.

**TC:** Do you think that your dad faced any discrimination in Washington [for being Italian]?

**JM:** Everybody liked him. One lady [a renter] lost a husband. My dad told her not to worry about paying the rent. He told her to get back on her feet first. Yet he didn't like to be cheated.

**TC:** Was he a strict father?

**JM:** His thing was always, "Do what your momma tells you."

**TC:** There were a lot of Italian Americans on the Poundstown Football team.

**JM:** Yes. It [the team] probably made my dad more respected. He wasn't in any of the pictures, but he owned the building.

**TC:** He made it possible.

**JM:** It made my dad a little on the famous side, just put it that way.

**TC:** He was the owner, the founder.

**JM:** Yes. Of course, he didn't charge them anything. [laughs]

**TC:** He was the [Art] Rooney of Washington.

**JM:** Yes.

**TC:** Was he one of the founders of the Alpine Club?

**JM:** Put it this way: He was a member for life. I don't know when he first joined. He was one of the old timers.

**TC:** Did he read an Italian newspaper?

**JM:** I still get it, today.

**TC:** Did he listen to Italian radio shows?

**JM:** Italian music. [sings]

**TC:** Did your parents play Italian music?

**JM:** My mother used to sing while she was cooking.

**TC:** Do you remember what she sang?

**JM:** Italian songs. She had a good voice. I told her she should be on the stage.

**TC:** Did your father become involved in any politics in the city?

**JM:** He was a strong Democrat! He'd say, "Don't you vote for a Republican, Joe!" I grew up that way. I'm still that way today.

**TC:** Why did he have such a strong feeling about the Democrats?

**JM:** Because he liked Franklin Roosevelt.

**TC:** Why did he like him?

**JM:** Because at the time, he made beer.

**CM:** The alcohol was very much involved.

**JM:** He was no beer maker.

**TC:** Did your dad enjoy drinking his own wine?

**JM:** He drank some wine. He liked going to Angelo's [Restaurant].

**TC:** The Spaghetti House?

**JM:** A gentleman who owned a bar on Chestnut Street baptized me.

**TC:** He was your godfather?

**JM:** Joe Scandle and his wife. Joe Reda and Emily were sponsors for my confirmation.

**TC:** Did your mom like to garden also?

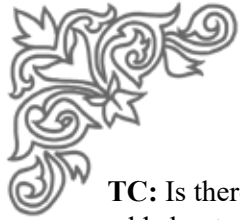
**JM:** She liked to can. [laughs] Whatever he brought home, she canned. I do that today. I still have some of the jars. Hazel Atlas made canning jars. I probably have a couple hundred of them. You had different people working there and for some reason, they brought them home. [laughs] I still have them, and I don't throw them away. Homegrown tomatoes are what goes in our sauce. Not canned. If I give you a jar, I'll tell you to bring back the bottle. [laughs]

**TC:** Did your parents like to go to church?

**JM:** My dad made sure they got a picture of me in church. My dad made sure we went to church. I go to church every Sunday. I hold the basket when the ushers come, and we dump it. I do it every Sunday and have been doing it for years.

**TC:** What about your brother, Pete? He lives by himself?

**JM:** Every time we go, he's talkative. He doesn't move around much. He has somebody come to clean the house. I call him, and he sounds the same as he did ten years ago. He always went to the Dog House [Restaurant].



**TC:** Is there anything else you'd like to add about growing up Italian in Washington, PA?

**JM:** People used to call West End the Worst End. As far as I'm concerned, the West End was the Best End.



## Florence (Flo) Marchione Nicolella

Daughter of Lucido Marchione  
and Angelina Vertucci Marchione



*Marchione family, 1950s. Front row: Florence, Lucido, Angelina.  
Back row: Vera, Louise, Millie*


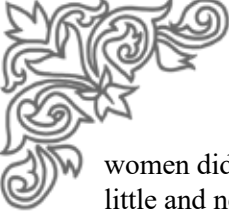
Florence (Flo) Marchione Nicolella grew up with three sisters on Moore Avenue near East Maiden Street. Her parents—Lucido and Angelina—were natives of Aquaro, Salerno, Campania, who met and married there. They had a daughter who died unexpectedly at age three before they emigrated to the United States. Several immigrants to Washington were natives of Aquaro. Lucido and Angelina's friends and relatives from Aquaro—their "paisani"—helped them obtain passage to the U.S. and get settled.

Flo recalled that her family's home on Moore Avenue was a popular place for friends and relatives to stop by as they did

errands on foot. "My mother always had a house full," she said. To this day, Flo enjoys when people drop in unexpectedly. "I like surprises," she says.

Flo also mentioned an Italian immigrant—Julia DiBello—who served as a "letter writer" for Italians who could not read or write. Like many immigrants, Lucido and Angelina kept in touch with people back home through letters. In many cases, it was understood that they would not see their loved ones face-to-face again. "When [my father] got a letter, he would run to [Julia DiBello's] house," Flo said.

Flo also reflects on the hard work that



women did in the home, making do with very little and never complaining. Her mother, Angelina, gardened, canned, cooked, baked, made rugs from rags and fashioned all manner of clothing from grain sacks. “They had a use for everything,” Flo said.

May 2017

### **Family Tree of Florence Marchione Nicolella**

#### **Florence’s Father:**

- Lucido Marchione, b. 2-7-1890, Aquaro, Salerno, Campania; d. Nov. 1963, Washington

#### **Florence’s Mother:**

- Angelina Vertucci, b. 9-19-1888, Aquaro, Salerno, Campania; d. 1968, Washington

#### **Lucido and Angelina’s Children:**

- Rose Marchione, b. Italy; d. Italy
- Louise Marchione b. 2-2-1920, Washington; m. — Rotunda
- Amelia (Millie) Marchione, b. 11-1-1921, Washington; m.—Rotunda
- Vera Marchione, b. 3-25-1925; d. Washington; m. — Barbella
- Florence (Flo) Marchione, b. 7-11-1928, Washington; d. 9-10-2020, Washington; m. Carl Nicolella, (b. 9-1-1917, Washington; d. 2012, Washington) on 3-2-1957

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

May 31, 2017; 3:00 pm; home of Florence Nicolella

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Others Present:** Dyane Troiano, Caroline DeIuliis

**Transcriber:** Caroline DeIuliis

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Were you born in Washington?

**Florence Nicolella:** I was born right here in this house. That's why I don't want to leave. I want to die here.

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**FN:** IC [Immaculate Conception Church]. Didn't want to. I mean I didn't want a church wedding. I was too old when I got married.

**TC:** Well, you were only 30 years old, 29 years old. That's not old. [chuckles]

**FN:** That's old. My husband was 10 years older than me. He was 39. That's old. Should have had a couple of kids by then.

**TC:** What was your husband's occupation?

**FN:** Retail salesman.

**TC:** Where did he work?

**FN:** Nickles Bakery, then he worked for the highway department [as a] surveyor. Nickles Bakery was originally from Ohio. Don't you remember when we were kids they'd come with the trucks house-to-house?

**TC:** With their white bread. [laugh]

**FN:** That was good bread then. Not anymore. None of the bread is good.

**TC:** So, what was your occupation or where did you work?

**FN:** I worked at the Bell Telephone. Then I worked switchboard at the hospital. I retired from there ... when I got pregnant I quit.

**TC:** Did your husband have any military service?

**FN:** World War II and then he was called back in during the Korean War ... Air Force.

**TC:** Did he have any particular rank that you wanted to mention?

**FN:** He was a Staff Sergeant.

**TC:** What are your sisters' names?

**FN:** Louise Rotunda and Amelia Rotunda, they married two brothers. And Vera Barbella, all those musical names.

**FN:** I had one who died in the old country. I was the youngest. I got stuck

with everything.

**TC:** The one who died in the old country, was she the oldest?

**FN:** Yes.

**TC:** Do you remember her name?

**FN:** Rose. You know we forgot about even putting her in any obituaries 'cause we never knew her.

**TC:** Your parents, Lucido and Angelina, they must have met in Italy.

**FN:** Oh yeah. They were sweethearts. How mature those women were compared to the kids today! Our parents, when they came over, they had to make do with nothing.

**TC:** So they were married and had a daughter over there?

**FN:** Yeah.

**TC:** But the daughter died young?

**FN:** Well, she died when she was about three years old, but she died suddenly. They never did know what happened.

**TC:** When your parents came here, did they come together?

**FN:** No, my dad came [first]. The men came first, then they sent for their wives ... but she came after World War I because my dad was drafted. Couldn't even speak English.

**TC:** So he came here, he worked and got drafted?

**FN:** I still have his discharge papers. They said his character was excellent. So the only thing is, he got gassed in France. He used to tell us stories. He would be drunk and I got so tired of hearing them, I just shut him off.

**TC:** Do you know what year he came [to the U.S.]?

**FN:** Well, the war was over in 1918, wasn't it? Maybe he came over in '16 maybe.

**TC:** Then you are saying that your mother, she had to have come over by 1919 because she had Louise in 1920.

**FN:** They got together right away ... then Millie followed fast.

**TC:** So your Dad came here. Did he come right to Washington? He knew people here?

**FN:** That's what they did. One would come, and then they'd [follow]. He came with ... probably a couple of paisans came together. How they got their money, I think all the paisans or relations pitched in for the voyage. They were poor when they came in. They had nothing. A trunk that I have upstairs. They brought food with them too, you know that?

**Dyane Troiano:** No.

**FN:** Yeah, my mother said they were

down in the bottom of the boat with the animals. They had animals and all. That's what they did.

**TC:** And so when your dad came here, what kind of work did he find when he got here?

**FN:** Well, they worked those foreigners like mules. They did anything they could for a dollar. His discharge papers said that he was a bricklayer.

**TC:** And did they ever tell you why they decided to come here, to the United States?

**FN:** So they could have a better life. They were poor over there, but they were happy.

**TC:** Did they ever talk about what life was like over there?

**FN:** My mother used to tell me that her mother would go begging on the doors for a crust of bread to feed her and her sister. They were poor, but they survived.

**TC:** Did your parents come through Ellis Island?

**FN:** Yep.

**TC:** And did your dad talk about his experience coming over on the boat?

**FN:** All he talked about was the army.

**TC:** Did they have any relatives already living here in Washington?

**FN:** Oh yeah, they had the Aloias, the DiBellos, there were lots of them. The D'Augustinos, Macarolas—you will need another sheet of paper. And then they had a lot in Pittsburgh also.

**TC:** Oh, and they had some in Pittsburgh also.

**FN:** Yeah, I liked it when they used to come to Washington. They'd talk about when they were in Italy and talk about certain people, in a good way.

**FN:** Marchese, they were all around here. You don't have enough room on your paper.

**TC:** And they all lived around in this area?

**FN:** Um huh, and they walked around everywhere. We were like, I used to call it the relay station. They'd walk from Prospect Avenue, up the A&P, and go grocery shopping and they always stopped and visited one another. My mother always had a house full. So I like it when people drop in. I don't like it when they call. I like surprises.

**FN:** But every Sunday they'd go to church and then they would stop. My mother would be making pasta or whatever.

**TC:** Did your parents, except for your dad going back in World War I, ever go back to Italy?

**FN:** No, my dad said he never wanted to

go back.

**TC:** He never wanted to go back.

**FN:** He had a brother there.

**TC:** Did he ever get to see him again?

**FN:** No. Talked on the phone, that's about it.

**TC:** So they kept in touch with each other.

**FN:** Um huh, my dad couldn't read or write, but there was a woman who wrote the letters for them, which was nice. And when he got the letter he would run to her house. It was the same thing. Everybody here is good.

**TC:** Was it a lady who wrote for a lot of people?

**FN:** Yeah, Julia DiBello, did you know her?

**TC:** No.

**FN:** She used to cook the meatballs for the spaghetti dinners and that.

**TC:** So she was the letter writer for the Italian families?

**FN:** Um huh.

**TC:** That's nice. And then did your dad keep in touch with anyone else over there? What about his parents?

**FN:** No, they were dead.

**TC:** Your mom's parents were dead also?

**FN:** Same thing.

**TC:** Did she have any brothers or sisters over there?

**FN:** She had a sister.

**TC:** Was she able to keep in touch with her?

**FN:** No, I guess when you wrote one letter it was [for the whole family]. It would say "Say such-and-such to so-and-so."

**TC:** This was the first house that they had?

**FN:** No, they lived on lower Prospect. They rented, then they decided to buy. They bought this house. It's about 100 years old.

**TC:** Do you remember what year they would have moved here?

**FN:** Let's see. It wouldn't have been 1925 because I was the only one born here. I'd say maybe 1927.

**TC:** What was the neighborhood around here like when you were growing up?

**FN:** Oh it was nice. We weren't rich, but everybody took care of their properties. There were mostly Italians and they always helped one another.

**TC:** And a lot of your neighbors were from the same town in Italy?

**FN:** Just two, the woman here [pointing] and there [pointing], but there were other Italians up the street.

**TC:** From other cities, other towns. And what was the name of the neighbor who lived here [pointing] who was from the town?

**FN:** Her name was Arena, her maiden name.

**TC:** And what about the one over there [pointing]?

**FN:** Uzzo, she was a good Catholic. Those are the ones that you need to watch.

**TC:** [laughs] Do you still go to IC Church?

**FN:** I never go to church anymore. Taking care of my mother, I couldn't go. And after she died, I thought I would try to go back, but I got nothing out of it. I pray.

**TC:** People in the neighborhood, what did they do when they got together? Did they have parties? Did they go to each other's houses?

**FN:** They'd visit, but we had a Sons of Italy half a block up where that transmission garage is and those apartments [now stand]. And the men would go up and play cards and drink.

**FN:** Then the men would get drunk and bring their friends here, like one or two

o'clock in the morning. Then they had their wives get up and cook for these drunks. [chuckles] I don't know how my mother did it. They would bring a guitar or a ...

**FN and TC:** Mandolin [laughs]

**FN:** Then my mother would get up and cook for them. They would be all drunk, getting some more wine. They made their own wine.

**TC:** The relationship between the men and the women of that generation, there was a hierarchy. The men were the breadwinners.

**FN:** They were the boss.

**TC:** The women took care of the home. Was your dad that kind of a father? Was he in charge?

**FN:** Oh yeah. He was in charge of the whippings we got. That's what the kids need today, I think. I don't know.

**TC:** And what about your mother? What was she like?

**FN:** Quiet, she had a hard life. All those, most of those women, had a hard life. [They'd] never have garbage to throw away. [They'd] never throw old clothes away. They had use for everything. We'd tear up old clothes and she would make rugs out of them. How she ever sewed those and washed those, I'll never know. They were like hooked rugs, but I used to rip them and she would wrap them

around the chair. And when she had enough she would make nice throw rugs. They had use for everything. [They] canned stuff. They had everything in the cellar. They had a hell of a life, the women.

**TC:** You took care of your mother after she had a stroke.

**FN:** My mother always had company. [Her friends would] come up every night.

**TC:** What was a typical day like growing up in this neighborhood?

**FN:** I went out and played all the time. I was the youngest. I didn't have too much to do.

**DT:** What did you do when you went out to play?

**FN:** Oh, we would make baseball bats, played baseball, hide and seek, hopscotch, jacks, tormented the neighbors. We always had something to do. We were never bored.

**TC:** Where did you go to school?

**FN:** Over here at 5th Ward. We would come home for lunch.

**TC:** When you went to school, did you speak Italian in the early years of going to school?

**FN:** My oldest sister couldn't speak English when she went to school.

**FN:** Well, it was, I don't know, [at school] she went to the cupboard and asked for something in Italian but the teacher wouldn't open the cupboard. She wanted bread and jelly. But when I went I could speak English. But I always spoke Italian to my mother. She never spoke good English.

**TC:** So in the home you spoke Italian primarily.

**FN:** Yes.

**TC:** And your father probably had to speak more English because of his work.

**FN:** I spoke English to my father, sometimes. But he went out and worked. He picked it up. Where my mother didn't. She had four children. She loved doing embroidery, making sheets with cut-out work on them, crocheting, but I never heard my mother say "I'm tired" or "I'll do this tomorrow." They just did what they had to do. They were content. Worked in the gardens, made big gardens.

**TC:** Did you have a garden out here?

**FN:** I had a little one here, but out by the railroad they had a big piece of land out there and [my father] would have a farmer come out and plow and put horse manure on it. My mother and him would go out there and work in the evenings. And my oldest sister had to watch the rest of us.

**TC:** The food that they grew, would you just use it in the home or would you sell it?

**FN:** Canned. She canned everything. With shelves galore in the cellar. Never went hungry. She made her own bread. The only thing they went to the store for was staples like flour, sugar, and they bought big [sizes] of everything.

**DT:** What was the closest store where she would shop?

**FN:** We had one, we had two here. A Paul's and a Marino's and then two blocks [away] we had J.A. Rungos, all kinds of grocery stores.

**TC:** Albano's?

**FN:** I never went to Albano's too much.

**TC:** And you went to Wash High?

**FN:** Yes.

**TC:** How did you like Wash High?

**FN:** Didn't know any better. Had to go to school. Never said I didn't like it, just went.

**TC:** A lot of your friends would walk there together?

**FN:** Mm hmm, the ones from farther away would be at the corner here. We'd go to school and would have to go back home for lunch. And then you would need to go back again in an hour. But my mother always had your lunch for you.

**TC:** So, everybody would go to their different houses to have lunch?

**FN:** Yeah, our legs would turn purple from the cold walk. Didn't have a nickel for a street car. That's all it cost. She'd come home and she'd bake bread. She would have pizza or she would make pizza frita for something different. And we would grab, I guess, bread and pepperoni or something. Then we would be back on the road again, I used to call it.

**DT:** Yeah, that's a long walk.

**FN:** It was. It was cold back in those days too.

**DT:** The snow too.

**FN:** Yep.

**TC:** How did your teachers treat you as an Italian American?

**FN:** Oh, the Americans they treated better.

**TC:** They did?

**FN:** I think they were mostly Italian foreigners here. We never had any Polish, but they were all like Italians. You can imagine what they said about us, but I used to hate to say where [my] parents were from. I used to be ashamed to say Italy. I was ashamed to say I was Italian, I have to admit it.

**TC:** Why were you ashamed?

**FN:** Well, the war was on with Mussolini and they just looked down on you. We didn't have nice clothes like the rest of the

the so-called Americans wore. And I remember we went to the bathroom, there was no doors on them and those little girls would have little silk panties on. I would have ones made out of sacks. I said someday I'm going to get me a pair of those silk panties. I did. Yeah, we had everything made out of sacks. There was a feeding mill over here. I still have some of those sheets in a trunk my mother had. She'd order them, they had lace around them. They were pretty.

**TC:** Made from sacks?

**FN:** Flour sacks, feed sacks. She used to boil them in lye water and there'd be like a decal on them like the one had a goat on the heel. She'd bleach them in lye water and cut them up and then they would make them into night gowns. I'm not sure about what we did for brassieres, I can't remember if I wore one early on or not. Now, I just let them hang. Nothing there anyway. But when you got a job you went out and buy all that stuff the American way.

**TC:** How was your dad raising daughters?

**FN:** I don't know 'cause we never had a brother.

**TC:** Yeah.

**FN:** He was strict.

**TC:** He was strict with you.

**FN:** When he said you be home by 9:00,

you better be home. He'd come looking for you. I think they didn't want, being that we were foreigners so-called, they didn't want their kids to get in trouble, you know. They watched the girls.

**TC:** And this was the house you grew up in? Were you actually born in here?

**FN:** Uh huh, I was born in this bedroom upstairs.

**TC:** How is your house today different from what it was like?

**FN:** Well, we have modern conveniences. We always had electricity, running water, a bathtub. I have a bathroom upstairs. There's a shower in the cellar. There is quite a difference.

**TC:** When you walk around your house today, do you, in your mind's eye, do you see things?

**FN:** Not anymore, I only have one sister left and she is in a home. She has dementia. We used to talk about the old times, but I can't even talk to her anymore. Sad. She's 95. Then, my other sister died three years ago. She had Alzheimer's. She was up at Southminster. That was \$7,300 a month. It's expensive. And same thing with Millie. She'd never go out to eat or anything. Saved all that money and now she is paying for a [nursing] home. I have nobody left, but we used to talk about the old times and the good times we had ...

**TC:** You had an Italian neighborhood

here in this part of Washington. Did you call your neighborhood by any name?

**FN:** No.

**TC:** There were three different areas of Washington where Italians settled. Did Italians mix together?

**FN:** No, they sort of stuck with their own. Now if you had a foreign name in East Washington, you couldn't buy a house in East Washington. They didn't want no Italians over there. The old people who died ... they didn't like Italians. The doctors and the attorneys live up there ... when the Americans went to Elmhurst Pool, the [Italians] had to go home. They couldn't join the club. They couldn't swim in that pool.

**TC:** You said your dad would go to the Sons of Italy. Did your parents belong to any other organizations?

**FN:** Well, my dad belonged to the American Legion.

**TC:** What about reading Italian newspapers or listening to Italian radio?

**FN:** My parents couldn't read or write. My dad learned how to write his name, but he was smart though.

**TC:** Did your parents become involved in politics?

**FN:** No, strictly homebodies.

**TC:** Did your parents go to church?

**FN:** Yeah, but my mother couldn't understand. My dad, he was an altar boy in Italy. He would have Mass here at home sometimes when he was drinking. [laughter]

**FN:** Veterans Day, he celebrated Veterans Day. He didn't need much to celebrate, him and his friends. [chuckles] His dad died on Palm Sunday, but you know Palm Sunday is not on the same date. So I go over and said, "How do you know what date your dad died?" And he said, "Palm Sunday." I would say, "They are different dates," and he'd get mad. Same thing when you said Mussolini, you better make sure the path was good to run. You couldn't say anything [bad] about Mussolini. They liked him. He said [Mussolini] put nice streets in and everything. I said, "They hung him by the heels, too." [laughter]

**TC:** Did your parents become citizens?

**FN:** My dad did and my mother automatically became one because he was.

**TC:** Sounds like your mother did a lot of the traditions of Italy like the cooking and gardening.

**FN:** Always, and the saint days they had. My dad was named after Lucido, the patron saint of their town. It's the 28th of July and they had a certain type of pasta that they made with thin wire and it had a hole in it. But it was all homemade. They'd pull it off that wire. We had to cook that every Saint Lucido Day.

**FN:** When I [visited Aquaro], you'd hear the people calling their kids. They were still naming them "Lucido" ...

**FN:** They have a big feast there on July 28. [Someone local in Washington] would collect money from all the paisans from Aquaro and send it over there and they would buy their fireworks with the money. They'd do it big time with a big parade.

**TC:** Did your parents encourage education?

**FN:** Just go to work. Go find a job, go to work. Who would have money to go to school then? Now I have three nephews and a niece who are attorneys. Times have changed.

**TC:** Is there anything else that you wanted to add about growing up?

**FN:** No, but they worked hard, those people. My dad would walk from here to Canonsburg for a day's work. He worked at the factory and I said they worked those men like mules. Worst job there was. They couldn't speak English. And I can remember my dad going to work and the boss would take him up and they'd go up there and help build this superintendent's home and the factory would pay for it, but I forget what they call that now.

**DT:** Illegal, that's what they call it.

**FN:** But they'd go and work on that superintendent's house. From the factory,

they would go there and punch out. But they worked them like donkeys. They looked down on you. My dad was a laborer. All of them were.

**FN:** I had girlfriends who weren't allowed to associate with me because I was Italian. They hated Italians. [The local newspaper recently ran a series] about the Black Hand. I knew some people who belonged to that. I used to hear them talking ... I know this one man when I got older. He murdered someone in Washington and took off for South America. He never got caught. He came back to Washington. He died here, but they talked broken and they'd say "Blacka" hands. A little mafia, that's what it was.

**TC:** Did you have a little corner grocery store in your neighborhood?

**FN:** Marino's just right across the street. Then there was John Yanni's. Those people used to walk to A&P in town. They'd go to Yanni's store on Jefferson Avenue. They always walked and they'd stop here to rest, I think. But they never complained.

**Sam Oliverio**  
**Son of Pietro (Pete) Oliverio and**  
**Saletta (Sally) Gallo Oliverio**



*Beth Oliverio Meeks with her uncle Sam Oliverio*

Sam Oliverio is the youngest of five sons of Pietro Oliverio and Saletta Gallo Oliverio, who emigrated to Washington from San Giovanni in Fiore, Cosenza, Calabria. Many of Washington's first Italian families emigrated from San Giovanni, including the Audia, Marasco, and Urso families. The town has been informally been called Washington's "sister city."


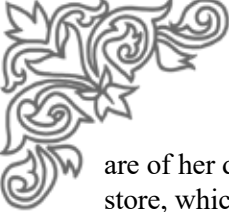
Two themes run through Oliverio family's story—the personal impact of military service and the resilience of families.

After arriving in the U.S. in the nineteen-teens, Pietro fought for the U.S. in Europe in World War I from 1917 to

1918. He returned with a debilitating respiratory condition caused by an enemy gas attack. His young wife, Saletta, and later their three sons, ensured the family's livelihood.

For nearly 30 years, the Oliverio family operated a grocery store at 590 Baird Ave (corner of Baird and Wayne) in the West End. Sam's brother John (older by 13 years) also operated a grocery store on West Wheeling Street.

Sam Oliverio tells the family story with a bittersweet sense of humor. His ornery behavior was his mother's bane, he says with a laugh. Yet his sweetest memories



are of her diligence in running the grocery store, which was a gathering place for the neighborhood of mixed ethnicities. He remembers her unending patience with children making choices from the big candy case that was a focal point of the store. They all called her “Aunt Sally,” Sam said.

When Sam reached adulthood in the 1950s, he experienced the lingering effects of discrimination against Italian Americans in Washington’s steel mills. Sam aspired to work at Jessop Steel as a metallurgist and scored high on the screening test, but he was passed over for hiring. Instead, Sam went into the insurance business and later operated a Motorist Insurance agency. “That’s how we dealt with discrimination,” he said. “We started our own business.”

Sam’s niece, Beth Oliverio Meeks (his brother John’s youngest daughter), also present during the interview, has a strong interest in family history and has documented both the paternal Oliverio/Gallo side and her mother’s family. Her mother, Basquala (Bea) Interval Oliverio, came from another San Giovanni family that settled in Washington. The family name was originally “Intravartol.” Beth is the family historian.

Beth’s father, John Oliverio Sr., a corporal in the Army Air Force, wrote a history of Washington’s Italian Americans’ military service in World War II. A 1994 Washington *Observer-Reporter* article about John Oliverio’s military service is included here.

April 2017



Sam Oliverio with his father Pietro  
(Pete) Oliverio



Sam Oliverio with his mother  
Saletta (Sally) Oliverio



Sam, left, and Joe Oliverio with their mother, Saletta, in  
front of the Baird Avenue grocery



## When the Vultures flew

► It's been 50 years since Jibon Oliveira was shipped overseas to fight in World War II. He was young and scared. And he still remembers it all.

BY RANDY HOUSSE, MANAGER  
OF THE JOURNAL'S EDITORIAL BOARD

In 1944, a young airman from Washington stopped on Italian ground for the first time. He was young and he was scared. He was there to fight in World War II.

The average in Europe was long for Clinton: a member of the 420th Air Force Bomb Group Association that known as the "Vulgar Vulturns."

Sometimes the jitters were too scared to fly and I had to make them get on the plane.

**James G. Thompson**



after Christmas preparations to leave for Italy

he said, "It was frustrating."

As an air operations specialist, Oliveira was often in charge of sending Helios to orbit.

"Sometimes, the internet were not started by me, and I had to make them get on the phone."

He also received the flight time of the pilot for their personal records. Sgt. Charles Bruckman of

Washington was one of three points. (Clerke didn't know they were from the same household.)

11 years later when they met at the American Legion Post 175 in Washington.

Shivers also recalls the day Lt. Louis Fahn of Washington parachuted out of a plane. The rest of the plane's crew were killed when

## About John Oliver



See Olvera in wedding gown made from purplish

Scientific and Technical Information Division

for the day he would require. She didn't know that, while in jail, Oliveira was already talking pro-

partitions. He recovered a silver penknife that had been used to slice down a plant after its bracken

"The parchment was ruined by water damage on the left side."

being dragged on the wedding day  
stripes," he said. "My wife was mar-  
ried in a wedding gown made from  
the material. I was the best man."

the pericardium. Later the fluid is made into a green dye used when we were dissecting.<sup>17</sup>

After the war was over, Thompson was one of the first ground crew members to take an air taxi to Europe as a pilot.

service, publ

<sup>1</sup>For a recent discussion of the importance of the "new" institutionalism, see Powell and DiMaggio (1991).

Alpine forests. We saw only the Alps, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany and the Reichsbanner, where Hitler

had his highway. You would see all the truck damage we did to his highway. All the trees around his

In honor of his service, Ollivier was awarded eight bronze stars and a distinguished service medal.



"The most important model was

my great greatest model. Why? Their's number during wartime and staying out of trouble was not

Chlorine is now banned, and he used his wife's law in West Washington.

shed in

Article about John Oliverio's military service, published in Washington *Observer-Reporter*, February 27, 1993



## Family Tree of Sam Oliverio

### Sam's Parents:

- Pietro (Pete) Oliverio, b. 2-18-1890, San Giovanni in Fiore, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 1-29-1954, Washington
- Saletta (Sally) Gallo, b. 8-17-1901, San Giovanni in Fiore, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 12-26-1969, Washington; arrived in U.S. 1-12-1922

### Pietro and Saletta's Children:

- John Oliverio, b. 1-21-1923, Aiden, PA; d. 5-28-1998, Washington; m. Basquala (Bea) Interval, b. 11-3-1920, Washington; d. 8-30-2020, Washington
- Joseph, b. 5-24-1924, Washington
- Anthony (Tony), b. 1926, Washington; d. 1940, Washington
- Pietro (Pete), b. 1933, Washington; d. 1935, Washington
- Sam, b. 3-23-1937, Washington; d. 12-22-2018, Washington; m. Mary Lou Eckland (b. 10-2-1938; d. 2009) on 6-22-1957

### Pietro's Parents:

- John Oliverio
- Antoinette Moraski

### Pietro's Sibling:

- Rose Oliverio, m — Talerico

### Saletta's Siblings:

- Mary Gallo, m. Lou Desmond
- John Gallo
- Samuel Gallo
- Rose Gallo

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

April 22, 2017; 1:00 pm; home of Sam Oliverio

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Beth Oliverio Meeks (niece of Sam Oliverio)

**Transcriber:** Cheri Duball

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Sam, what is your date of birth?

**BOM:** August 17, 1901, and she died December 26, 1969.

**Sam Oliverio:** March 23, 1937. 80 years ago.

**TC:** And where was she born?

**TC:** And where were you born?

**SO:** San Giovanni [in Fiore], Italy. Which is St. John's in English.

**SO:** Wayne Street in Washington PA.

**TC:** Sam, who are your children?

**TC:** Where is Wayne Street?

**SO:** Samuel M., Scott E., and Steven L.

**SO:** It's parallel to Wilmington which is parallel to Ewing Street. It's in the West End in Canton Township area. I believe I was born at home. And you know how I know that? Because I wasn't circumcised.

**TC:** What's the age of your children?

**SO:** Sam was born in 1959. He's 58. Scotty was born in 1962 and Steve was born in 1963.

**TC:** What was your father's full name?

**TC:** And your spouse?

**SO:** Pietro Oliverio. None of us had a middle initial because we couldn't afford one.

**SO:** Mary Lou Eckland Oliverio and she passed away in 2009, I think it was. They all spelled it different. Them Swedes, you know how they were.

**TC:** When was your father's birthdate and where was he born?

**TC:** What was her birthdate?

**SO:** San Giovanni [in Fiore], Italy.

**SO:** October 2, 1938.

**Beth Oliverio Meeks:** 1890?

**TC:** What is your wedding date?

**TC:** 1890? OK. And then your mother was Saletta Gallo. And her birthdate?

**SO:** June 22, 1957. We were married 52 years when she passed away.

**TC:** Where were you married?

**SO:** Fourth Presbyterian Church in Tylerdale. Good old Tylerdale.

**TC:** Your occupation was insurance?

**SO:** When I retired, I was an insurance agent.

**TC:** Did you do any other type of work before that?

**SO:** How far back do you want me to go? I was in insurance since 1964. That's far enough.

**TC:** What year was [your brother] John born?

**BOM:** January 21, 1923.

**TC:** And then Joseph's birthday?

**SO:** That, I don't know.

**TC:** Was John born here in Washington?

**SO:** All three of us were. Well, there was five of us. Remember I said two died young.

**TC:** What were the names of the two that died?

**SO:** Anthony. That's his tombstone here. And I have the baby's somewhere. I don't know if it's in there or not. Tombstones for the kids are just about all ...

**TC:** And Pete is Pietro? 1933-1935.

**SO:** Can you read that? [points to a photo] OK. See those stones are just about crumbled? He was only two years old when he passed away. And then Tony. This was my dad's military service. I didn't know if you would want any of that or not. And then brother John's too. You can take pictures of those later if you want.

**BOM:** Uncle Joe was born May 24, 1924.

**SO:** I was three years old when [Tony] passed away. So, that's why I don't remember him.

**TC:** How did your parents meet?

**SO:** He evidently knew her from Italy because he sent for her when he got here. That's the way they did it back then. Don't ask me how they met.

**TC:** Do you know when they got married or where they got married?

**SO:** Nope.

**TC:** Were they the first members of your family to come here?

**SO:** Immediate family, yes.

**TC:** Did you have any cousins or anyone like that who came here before your parents?

**SO:** Well, you're talking about my dad's cousins, not mine.

**TC:** Yes, your dad's cousins.

**SO:** Mr. Marasco [Floyd] was a cousin. A distant cousin. Joe Marasco who had that tarpaulin shop on Chestnut. Mm Mm Pizza is in there now. That's where his shop was.

**TC:** What kind of shop was it?

**SO:** He dealt with tarpaulins and stuff like that and sewed them and stuff like that. That's what he did.

**TC:** What's a tarpaulin?

**SO:** It's something you cover stuff with.

**TC:** A tarp?

**SO:** You didn't know the full name? See, you learned something today. It was worth the trip!

**BOM:** What did your dad do before you were born?

**SO:** He was in the coal mines for a while. But then, when he come back from the service, it was total disability. Remember I said he was gassed in Germany? Some people don't get over that. You know that jerk in the paper? The one who said Hitler never gassed anybody over there? Where was he at?

**TC:** So, your dad served in World War I?

**SO:** Yes, ma'am.

**TC:** He came here and then he was drafted into the war?

**SO:** Yes, he went over and served his time and when he come back, he couldn't get a job. First of all because his name was Oliverio. And second of all, the farmers who were exempt took the jobs in the mills, and when the guys come back from the service, they stayed in the mills. You didn't know that part of history, did you?

**TC:** So, when he came back, it was around ...

**SO:** I have no idea. After the war.

**TC:** Like 1919, 1920?

**SO:** But he was disabled after that. He never worked after I was born in '37. Probably didn't work any after he got back, really, to be honest with you. But he did work like, in the Lincoln Hill mine back in the day.

**BOM:** Did he work in the grocery store?

**SO:** No, he'd mop the floor in the morning and that was it. He'd mop the floor in the morning and then he would get out of there. My mother was the one who worked in the store. You haven't got to that part yet about the store.

**TC:** Right. So, your dad was disabled in the war. What kind of disability was that?

**SO:** I'll just put down that he was gassed in Germany. I don't know. A physical disability.

**TC:** It was a physical disability?

**SO:** Physical disability, yes. His face, his nose was closed in. He got up every morning and he would go in the sink with hot salt water and would suck that in and cough, and spit and choke just so he could breathe for the day.

**TC:** This is something I've wondered about. These Italian immigrants getting drafted to go back to Europe to serve in World War I, how was our country able to draft them? They weren't American citizens.

**SO:** Sure they were. They were citizens by then. It's not like they just got off the boat and had to go over to Germany.

**TC:** Right. But, you think they went through the citizenship process?

**SO:** Yeah.

**TC:** OK. And then they were drafted?

**SO:** I don't know whether he was drafted or whether he enlisted. I don't know that. But he served.

**TC:** So, the disability he acquired by being gassed. Did he have trouble walking?

**SO:** No, just breathing.

**TC:** And then when he came back, and he was disabled, you're saying that he owned a store.

**SO:** No, we were still at the homestead. The homestead, which is on Wayne

Street. I'd like to say the 600 block of Wayne Street, let's say. Miss Kobaski owned the store and I can still remember that name. I found a quarter somewhere, OK, so I'm going to the store. I'm sneaking through the cornfield. My dad says, "Hey, where you going?" "I'm going to the store!" "No you're not. Get back here!" I wasn't allowed out of the yard. But we eventually bought Miss Kobaski's store.

**TC:** You eventually bought the store? OK. That was the corner of Baird and ...

**SO:** Wayne. See, our house was on the back of Wayne Street, but the address was Wayne. The township never put it through. There were so many roads out there, they never put it through. But then they also bought a plot in back of the store. They ended up with three properties. People who immigrated here, they didn't have a lot of money. Each of us boys got one of the properties. I got the homestead, brother Joe got the store, and her dad [Beth's father, John Oliverio] got the house in back of the store.

**TC:** Do you know what year they bought the store?

**SO:** I must have been about 12, so I would say '49? In that area. '48, '49?

**TC:** So how did they survive financially until they got the store?

**SO:** Well, I don't ever remember going to the store for anything. Mother made bread and we had a garden and we had

our vegetables. We had a milkman, I guess. We had an icebox. I just remember an old stove in the middle of the dining room floor with a hotplate on top. I remember that vaguely.

**BOM:** Did my dad help buy the grocery store?

**SO:** No, brother Joe was the one. They both worked at McCann's which was uptown by the Trust Building. That was the supermarket. Brother Joe was a meat cutter. I think your dad worked there too. But brother Joe eventually came into the store with my mom. My mom watched it every night. Then, when she was tired, she would get the neighborhood kids to come in and work in the evenings. They all remember the store. They called her Aunt Sally.

**TC:** Was your dad able to get a disability payment from the government?

**SO:** Yeah. Veteran's disability. But his job was to mop the floor every morning. That was it. Which cousin Lou Desmond put down. Then, [Lou Desmond] also put a bathroom in for us which we didn't have up there. Man, we were in our glory now. We have a bathroom! The Cellone's bread man would come in and say, "Mrs. Oliverio, I got to go to the bathroom," and she would say, "You go use the outhouse!" It was still there.

**TC:** So, you're not sure where your parents met, but they were from the same town.

**SO:** They met there in San Giovanni. When he come over here, they must have been ... Why he would come without her, I don't know any of that story. He probably said, let me go over and try to get a job, and I'll send for you and did. A lot of them did it that way.

**TC:** They got married here. Do you know where they got married?

**SO:** I have no idea. That's way before my time, dear.

**TC:** Do you know what your parents heard about the United States before they came here?

**SO:** How did any of them hear? You know, land of milk and honey. They were so poor over there, it had to be better over here.

**TC:** And they came through Ellis Island. Did they come directly to western Pennsylvania from there?

**SO:** I would think. I don't know how my dad's sister ended up in West Virginia, but she ended up down there and he ended up here. I don't know when she came.

**TC:** So your dad's sister went to West Virginia?

**SO:** Right. Her uncle worked in the coal mine.

**TC:** What's her name?

**SO:** Rose Oliverio Talerico.

**TC:** Did she stay in West Virginia?

**SO:** Yep. She stayed and died down there. And they had a little store.

**TC:** Did your mother or father tell you anything about their immigration experience?

**SO:** Not really. They never talked about it. Not to me. Maybe to her [Beth's] dad.

**TC:** And is Rose Talerico the only relative they had in the U.S.?

**SO:** On my dad's side, as far as I know. There was two cousins came over from the Oliverio side. [To Beth] Do you remember any of those?

**TC:** What are their names?

**SO:** One was Rose. I can't remember the other one.

**TC:** They came to Washington?

**SO:** Well, they didn't come here. They visited here. I tried to talk to the one younger one, her name wasn't Rose. That was the older lady.

**BOM:** Is that the one from California?

**SO:** Yeah, she was probably in California at that time.

**BOM:** Laura?

**SO:** No, one married a barber in New York. I can't think of her name. I tried

to say a sentence to her and she says, "You don't know how to trill your words." In other words, you don't know how to put them in a sentence. But I tried. When my mom died, I lost all of that. But she always talked to me in Italian. Always.

**TC:** Did you speak Italian in the home?

**SO:** I just listened in Italian. I didn't talk Italian. I wasn't like fluent. He [Beth's father] learned it fluently.

**TC:** So you would speak back to your parents in English. Did they learn English?

**SO:** Yeah, just by being here. Like I said, my mother run the store. We had a penny candy case and she had more patience with them kids. You know, they would come in the store with a nickel and a dime and they'd go off with a little bag of candy, you know. She had a lot of patience with the kids. More than me. I'd say, "Come on, hurry up! What do you want?"

**TC:** Did the store have a name?

**SO:** Just Oliverio's Grocery Store. We wrote a lot of credit with people who never paid back, back in the day.

**TC:** So the first store was around 1949.

**BOM:** I don't know, but my dad [John Oliverio] always said he sent money when he was in the service to Grandma Sally to buy the store. That's in my head.

**SO:** Well, that's not his store. Our store. He may have contributed to that with brother Joe.

**TC:** What were some of the other stores you mentioned?

**SO:** Did you get her dad's store? John Oliverio's.

**BOM:** Johnny's Market.

**SO:** Johnny's Market. He sponsored our basketball team.

**TC:** Oh, Johnny's Market. Where was that?

**SO:** Wheeling Street. West Wheeling.

**TC:** In your family were there other stores?

**SO:** No.

**TC:** Just the two?

**BOM:** My dad's was years later.

**SO:** We had a Washington Grocers' Association back then. That's where the mom and pop stores got their groceries. They had bought a bond originally and it was doing OK. Except, with the mom and pop stores going on the wayside, they were done.

**TC:** Do they still exist today?

**SO:** No. Joy Manufacturing owns the building now. Or Caterpillar.

**TC:** Where was that located?

**SO:** Pike Street in Meadowlands. You know where Joy Manufacturing is?

**TC:** So tell me a little bit about what you remember about the store that your parents ran. Your mom was born in 1901, so she was in her late 40s when the store was founded [in 1949]. Your dad was probably about the same age.

**SO:** Well, he was older. He really didn't have much to do with the store other than mopping the floor in the morning making sure it was clean. Then he was done for the day. Then he would have friends he would visit and of course when you went somewhere, you went by streetcar or you walked back then. My job was to put the Sunday paper together. That was my job and I don't know what I made per week. I had a little piggy bank and I had it filled with dimes. Her [Beth's] dad comes over and decides it's time to butcher my pig. Now, why would he have business butchering my pig? He took advantage of me. There was \$500 in dimes in that pig. In dimes. Dimes don't take up much room and they add up. So, if you're going to save, save dimes.

**BOM:** How long did it take you to save all that?

**SO:** Who knows? And it wasn't his business to butcher the damn thing.

**TC:** What year did your [Sam's] dad die?

**SO:** '54. The year I graduated. January or February that year.

**TC:** So it was only a few years after they got the store? Did Sally keep the store?

**SO:** Oh, yeah. And my brother. He worked there during the day when he was there. Every once in a while, he'd go somewhere. You know what my mother would call him? Goodtime Charlie because he knew she'd be there to take care of it, that's why.

**TC:** So it sounds like your mother was a very responsible woman. Would you describe her that way?

**SO:** I don't know! She just did what she had to do, you know? I was a brat, probably. I remember cutting two holes in the chenille bedspread so I could get my car under it. You know, like a little garage. I made her mad one time. We had three openings in the store. We lived in back of the store, by the way. There was three openings and I made her mad and she came at me with the broom, but she couldn't catch me. I kept going like this. She said, "I'll get you!" I'm watching television on this daybed on my back and here she comes with the broom. Now, she is not going to hit me in my private parts. I turned over and she hit me on the tailbone with that damn broom. I couldn't sit for a week. So, she did remember. I don't know what I did, but it must have been bad! Ornerly. It wasn't bad, it was ornerly.

**TC:** Now, you said you lived on Wayne Street. You were born there. Did you live in any other houses except Wayne Street?

**SO:** Wayne and Baird Avenue where the store was. We lived in the back of the store.

**TC:** And you lived there throughout your childhood?

**SO:** Until I got married.

**TC:** When your parents came to the United States, do you think they planned to stay here or do you think they planned to go back?

**SO:** Oh no, I don't think they planned to go back.

**TC:** Did they keep in contact with the relatives in Italy?

**SO:** My mother would send her sister a letter written in Italian and she would send her money. That's what they did.

**BOM:** This is one of the last pictures of Grandma Sally. She died in 1969. She died in December.

**SO:** She died the day after Christmas. We were at the mall. She came over for Christmas. We brought her over the house for Christmas. We were at the mall shopping and they called us on the intercom and I did not hear them. When I come back, Mary Adams called and told me she passed away. I said, "Well, where is she?" She was down at Abel's [funeral home]. I went down there and there she was. She wasn't laid out, she was in her petticoat, laying on a damn thing there.

And she had bruises where she fell. I felt so bad.

**BOM:** She fell in the store.

**SO:** In the back and she bruised herself. We found a whole wastebasket full of Bufferin. They didn't tell you if they were hurting. They just took the pills. They never told you if they were hurting. None of them. But she had taken Bufferin. I don't know how many. But we had the store so we had access.

**BOM:** I remember seeing her on Christmas day. I thought she came to our house on Christmas day. We didn't spend Christmas days together. He's [Sam's] saying she was at his house.

**SO:** Well, she could have been there later or earlier.

**BOM:** Yeah, making her rounds that day.

**SO:** I used to stop at the store every day to give her an insulin shot. They tried to teach her how to do it to an orange. She didn't want any parts of that. Every morning when I would come, she would have her needles boiled and I'd give her a shot here and here. Just went right around, you know.

**TC:** So you grew up at the corner of Wayne and Baird. What was the neighborhood like?

**SO:** Well, it was a mixed neighborhood. We had Ferrallis across the street, Oberdicks to the left, Tianos in the back.

It was a mixed neighborhood. Polish. You know, we had a little bit of everything. We had Blacks very close by, a little mixture of everything.

**BOM:** Were you allowed to visit at everybody's houses? The Polish, the Blacks?

**SO:** Well, they all came to the store. We didn't have to go visit them.

**TC:** Were there other Italians? You said the Tianos and Ferrallis. And others?

**SO:** I can't think of too many. Grecos.

**TC:** The Italians in the neighborhood, did they come from the same place in Italy?

**SO:** I can't say that.


**TC:** What kinds of events brought people together in the neighborhood?

**SO:** We didn't have any events per se.

**BOM:** Did they hang out on the front porch of the store?

**SO:** At times they would get together. Albert Ferralli built a ballfield down below. He had some property. He built a ballfield for us. Now, you know that name, don't you? In fact, on Friday nights, he used to show movies of Sammy Angott boxing because him and Sammy Angott were good buddies.

Now you'll like this one: Our kids, as a ball team, we're going to play Interval's



---

team from down here. Now, here come [we] kids from West End and we didn't have a baseball. They come with uniforms on! Regular baseball uniforms. And here's a bunch of scrubs and we're going to play these kids with uniforms. We used to play the baseball until we had to put tape on it and when that went, we played with the little thing that was left in the middle.

**BOM:** What were your bats?

**SO:** We had wood bats back then! We weren't that bad! We did have bats!

**TC:** What was your house like?

**SO:** Store was in the front and we had three rooms in the back and a bath. That was it.

**TC:** Did you sleep in a room with your brothers?

**SO:** I had my bedroom. No, there was just my bed. My mom's bedroom was also the living room. She had a rocking chair, and a bed, and the daybed that she hit my tailbone on and the TV. That's how I grew up.

**TC:** And your brothers were older?

**SO:** Yeah, they were gone. Married.

**TC:** What was a typical day like for you when you were a child? Where did you go to school?

**SO:** Trinity. Hayes Avenue until 7th

grade. We were one of the first classes that went to 8th grade at Trinity. So we were there five years. The new kids coming in always got lipstick put on their faces by the upperclassmen. But when we were upperclassmen, they eliminated that, so we didn't get to do it.

**BOM:** How did you get to school?

**SO:** School bus. Top of Ewing Street we caught the school bus.

**TC:** Did your parents belong to an Italian organization?

**SO:** No. They weren't church-goers. They were good people, but they just weren't church-goers. I had confirmation at [Immaculate Conception] and then I never went back. I went to one class. I was baptized there. I went to one confirmation class, but the other kids was so much younger than me that I said forget it and I never went back.

**BOM:** So was my dad baptized?

**SO:** He was my godfather. I was older when I was baptized.

**TC:** Did your parents subscribe to an Italian language newspaper?

**SO:** No.

**TC:** Did they listen to Italian radio shows?

**SO:** No.

**TC:** Did they become involved in politics?

**SO:** No. My brother Joe did. He was magistrate for one year.

**TC:** What did your parents do for fun and entertainment?

**SO:** I don't remember them doing anything. My mother loved the Beverly Hillbillies. She loved watching that show. I can't remember my dad watching much television, to be honest with you. He had buddies around the area and he would go to their places and spend some time with them. If they would get into a spat, him and my mother, he would take off for West Virginia to stay with his sister until he'd cool down and come back. But, he never hit her. He just said, "I'm out of here." He would go down there and do odd jobs for them, which he loved to do.

**BOM:** What kind of car did he have?

**SO:** He took a bus. Car? What is a car? We never had a car. Mark that down. We never had a car. So what did I do? When I worked for my cousin, Lou, I didn't get paid for a year because I didn't want to interrupt my mother's social security. I was young when I graduated. I graduated at 17 and I worked until I was 18. Then I got this big check from Lou [Desmond] for working for him building houses for all that time. What the hell do I do? Instead of matriculating to W&J, I bought a car. What the hell? We never had a car.

**TC:** What did you buy?

**SO:** A '55 Buick. Brand new. I probably could have went to W&J for two years with that money. But I had no guidance from my brothers for sure because there was no way in hell I was going to get educated and they didn't. You understand how that works with Italians? I'm telling you how it works.

**TC:** You talked about there being different ethnic groups in the neighborhood. Did everybody get along pretty well?

**SO:** Yep!

**TC:** You said both of your parents became American citizens, but probably long before you were born.

**SO:** Right.

**TC:** What aspects of Italian culture did your parents bring with them from Italy?

**SO:** Give me some of the cultures and I'll tell you whether they brought them.

**TC:** How about food?

**BOM:** The garden and the bread.

**SO:** Well, we grew our own vegetables and mom baked bread. Now, we had this big grape arbor, long as this house, and my dad did not make wine. He did not drink. So we made grape juice and it would ferment and pop the corks off the bottle, knock the caps off the bottle. We might as well made wine! But we tried to make grape juice and evidently we didn't.

**TC:** Would you say your parents were proud of their heritage?

**SO:** I think so, yeah. But I would get embarrassed when my mother would speak Italian uptown and I shouldn't have. I regret that now. I should have been proud of that. One time she was going to take me to the dentist. McCann's [grocery store] was still there. The dentist was upstairs. I wasn't going to go to that dentist. I grabbed ahold of a 50 pound sack of potatoes and I wasn't letting go. So, my mother said, "Come on, let's go home." I wasn't going to the dentist. Sammy [Sam's son] inherited that.

**BOM:** He won't go to the dentist.

**SO:** They had to knock him out to get him to the dentist.

**BOM:** And Donna [Beth's sister] is petrified of the dentist.

**SO:** Is she? So, there's some genes there somehow. But I remember stories like that. I remember stuff that doesn't really make a lot of matter. Mundane stuff, that's what I remember.

**TC:** You said your mother would speak Italian. So if you were uptown and she was speaking Italian, who would she be speaking to?

**SO:** Me!

**TC:** Oh, to you? Because you understood Italian well.

**SO:** Yes. And there's different dialects too. Other people could talk Italian and I couldn't understand them. Different dialects. Just like we have different dialects here. But I understood her well.

**TC:** Did you feel there was discrimination against Italians?

**SO:** To put it mildly.

**TC:** Could you say more about that? You mentioned about the working in the ...

**SO:** I told you about that. A lot of the Oliverios took the "io" off to Oliver. So now they could obtain work because they weren't discriminated against. OK? I had an opportunity ... to go to the metallurgical school at the Jessop [Steel] because I wanted to get in the Jessop, right? Jimmy Ewens got me in this metallurgical class and I had the top grade. So I goes to Harry Taylor, who was the big honcho, to a job. He goes, "Well, I can get you a job at Mellon Stuart." I said, "No, I want to work at the Jessop." Well, I never did get called. I found out years later [that] Bob Timko, who was a metallurgist that taught the class, [was] asked to change the grade so that I wouldn't get the top grade. You talk about discrimination? What do you call that?

**BOM:** What is a metallurgist?

**SO:** Steel. You know, what they add to the steel and what to take off from it.

**TC:** So how did people, including yourself, deal with the discrimination?

You said some people changed their names.

**SO:** We went into business for ourselves. That's how we did it. I finally did it, but it took me until 1982 to do it. And I was ten years too late starting my own agency. If I had been in ten years sooner, I would have been better off. But that's how we dealt with discrimination, so we started our own business.

**TC:** Did your mom and dad feel bad about the discrimination?

**SO:** They didn't seem to be. The thing that bothered my dad was that he wasn't able to work anyhow when he came back. He didn't have a job before he went and when he came back, he wasn't able to work.

**TC:** Did it upset your mother?

**SO:** Not really. The only thing that upset her was me.

**SO:** I used to watch Donna Marie and Johnny [Beth's older sister and brother]. I would walk from the store down to where they lived on Chestnut. It was only a block or a block and a half. All I wanted was a can of black olives in the fridge. That's all I wanted. I don't know if they ever paid me or not. I don't remember getting paid. Anyway, by time I got there, they were both in bed. So I was just a sitter, that's all. I just sat there and ate olives. The big TV they had was like this. Me and my dad on Tuesday night would walk down to watch Milton Berle on this

TV set. Your [Beth's] dad had one of the first ones. Now they're going back to TVs that size.

**BOM:** And then my sister watched his [Sam's] children.

**SO:** How about that? Isn't that funny how things work? What goes around comes around.

**TC:** What was your parents' attitude toward education?

**SO:** It never came up. Like I told you, our family was different. My brothers were different. They didn't want me to be educated. I was eighth in my class; I had straight A's. That's my fault. I put the blame on them. I was so damn young. I should have worked the year with Lou [Desmond] and then went to school. I needed that other year of maturity, I needed that. My mother sent me to school when I was five. This is why I think she did that: Aunt Mary's [Desmond's] son, Joe, who was in my class, wouldn't go when he was five, wouldn't go when he was six. So he's seven now. He decides to go to grade school which is a half a block up the street. So she must have called my mother and says, "My Joey is going to school, why don't you send Sammy?" That's my theory. And out the door I went.

**SO:** I got my hand slapped the first day of school. I didn't know how to act around other kids. Really! I wasn't around other kids at all. But I never got smacked after that.

**TC:** Was Mary your mother's sister?

**SO:** Yes. Mary Gallo Desmond.

**TC:** Was she older or younger than your mother?

**SO:** Older. Yeah, because she passed away sooner. That's how I remember.

**TC:** And she came to the United States ...

**SO:** Probably before [Saletta].

**TC:** And she married an American?

**SO:** She married a Desmond.

**BOM:** So she didn't come with Sally on the boat?

**SO:** No. She must have already been here. Or her and her husband might have came together. Who knows? I don't know any of that. And there's nobody living that would know any of that.

**BOM:** But Sam Desmond that is still alive is her son?

**SO:** Joe Desmond is still alive. Joe and Thelma is the only two still living. And Thelma has Alzheimer's so she don't know what's going on. She came to her sister's funeral which was at Neal's Funeral Home. You know, Mary Romano. And I was talking to her and you know, you have to watch what you say and be positive about everything. She still didn't know who I was or anything. We built all the Desmonds' houses. Their brother built

their houses and I was working for them when we did Stonemark Drive.

**TC:** Beth, what did your dad do? He went to the army and then when he came out?

**BOM:** He bought the grocery store. He worked at McCann's [grocery store]. Then him and my mother married. Then they owned rental properties and grocery stores, to my knowledge. He was disabled from the time I was born. Not much longer after I was born.

**TC:** And then your Uncle Joe, he worked in the store with your mom?


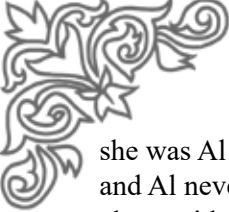
**SO:** Well, this is off the record, but when he would file his tax returns, he would come down to a loss or not make any money. Then, as he got older he decided, "You know what? I don't have any Social Security credits." He had to go work for the stupid carnival to get Social Security credits. Remember when he worked for the carnival?

**BOM:** I do. I still don't know how he got to be magistrate and work for the carnival.

**SO:** I don't know which came first. The magistrate, I think, came first. But he got in that job through politics. But then he ran and he couldn't beat that woman that Al Ferralli was supporting.

**BOM:** Teagarden?

**SO:** Yeah. He couldn't beat her because



she was Al Ferralli's secretary. See, him and Al never got along, but I always got along with Albert.

**BOM:** That was the people who lived across the street from Grandma's house.

**SO:** Yep.

**TC:** So is there anything else you wanted to add about growing up as an Italian American?

**SO:** Nothing. I'm proud of my heritage. I never thought about changing my name. I don't give a damn if they hire me or not. My dad was the same way. He wasn't going to change his name. Of course, he didn't have to apply for a job once he got back from the service. That might have been a different story. There are some Olivers down in Houston that were Oliverios.

**TC:** And how are they related to you?

**SO:** Distant.

**SO:** Somewhere, I have the [San Giovanni] phone book from the first Italian festival [in Washington] and there's like a page and a half of Oliverios and about this many Gallos. So there's a lot of Oliverios over there. It's like Smith here, you know.



**Draft of introduction to “Hard Times,” a memoir by  
John Oliverio (b. 1-21-1923, d. 5-28-1998)**

Hard times, I’ll tell you about hard times. I was born in January 1923, in Aiden, PA, a small coal mining town to immigrant parents, delivered by a midwife, my great aunt Jenny Cimino. Within a year we moved into a house in Meadowlands, PA.

Then, after a short period, we moved in with Angotts on Weirich Avenue. Sam Angott, light heavyweight champion of the world. All this time, my mother was getting close to where her sister lived on Hayes Avenue, about one-half mile away.

My mom came straight from Italy, got married the next day, had me 12 months later. She must have been pretty bewildered by this time, with all the moving around.

My dad was working as a coal miner and had saved enough money to put down a payment on a little house on Wayne Street, where our roots stayed until I am out of World War II.

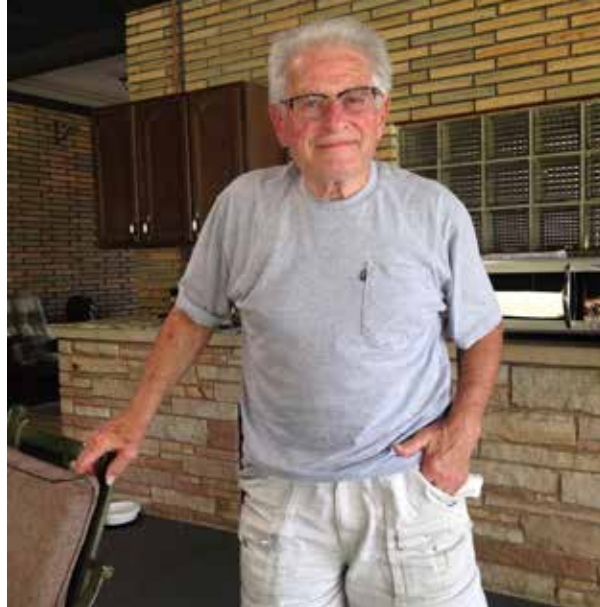
I helped buy the store the next day and my folks moved into the store. My brother Joe moved into the homestead. I got married and moved into a two-room house, altered from a garage. After our first child, we moved into the house on West Chestnut St., where we stayed about 12 years.

I bought a grocery store after I got married on West Wheeling Street, where I did business until 1964, when I became disabled and went on Social Security Disability.



## Silvio Passalacqua

Son of Angelo Passalacqua and Giacomina (Jenny) Cirlingione Passalacqua



Silvio Passalacqua is the youngest son of Giacomina Cirlingione (b. Villa Rosa, Sicily) and Angelo Passalacqua (b. Messina, Sicily), who established one of Washington's most enduring Italian restaurants. The restaurant, originally called West Chestnut Spaghetti Inn and located in the West End, was renamed "Angelo's" after the owner's death in 1953. Today, the restaurant remains in the family's hands in a new location on North Franklin Drive, with Silvio's son, Michael Passalacqua, as owner.

In the mid-1930s, Angelo traveled back and forth from Pittsburgh (home to his wife Giacomina's family) while setting up his first tavern on Wylie Avenue in Washington. Once he was assured of its success, he moved his wife and five

children to town. He founded West Chestnut Spaghetti House with business partner Matt Randazzo in the early 1940s and moved to living quarters above the restaurant. To this day, the home cooking of Silvio's late mother Giacomina—especially her lasagna—continue to inspire the menu at Angelo's.

Silvio, now retired and serving as a supervisor for North Franklin Township, recalls his parents' ceaseless dedication and work ethic. In his interview, Silvio reflects on the family's 80-year history in the restaurant business, the lessons it has brought, and the inevitable changes that occur in any such enterprise. His reflections are replete with humor, humility and love of life.

March 2017



# Angelo's Celebrates 75 Years

March 1939 - March 2014

## Thank You

*It is with great pride and humility that I announce that on March 28th, 2014 Angelo's will turn 75 years old. When my grandparents opened the doors to their humble little tavern in half of the building at 955 West Chestnut Street, could they imagine that the business would survive three generations and achieve this milestone?*

*While all of my family members who put their blood, sweat and tears into this accomplishment certainly merit their due accolades, at this time what humbles me is the loyalty, support, and the generations of locals, travelers, and business people who sustained us all these decades. A few years ago, I sat down with a piece of paper and tried to come up with a good figure of the number of people who have passed through our doors, and was relatively shocked when that number came out to more than a million. Considering I did that more than 5 years ago, the number is now a low estimate. That is overwhelming. It is humbling the people I know who had their first date at Angelo's, got engaged at Angelo's and had all their family outings with us. I got to know children of parents, who my dad and mom knew as children and I entertained those children just as my parents entertained them growing up.*

*And through those years thousands of you have worked for us and helped us realize this monumental achievement. So many people worked for us for 25-30 years. So many made our little restaurant their life's work. And so many contributed on so many levels it's impossible to calculate and wonder. And for that I am equally thankful. And equally honored, humbled, and lucky to have been part of our contribution to the fabric of our community.*



So at this time we just want to say THANK YOU ALL  
for making this happen. And to celebrate...



Giacominina and Angelo Passalacqua



Angelo Passalacqua



Carmelo Passalacqua Jr.



Angelo's Restaurant

## Family Tree of Silvio Passalacqua

### Silvio's Father:

- Angelo Passalacqua, b. Messina, Sicily; d. Washington

### Silvio's Mother:

- Giacomina (Jenny) Cirlingione, b. Villa Rosa, Sicily; d. Washington

### Angelo and Giacomina's place of marriage:

- Pittsburgh, PA

### Angelo and Giacomina's Children:

- Mary Rose Passalacqua, m. Anthony Gerolium; m. 2<sup>nd</sup> Joseph Szopo
- Josephine Passalacqua, d. age 10
- Carmelina Passalacqua, m. Tony Di Stefano
- Antoinette Passalacqua, m. Frank Belcastro
- Carmelo James Passalacqua, m. Yolanda Falconi
- Anthony Passalacqua, d. in infancy
- Another brother d. in infancy
- Silvio Passalacqua, m. Patricia Hixon

### Angelo's Siblings:

- Salvatore Passalacqua, b. Messina, Italy; d. Italy
- Carmelo Passalacqua, b. Messina, Italy; m. Josephine; had a bar and restaurant in Washington; had two sons Salvatore (Sam) (died in Luzon, Philippines, in WWII) and Carmelo Jr. (m. "Cookie")
- Sebastiano Passalacqua, b. Messina, Italy; d. Italy
- Mateo Passalacqua, b. Messina, Italy; m. Rose; had a bar (Venetian Gardens) in Canonsburg; had two daughters, Mary (m. Leroy Verna, owned Leroy's Music Mart in Canonsburg) and Carmella (Sis) (m. Patsy Pitzerella)
- Anthony Passalacqua, policeman, remained in Sicily

### Giacomina's Siblings:

- Angelo Cirlingione
- Sam Cirlingione, had a barber shop
- Rose Cirlingione, m. Dominick Solima

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

March 9, 2017; 11:00 am; Citizens Library, Washington

**Interviewers:** Sandy Mansmann and Tina Calabro

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editors:** Tina Calabro and Michel Passalacqua

**Sandy Mansmann:** Where were you born?

**Silvio Passalacqua:** Pittsburgh. I went to first grade in Pittsburgh. I went to Horace Mann school and then we moved to Washington.

**SM:** And your mom's name?

**SP:** Giacomina! You know, I got a history lesson from an Irishman one day. I was buying an insurance policy one day and I spelled my mother's name with an 'o' on the end of it. He said, "No, no, no. 'O' is masculine and 'A' is feminine." I got a lesson. [laughs]

**SM:** And your children?

**SP:** Yes. I have twins—Michael and Michel. And the youngest is Tonne.

**SM:** And your spouse?

**SP:** Patricia. Passed away 20 years ago. Her maiden name is Hixon.

**SM:** That doesn't sound very Italian.

**SP:** She's not. I made her Italian [laughs]. I converted her.

**SM:** Did she work outside of the home?

**SP:** When we were first married, she had a couple secretarial jobs. But after that, we got into the business with my dad and then, after my dad passed away, we ran it for my mother. Then me and my sister took it over. Then, later on, I bought my sister out.

**SM:** So, this is, what's your business?

**SP:** Angelo's Restaurant!

**SM:** Okay, so you are still currently involved down there?

**SP:** No, no. My son Michael has it. I'm out to pasture.

**SM:** [laughs] So, how long were you involved in the whole process of establishing it? Running it?

**SP:** Since I was 20 years old.

**Tina Calabro:** Before you were married?

**SP:** Yes. Want to know how I met my wife?

**SM:** Good food?

**SP:** No. I was a singer in the Johnny Cimino Orchestra. We played at the Alpine Club all the time. There were four girls sitting at a table. I told a friend of mine, I said, "Hey! That girl over there with the sharp legs sticking out, ask her if she'll marry me." That was the beginning.

**SM:** What was the name of the place?

**SP:** Alpine Club. It was the Italian Club.

**SM:** You were with what group?

**SP:** The Johnny Cimino Orchestra. Eleven-piece orchestra.

**SM:** Singer or what instrument?

**SP:** Yes, like Sinatra, Tony Bennett, them type tunes.

**SM:** So you were the star singer?

**SP:** I was a pretty big fish in a little pond, yeah.

**SM:** [laughs] How long did you court before you actually got married?

**SP:** Court my wife? About a couple years. Only a couple years.

**SM:** So, your son Michael now runs ...

**SP:** Sole owner. Yes.

**SM:** Were you involved in any other occupation before the restaurant?

**SP:** No.

**SM:** You didn't shine shoes or ... ?

**SP:** No, not yet.

**SM:** [laughs] Something to look forward to, huh?

**SP:** [laughs] Yeah.

**SM:** Did you serve in the military?

**SP:** I was in the organized Reserves for six years. That was during the Korean War. We got alerted for activation twice, but never got the call.

**SM:** Where were the Reserves based out of?

**SP:** Well, we met on Chestnut Street where the old Newmark Shoe Store used to be. That was the meeting place. We met there once a month. Then we went to camp for two weeks every year. Different forts. Fort Meade. Fort Eustis, Virginia.

**SM:** Meade in Maryland?

**SP:** Fort Meade in Maryland.

**SM:** Fort Eustis in Virginia down by the ocean?

**SP:** Yeah. And Fort Eustis that was in Virginia. There's another one I can't recall. [Later remembered "Camp Pickett, VA"]

**SM:** Now, we're going to go back to your family, your birth family. Your siblings' names.

**SP:** My oldest sister was named Mary Rose. Second in command was my sister, Josephine, who was killed coming home from school by a car. I never met her. Because I'm the youngest, I never knew her.

**SM:** I should ask you, how many children [in your birth family]?

**SP:** Five now. There was eight. I had two infant brothers, when they lived in Boswell. They died in infancy. And my sister, Josephine was buried, or entombed over in Pittsburgh Catholic Cemetery where my mother and father are.

**SM:** What cemetery?

**SP:** North Side Catholic. Boy, I'm surprised I remember half this stuff. I ain't too good at that usually.

**SM:** Josephine was killed by a car on the way home from school.

**SP:** Yes, yes.

**SM:** Elementary school or ...

**SP:** Yeah. Yeah, she was young. She was about 10, I think. Roughly.

**SM:** Okay then, onto the next, your third ...

**SP:** The next one is Carmelina.

**SM:** [extended enunciation] Carmelina. We got some girls goin' on here.

**SM:** Is Mary Rose still living now?

**SP:** No. I don't know who is the older between my brother, my sister and I. It was a year apart or something. Antoinette and then, James. [All of my siblings are gone.]

**SM:** So are you number six?

**SP:** Yeah.

**SM:** And the youngest [alive]?

**SP:** I'm the youngest.

**SM:** So, the two boys that died in infancy?

**SP:** I think that's when we lived in either Somerset or Boswell. I think that's where they first came, when they came [to the U.S.] and then they migrated to Pittsburgh.

**SM:** They were so young, were they named at all? Or they didn't live that long? The two boys?

**SP:** Yeah, one of them was Anthony and I don't know what the other one was. They died of rickets. It's a deficiency in sunlight and vitamin D.

**SM:** Did any of your siblings remain in Washington?

**SP:** Yeah, they all did. They never left town.

**SM:** Is there anybody in the family that is a family historian?

**SP:** Well, maybe Michael and Michel know more about it than anybody else.

**SM:** Do you have any idea how your mom and dad met?

**SP:** I think my dad came to the United States first and then my mother came second. Then, my Uncle Sam, who is my mother's brother, got the two of them together. That's Sam Cirlingione.

**SP:** I think my Uncle Sam brought them over. I know he used to have a barber shop and he used to brag, "I brought your mother over here on 50 cents a haircut." So how they did that, I don't know. [laughs]

**TC:** Where was his barber shop?

**SP:** In Pittsburgh, down on Beaver Avenue [North Side]. When they got flooded down there, they come up and lived with us on Superior Avenue. Up on the hill.

**TC:** So you lived on Superior? Is that considered Troy Hill, or is it just up the hill from the North Side?

**SP:** Uh, I don't know. It's 1256 Superior Avenue.

**SP:** You know, for all the years I was

going over to the cemetery for my mom and dad, it took me, I don't know how many years to find that house again. But, I was just a little kid. I remember a lot about it.

**SM:** Is it still standing?

**SP:** Yeah. Well, it's been like six, seven years ago. But, I'm sure it's still there. It was a good house. A good neighborhood. My sister Mary graduated from Oliver High School. My other two sisters and brother, I think they started there. But, they didn't finish their education until we moved to Washington.

**SM:** Once they got to Washington, where did they go to school?

**SP:** Wash High. Washington High School. I went to 7th Ward when we lived there. Then we moved to Tylerdale. I went to Clark School. Then, when we moved out Chestnut Street, I went to 8th Ward School. And from there, if you pass all your grades you get to go to Wash High.

**SM:** If you pass. Did you pass all your grades?

**SP:** I did okay. I could've done better if I'd applied myself, but I was into jitterbugging and, you know, stuff like that.

**SM:** You had other things to do.

**SP:** Yeah. Priorities.

**SM:** Did you graduate from Wash High?

**SP:** Yes.

**SM:** Anything after that as far as [formal education]?

**SP:** No.

**SM:** Just the education of life.

**SP:** Music and that's it.

**SM:** Did your mother have a nickname?

**SP:** Jenny. J-E-N-N-Y

**SM:** So, the first to come from Italy ...

**SP:** Was my dad.

**SM:** And then, your mom, shortly after that. But they didn't know each other.

**SP:** No, uh uh, no. My mother was from a different village and she was ten years younger. I think. Nine or ten. He liked them young broads. [laughter] It's like me and Lois [girlfriend]. She's nine years younger than me. I told her I need somebody to push me around in the wheelchair. I told her, "Lois, you stay nice and fit. You got to take care of me."

**SM:** Do you have any idea how [or why] your parents came to the U.S. or how they heard about it?

**SP:** Because the streets were lined with gold. You know, for opportunity. They knew there was good opportunity here. My dad worked in one of the mills. Also, when he came over, he worked his way over.

**SM:** On the boat?

**SP:** Yes, on the ship. He, I don't know what his position was, whether he was shoveling coal or what, but he did something to earn his fare to come to the United States.

**SM:** I know some traditions were that they were hired here or promised work for like three years and then they would get the passage. Paid through servitude sort of.

**SP:** I don't know how they ever managed that stuff. I went to Ellis Island one time. And you see people with little kids and couldn't speak the language, probably didn't have five bucks in their pocket. Just wonder how they survived, but they managed.

**SM:** I guess what they were leaving must have been pretty ...

**SP:** Sure. Pull up roots.

**SM:** Did your Dad know anybody here?

**SP:** You know, I don't know. I can't tell you. My mother had two brothers that lived here in Pittsburgh and one sister.

**SM:** What were their names?

**SP:** Angelo Cirlingione and Sam Cirlingione.

**SM:** What about the sister?

**SP:** Rose Cirlingione.

**SM:** So your mother's three siblings, they already came here and they wanted to get her over here.

**SP:** I don't know if they was here ahead of her or not. If my sister Mary was here, she could tell you about all the history. She knows everybody's birthday and who's what, you know?

**TC:** Does she have children who kept a history for her?

**SP:** Yes, Charles Gerolium—she only has one son alive. He lives in Florida.

**SP:** My Uncle Sam was on Beaver Avenue, and so was my Uncle Angelo. He had a beer distributor down there. I remember.

**SM:** Now, other than your dad working his way over on the ship, he came through Ellis Island?

**SP:** Yes. Yes.

**SM:** And then, what was his route, basically? Did he come strictly to Pittsburgh?

**SP:** You know, I have no idea. I think they first ended up either in Boswell or Somerset.

**SP:** Did you want to know my dad's brothers? He had a brother, Carmelo, and another brother, Sebastian. Don't put this down, but he got deported. [laughter]

**SM:** Just two brothers. So, the one, Sebastian, came and went back. What about Carmelo, did he come here?

**SP:** Yeah, he came here. He had a little bar and restaurant for a long time. Then, he moved to Florida.

**SM:** Where did he have his bar and restaurant?

**SP:** Right on Chestnut Street.

**SM:** What was it called?

**SP:** Beats the heck out of, I don't remember. You're too young. You don't remember Andy Brothers Tire Shop. There were a couple doors up from there. My dad had another brother, too. Matt. Mateo. He had a bar in Canonsburg right on Pike Street. Venetian Gardens.

**SM:** Lotta bars in that family.

**SP:** Yep.

**SM:** So, you grew up with a lot of your Italian family here.

**SP:** Oh, yeah. I was only seven years old and my dad had a bar here in Washington with another guy. He used to sleep in the back room. In those days, he was down on Wylie Avenue. It was a very tough spot. Half of it was Black. Half of it was White. More than once there were collisions there. He used to come home [to Pittsburgh] on Saturday night after he closed. You weren't allowed to be open on Sundays then. He stayed home until Monday morning and he drove back.

**SM:** To Wylie Avenue? In Washington?

**SP:** Yeah. Then my father told my mother, if she didn't come to Washington with him, then he wasn't coming home no more. That was a tough trip.

**SM:** So he lived in Pittsburgh?

**SP:** That's where the home was. Yeah. He just had a little cot in the back room of the bar. Shortly after he got outta there and started on West Chestnut Street with his brother Carmelo, there was a double killing in there. Somebody killed somebody and then they come back to the bar after the owner and the owner shot him. So, two guys got checked off.

**SM:** So he owned the bar on Wylie Avenue before he moved his location to West Chestnut?

**SP:** Yeah. You don't have to put that killing in there.

**SM:** Do you remember the name of the bar he had on Wylie?

**SP:** No.

**SM:** When he opened the restaurant on West Chestnut, was it called Angelo's originally?

**SP:** West Chestnut Spaghetti Inn. With Matt Randazzo as partner.

**SM:** Do you remember what year he founded that restaurant?

**SP:** No. I have no idea. Yeah, my dad got outta there just in time. Ran a good business out in West End. We started out as just a little tavern and had half of that building and when he bought the building, we took the whole downstairs. There were four six-room apartments upstairs. How did my dad ever do it? He was a good businessman. He couldn't read or write that much in English. But he knew how to make the bucks work.

**SM:** So once they got here, I guess they stayed.

**SP:** Yeah. Wait a minute, my father had another brother who stayed in Italy and never came here. He was a policeman. [Anthony, I think, was his name.] 'Cause I remember my dad sitting in a chair, big tears coming out of his eyes and he had this letter in his hand, with a black thing all the way around it, telling him that his brother died.

**SM:** He just died of natural causes?

**SP:** I guess, yeah.

**SM:** Did you or did anyone in the family keep in contact with relatives in Italy?

**SP:** My dad did. They corresponded back and forth. My dad and his brother. Very little, but they did touch bases. One knew where the other one was. And that was about it there.

**SM:** What about your mother? Did she keep in touch with her parents over there?

**TC:** And his wife? They're all buried in North Side?

**SP:** They came here 'cause they're both buried up in North Side Catholic—her mother and her dad. My grandmother lived with us for awhile. Still had the black dress and the black stockings. I had to go to the store with her when she'd buy sliced bread and I was just a little kid. But I'd get so embarrassed. She'd chisel that guy for a loaf of bread. She didn't want to pay regular price. [laughter]

**TC:** Do you remember the first names of your mother's parents?

**SP:** No.

**TC:** But they lived with you?

**SP:** No, just the mother.

**TC:** The dad died?

**SP:** Yeah, I guess he died first and then, she lived with us for a while. But back in them days, somebody died, you put them black clothes on and ...

**SM:** And it's your mother's parents that are buried in North Side?

**SP:** Yes, yes. Right. My dad's brother [Carmelo] and his wife [Josephine] are buried in North Side Cemetery, and also their son [Sam], who was a paratrooper and got killed in the Second World War. He was a paratrooper.

**SP:** Yeah. Right.

**SM:** The neighborhood, where you lived here ...

**SP:** Well, we lived on Jefferson Avenue. Right next door was either a dairy or a bakery. I don't remember much about any activities there. Other than going to school there. I remember, as a kid, I used to wait for my dad to come home from deer hunting so I could carry the rifle in the house and hope somebody could see me, you know? [laughter]

**SM:** Where on Jefferson Avenue. would that be? What's there now?

**SP:** In between Chestnut Street and that little Henderson Avenue. No, not Henderson! What's the one the goes alongside Wash High?

**SM:** Hallam?

**SP:** Hallam! Yeah. Lower, closer to the bottom of that.

**TC:** You were seven when you moved here?

**SP:** Probably. Yeah 'cause I went to second grade here. I might have been eight, I don't know.

**SM:** Approximately how long or until what grade were you at that location?

**SP:** Well, my last stop was 8th grade at 8th Ward School. Then I went to Wash High, so I'd a been ...

**SM:** Well, you were living on Jefferson, do you remember how many years approximately?

**SP:** Maybe two.

**SM:** What was the next one?

**SP:** Tylerdale down at Clark School. On Allison Avenue.

**SM:** How long were you on Allison Avenue?

**SP:** From there I went to, well, I was in 4th grade at 8th Ward, so a couple years, that's it.

**SM:** That's when you went to Clark?

**SP:** Yeah.

**SM:** Then, where did we go after that?

**SP:** After Clark? To 8th Ward.

**SM:** What home? Did you change homes?

**SP:** Yeah. We lived on the corner of Hayes Avenue and Chestnut Street.

**SM:** In the homes that you lived in, were your neighbors predominantly Italian or not?

**SP:** No, nothing like that. I think it was where my dad could do the rent. But these were always nice places. We didn't live in any bad conditions. He was a good provider.

**SM:** So you were basically in a mixed neighborhood.

**SP:** Yeah, yeah.

**SM:** As far as a community, what were your ties? Were Italians necessarily in the same church or organizations? Fraternal organizations or social?

**SP:** Well, I went to I.C. [Immaculate Conception] Church. Although I was married in St. Hilary because my mother talked to the priest down there, to do it on Sunday. All my relatives were in the bar business. Nobody thought you could close a day to go to a wedding. I remember Father Zapora was his name. I remember after the wedding was over, taking pictures and he told my mother, "Get these people the hell outta here! The pope's going to find out about it!" [laughs]

**SP:** Both my daughters got married at Immaculate Conception [Church]. My son waited until he was 59 before he got married.

**SP:** My daughter, Tonne, I sent her to Hyde Park, to a culinary institute. She went to Colorado after that. Well, she met a guy and he was a good skier and she was a good skier. She turned our

business around from the tavern, too. A better restaurant, yeah.

**SP:** She was working with University of Colorado Springs. She was in charge of the food service for about four or five different entities in there. But she said she just couldn't stand the kids anymore. They wouldn't work. They all had bad attitudes. They call off. She said, "Dad, I used to throw up before I went to work." So now she's working for a different company. She's on the road again. Because she worked for U.S. Foods and Sysco and that was her bag. Out there, it's very laid back. You can take your dog with you when you're going to work. [laughter] You go into a restaurant to eat and the guy at the cash register, his dog might be laying there. Which is OK!

**SM:** From Hayes, the corner of Hayes and Chestnut, is that where you stayed?

**SP:** Yeah, the family stayed there. My dad died after my mom died. Then my sister took over the house.

**SM:** The family still owns that property?

**SP:** Yes, my one sister [Carmelina], who died. Now her daughters own it.

**SM:** Ok, so where did you go from there?

**SP:** I went to Washington, D.C. for a while. I worked for the F.B.I. I was a clerk typist. When I got it in the mail, it said Miss Silvio Passalacqua. Clerk typist. They were interviewing down at Wash High.

**SM:** Did they ask if you wore high heels?

**SP:** Well, no, I went down there. I looked around and said I don't know how to type and I ain't a girl, so I sneaked around and saw some guy was in there. You had to get cleared pretty good for that. That's when Communism first raised its head and they were, it was a File 67. They were investigating everyone who had a government connection. Army, Navy, Marines, government workers to see if they had any affiliation with any. You had to search their files for ten years for friends, cousins, uncles—anybody that was connected with them, and see if you got a number from a file. Go to the General Index and look them up. Three of the guys I lived with became F.B.I. agents. Back then, you just had to have four years of accounting. Or four years of pre-law. Now, you have to pass a bar and all that stuff. But they was going to night school while we all lived together. It was five of us living in a big house we rented. A furnished house.

**SM:** Do you remember where your house was?

**SP:** It was Southside, in a nice neighborhood. We took the bus to work everyday. Down on Constitution Avenue. The J. Edgar Hoover Building. I lived on Georgia Avenue with relations when I first got there.

**SM:** So your stint in D.C., how long do you think you were there?

**SP:** I was there for about three years, I

think. I got homesick and come home. I had a girlfriend here. After coming home from Washington, D.C., I worked at a gas station. I had a construction job with Iron Workers. I drove a beer truck. And when my boss dropped dead, I went to work for my dad. I was only 20 years old at the time. You had to be 21, really. You had to be 21 to drive a beer truck. I squeezed in there.

**SM:** How come with such an Italian family you had so many people in beer?

**SP:** Well, dad knew Patsy Verano, the guy who owned the place and he got me the job. The good job I had was with Johns Mansville Construction Company. I was making a buck and a half an hour. We were working five days, ten hours and the other two hours were time and a half. I was making more money than my brother-in-law. He had a couple kids. I used to wave my check at him. That was a big bunch of change there. I used to carry them big sheets of steel on my back. They was ten foot long. Then we took them over, hooked them up, and pulled them up to these guys on a scaffold up there.

**SM:** They maybe get caught in the wind?

**SP:** No, no. I was up there. We worked at J&L Steel. I worked underneath the roof with the buck up. I had to walk a little bit of steel there. But I thought I was tough. When I used to drive a beer truck, I used to go through downtown Pittsburgh with a cigarette in my mouth, sleeves rolled up, arm out with that big auto car. [laughter]

**SM:** You went to work for your dad at his restaurant which was then called what?

**SP:** After my boss at the beer distributor died, then right away they had to make some changes. So all them other distributors were like vultures and he was hooked up with somebody else in Canonsburg. I got ousted. That's when my dad took me in.

**SM:** At that point what was the restaurant called?

**SP:** Just West Chestnut Spaghetti Inn. Just a shot and a beer place. I know a shot of wine was 20 cents. There was a lot of winos around that time. All local people. We never developed into a restaurant until Wheeling Downs racetrack opened and we had bumper-to-bumper traffic going by. Going and coming. We didn't know what the hell we were doin' in there. I remember my dad when somebody wanted a martini, he served it in a beer glass. They're probably still talking about that. [laughter] But that's when we started makin' some money.

**SM:** Is the house still there?

**SP:** Yes. It's a big, two-story house. Living room, dining room and big kitchen. Basement. An upstairs with all the bedrooms and the bathroom. Big yard. Big bank to cut. To mow.

**SM:** Did it have a Chestnut Street address?

**SP:** 1005. The restaurant, the old bar

was 955. It was West Chestnut Spaghetti Inn downstairs. Then it became Angelo's after my dad died.

**SM:** Now, when you were growing up, your neighborhood, your activities, what did you do at home? What'd you do for fun?

**SP:** Well, in them days, people swept their sidewalks. West End was a good place. [My friends were] Eddie Cahill, Louie Reda, and the guy the next street up, next house up was Bob West.

[Bob's] uncle, Jim, had his little grocery store there. Every once in a while he'd get somebody to take groceries to some house, you know. You'd get a nickel. We'd all want to go to Mrs. Burris 'cause she was good for a dime. It was just down a couple doors, you know? But, we lived up there and we played there. Got the police after us a couple times at night. Making noise, that's all. Running on people's porches. Stuff like that. I remember one time, in this one guy's yard, he had a whole bunch of corrugated sheets stacked up, but there were only two skids [to keep the sheets off the ground]. There was a little dip there [and] I could fit in that space. When somebody would call the police on us, I would stand on the sidewalk by that house. The policeman, Honey Harris or Norty Wright, would say, "Don't you run." I'd wait until they were almost there and I'd go behind that house and dive in that thing. They'd come in and wonder where the hell I went. [laughter]

Their legs would stick out. I wanted to reach out and grab their legs. I never got caught. I only got caught once. One time, me and Eddie Cahill got caught and the police took us up and said "We're taking you to Morganza [reform school]." Boy, you never heard anybody cry so loud in your life. When they got down to the bottom of Chestnut Street, they said, "You gonna behave?" We said, "Yeah! Yeah!" [laughter] They turned around and took us back. Scared the heck outta us in the meantime.

**SM:** I think Morganza was the threat.

**SP:** That was the reform school, yeah. We heard they beat 'em down there and wouldn't feed 'em and you heard all kinds of stories. Oh, we was definitely afraid of that.

**SM:** You said every Sunday was a feast. Did you say you got in trouble if you didn't show up?

**SP:** Oh, yeah, after my dad died, if we missed a Sunday, you got scorned a little bit. [laughter] She [my mother] kept the family together. After she passed away, everybody seemed to go their own way. I was closer with my brother and my oldest sister than anybody. I was in partnership with my older sister, Carmelina. Partnerships are no good. Especially if they're family. So, I bought them out and it was all agreeable and stuff. They wanted to retire.

**TC:** How would you describe your mother's personality?

**SP:** Good. She was a pleasant woman. I know one thing: If we got in trouble with Dad, she stuck up for us.

**TC:** What about your dad? How would you describe his personality?

**SP:** He was a straight, steady guy. He'd torture you to death. If you did something wrong, he'd say, "I want to see you when I get home."

**SM:** You'd live in fear all day.

**SP:** Oh, yeah. You'd sweat. Wondering what was gonna happen. My brother, before he went to the Navy, drove my dad's car and he had a key. When he went to the Navy, I found that key and I knew how to let clutch out and give it a gas. That's when you had four on the floor. At night when my dad would be at the restaurant, I used to back that big Buick out of the garage, make a real sharp turn up Hayes Avenue, fill it up with guys and we'd drive all over town in low gear 'cause I didn't know you had to shift. I never had a wreck or anything. I was crazy. If my dad would've caught me, I'd have gotten killed for sure!

**SM:** Did your parents speak Italian in the home?

**SP:** Yeah. But that was secret stuff. They talked Italian. My sister, Mary, could talk it the best.

Then before I went to Italy, I took Italian with Theresa Cavotti for a couple years. I got pretty good. Now, I forgot all that stuff 'cause I don't use it.

**TC:** Did they both speak English well?

**SP:** Oh yeah, with an accent. Broken a little bit. The Sicilian accent was altogether different. Somebody told me once that they wanted their own language. When a guy came, trying to sell a sweeper to my mother, he says [formally], "Signora, questa qui." I'd [say to myself], "That guy don't know [Italian]." My mother [explained], "No, that's the King's English of Italian." That's the way you talk. We had like a slang version.

**SM:** What about the camaraderie among Italians? When you were growing up?

**SP:** I hate to say this, but Italians are not good at camaraderie. [laughter] If you got 50 cents more than me, I'm jealous of you and I want to try to get 50 cents more than you. That's like when we first went into business, you know, I don't remember any Italians coming in there.

**SM:** Sometimes, because your families are so big, you already have a self-contained community.

**SP:** I remember when my mother used

to make homemade pasta. She'd roll that dough out. She made a pasta called, like, perchitelli. She'd roll big strings of pasta and in a diameter like this. [gestures] She'd cut a little piece like that. She had a wire. She'd roll that thing out to a pasta string. Man, it was the best. It was heavy. You couldn't go swimming for a couple days after that. It used to make me mad when we had company [and she'd serve this pasta]. I'd say, "Put that away and get the Vimco [store brand]." There was only so much to go around and we wanted it for ourselves.

**TC:** Did your mother do all the cooking?

**SP:** Oh, yeah.

**TC:** Did your father do any?

**SP:** Men didn't do that stuff. They didn't wash dishes. I'll tell you a little story about my father. He didn't drink, but he'd bring a couple bottles of beer home and at dinner time they'd drink a bottle of Fort Pitt. They had all them empty bottles there. Back at that time, there was a two cent deposit on them bottles. So I instead of taking them back to the restaurant, I had a friend take them. He'd get maybe 8 or 9 cents for them. Then we'd go straight up to Marchese's store and get a Pepsi cola and a big candy bar. That was living. I was hijacking my dad. [laughter] My first crime spree.

**TC:** Did your mother have any specialties that she made that you put into the restaurant?

**SP:** Lasagna. That's what started us. With ricotta. Yeah, that was a start and we went from there. Just got a little bit better. Always trying to get a little upscale.

There for a while we had a nice dining room trade and in the bar I had all them truck drivers and they'd fight every once in a while. Then, finally, we got rid of all the bad people and started going the right direction. But way back then, it was like a steam table. We prepared stuff ahead of time and when my daughter, Tonne, came to work with us, she worked with a chef in Pittsburgh, and when she came to work with us, she made everything to order. Everything was sauteed. Nothing was prepared ahead of time. Then we started to develop. Then, the guy that she worked with over in Pittsburgh, a guy named Mark Cardemone Rainer, he was good. I got him to come here. He changed our restaurant all the way around. He taught us the restaurant business. We were in the tavern business. He taught us the restaurant business. I'll tell you about him. His dad was a doctor and his sister an artist of some renown. She was a sculptor and he was a rebel. He went to Hawaii and lived on the beach with a bandana on his head. Then he finally came home. Somehow or another he got a job in a restaurant cooking and baking. He could do anything. After he left us, he went into business with some in-laws. It was over in Southside, in Pittsburgh, and he did very well. He got all kinds of accolades and stuff. Then, the sides didn't [get along] so he got out of that. He got into the computer business. Then, from there, he went to school and became a doctor.

**SP:** We used have these wine guys come in and give a demo on these fancy wines and stuff. Mark knew more about the wines than they did. He could bake. He was a baker. He was good. Fact is, I had to buy him a truck to get back and forth to work. He was leaving his wife isolated over in Whitehall. He said, "I'm going to have to leave." I said, "No you're not." I went and got a pickup truck.

**TC:** When you started to work in the restaurant, you worked there from the time you were 20? Was there a certain point you retired or you just kind of tapered off?

**SP:** No, I didn't til way after I got the kids in the business.

**TC:** Did your family have any Italian traditions that you followed?

**SP:** Yes. Christmas and stuff like that. Christmas Eve was always the Seven Fishes or whatever that is. A big coil of hot sausage. She put the whole coil in there at once. We always had a roast and pasta on Sunday. The roast was always left over but the pasta wasn't. Especially when she made the homemade stuff. She made gnocchi and cavatelli one time, couple times. She taught my wife how to make the gnocchi. We cooked them for an hour before they got soft. [laughs] She did something wrong with them. But I ate them anyway. There again, I couldn't go swimming for a week. It was like lead.

**SM:** So you said roast, pasta, hard-boiled eggs and tomato sauce.

**SP:** Yeah. I'll tell you another thing. My mother, when she was making sauce in the morning, I'd come downstairs, she'd take some of the sauce that wasn't quite done yet, put it in a big, black skillet, cracked a couple eggs in it, poached them in the sauce, big hunk of Italian bread in the oven. All that stuff was so simple. I remember a big dessert for us. This happened when we lived in Pittsburgh. My mother would bake bread and when they come out of the oven hot, she'd bust it in pieces and we'd pour olive oil on it and black pepper. I ain't ate it since. That was a delicacy. We all looked forward to it. It was good virgin olive oil on it. I don't know why the black pepper. But, it wasn't hot. You know? It was good.

**TC:** As a final question, what did growing up Italian mean to you? As a young person, as a child, what did it mean to you?

**SP:** Well, I don't know if I was ever conscious about "I'm Italian." I'm growing up, but I was never ashamed. I remember I was taking voice lessons from a lady in Pittsburgh. A German lady—Schultz was her name—she used to make me hold her stomach and she'd go "Ba Ba Ba Ba." Taught me how to breathe, you know? But, she came down on me one time about the Mafia, you know, the Italian people, she said, "It's disgusting they came here to get away from this and they brought the same thing with them." I said, "You know how they

survived? They paid off all them Irishmen and Englishman cash and that's how they stayed in business." So, that's the last time I went for a lesson. [laughter]

**SM:** So with your friends, it wasn't necessarily that you stuck with Italians.

**SP:** No, uh uh. It didn't really make a difference. [Lou Reda was a good friend, and so was Bob West.] I didn't know it at the time that [Bob] was such a good friend. But he was a great guy. I think the family's name was really Alfano. How they got to be "West" I don't know. His family lived in this house and Uncle Jim had the store there. One of the aunts was down the street. They was all together.

**TC:** Your family was one of the Italian families that helped make the town of Washington what it is. What do you think about Italians' role in building the city?

**SP:** Well, they weren't afraid of work. They wanted to elevate their status. They were proud of where they were. Tried to stay as straight as they could.

**SM:** Did your family encounter anything from the Black Hand or anything?

**SP:** No, uh uh. My mother said she saw that thing in Italy. Guy got shot and the Black Hand stayed there. When the police asked, who did it, they said nobody saw it. They were afraid. That's when they organized and got the Mafia going too. My mother didn't want to watch "The Untouchables." She said they make the bad guy Italian all the time. I said,

"Mom, they were." [laughs]

**TC:** Is there anything else you wanted to add about your growing up here and becoming a part of the city?

**SP:** It was a good city. A good town to grow up in. I had a good childhood. I had good friends up in the corner there. We played buckety-buck and "release the burglar" at night and played baseball together. Used to climb the oil derrick out there. It was behind on Fayette Street. You had to go up there and roll a Bugler [laughter] and inhale it. Then you had to go down a couple of steps on the step ladder and dive for that cable. Then you were accepted. They had a big oak tree out there with a big bull rope swing in it. You swung out and you was like 40-50 feet off the ground. I think I had a good upbringing. A good childhood. I don't remember any bad parts of it, you know? It was all good. Parents were good. Family was good. Everybody was intact and it was as good as it gets.

**SM:** What do you do now for activity?

**SP:** I have a cabin up at Seven Springs. I work on it a little bit. I used to ski. But, I got this shoulder operated on. I used to lift weights. I was always into it, real committed. I used to lift with the big guys. Well, I ruined both my shoulders. So the last time I went to see Dr. Gibbon, he said those two repair jobs I did, on account of your age, you're getting a little bit frayed. He said, "I'd be nice to that." So when you ski and you fall, so I quit skiing. So I had a snowmobile up there and a quad. I still do a lot of stuff and just

recently, I quit hunting. I used to be first guy in the woods, last guy out. Then, I all of a sudden didn't want to kill anything any more. I killed a buck up in Saint Mary's one time—one of the last times I went. He slid down over a stump and I went to give him his second shot and I went down and the buck was like this [gestures]. He looked at me and blood was squirting out both sides and I said, "Holy hell! What did I do? I don't need them horns." So, that started me. Now the only thing I hunt is spring gobbler and I call them. I don't even shoot them. I had a friend of mine, Ron Cherilla, in the blind with me. I had my video camera. I use the mouth call. I talked this turkey into coming in, getting ready to mount the decoy and I was telling him do this, do that. Everything was good. Then, he shot the turkey and I filmed everything and I said, "I'm gonna make a big DVD outta this." You know, a big spectacular film. At that time, the new restaurant was getting built. I was taking progress pictures up there. I went to show a guy one time, this turkey hunt, and I was showing the video. Just as the gun come out it showed Angelo's restaurant. [laughter] I'd recorded over top of it.

**SM:** Why did Angelo's move [to new location in 2008]?

**SP:** Oh, well, we were very limited down there. Very limited in space. We could only seat about 75, 80 people. Parking was no good across the street. I had a waitress got killed outside—got hit by a car. Another woman got hit with a car. Sideswiped and another guy got out in the

middle of the road and got hit with a side mirror. It was just bad.

Then things were going on bad underneath the building. There was no basement.

What I did upstairs was make eight three-room apartments from what was six four-room apartments. I spent days downstairs with a saw, outside remodeling, putting beams in and stuff. Then, when lunch time came, I covered everything up, went upstairs in one of the apartments and vinyled. When lunch hour was over, I worked til dark and then, I'd go back upstairs and go home about 9 or 10 o'clock. I worked. That's why I'm so short. I used to be 6 foot 2 [laughter].

## **Theresa Elizabeth (Betty) Sonson Powers and Frank Leo Sonson Jr.**

**Grandchildren of Vincenzo Sansone and Mary Campisi Sansone,  
and Salvatore Longo and Mary Sansone Longo**


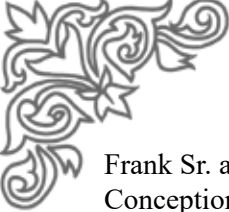


Theresa Elizabeth (Betty) Sonson Powers and Frank Leo Sonson Jr. are a brother and sister who grew up in Washington in a large family whose original name was “Sansone.” (Officials at Ellis Island misspelled the family name when their grandparents, Vincenzo Sansone and Mary Campisi Sansone, entered the country as husband and wife in the 1880s.)

After living in Pittsburgh for a time, Vincenzo and Mary settled in Washington because members of Mary’s family had

settled there. Mary’s family—the Campisis (also known as “Camps”)—were related to the Sansones in Sicily.

Betty and Frank Jr.’s father, Frank Sr., born in 1892, was the eldest of Vincenzo and Mary’s 12 children, including two who did not survive childhood. Over the next several decades, the Sonson clan grew large. The Sonson surname was so ubiquitous in Washington, that every class at Immaculate Conception School had at least three, said Betty. Sonson family reunions in 2016 and 2017 drew 250 attendees.



Frank Sr. attended Immaculate Conception School until fourth grade, at which time his labor was needed to help provide for the family. At age 15 in 1909, he established his own grocery store and produce supply business on busy Chestnut Street. The business served the Italian community and thrived until the Great Depression led to its closure in the 1930s. Frank Sr. struggled mightily to provide for his family during those difficult years, while his wife Lula, also a member of an Italian immigrant family, took care of their home and children.

Betty and Frank Jr. describe their parents as people who faced these challenges with dignity and persistence. Eventually, their father found a way to apply his considerable knowledge of the grocery business by looking beyond the frame of his hometown. In 1941, at the age of 49, he convinced a large West Virginia produce distributor to allow him to develop the Washington market, and he did so successfully. A decade later, both Frank Sr. and Lula succumbed to serious illness and died within a few months of each other. Betty and Frank Jr., their youngest children, were only 20 and 22, respectively.

The Sonson family story highlights the economic ups and downs experienced by Italian immigrants over the large period of Italian migration and settlement—the 1800s to the 1930s. The Sonson story also emphasizes the beneficial support of a large family. “Everyone helped one another,” said Frank Jr.

June 2017



Frank Sr.'s store on Chestnut St. (man in photo is relative Andy Sonson)



Lula Longo and Frank Sonson Sr.



Frank Sonson Sr. was one of the first Italian Americans to run for office in Washington.



Frank Sr. and Lula Sonson with their adult children



Siblings Betty and Frank Jr.



Ann Sonson and cousin Salvatore Longo



“Older folks” gather for September 1955 birthday party for Uncle Jim Campisi.



“Younger folks” gather for September 1955 birthday party for Uncle Jim Campisi.



**Family Tree of Siblings Theresa Elizabeth (Betty) Sonson Powers  
and Frank Leo Sonson**

**Theresa and Frank's Father:**

- Frank Sonson Sr., b. 2-16-1892, Pittsburgh; d. 4-13-1952, Mercy Hospital, Pittsburgh

**Theresa and Frank's Mother:**

- Lula Longo, b. 11-25-1895, Temene, Palermo, Sicily; d. 12-26-1951, California

**Frank and Lula's date and place of marriage:**

- 7-14-1913, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Washington

**Frank Sr. and Lula's Children:**

- Mary A. Sonson, b. 9-18-1915, Washington; d. 9-11-1991, Washington; m. James Liberatore, d. April 1990
- Vincent Joseph Sonson, b. 8-1-1918, Washington; d. 8-4-1976, Washington; m. Gertrude (Dorothy) Buccigrossi
- Samuel Anthony Sonson, b. 2-7-1921, Washington; d. 6-27-2011, Washington; m. Jane Romano, d. June 1963; m. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ann Miller
- Lula Ann Sonson, b. 12-11-1923, Washington; d. 4-17-2003, Washington; m. Leo Snyder, d. February 1981
- Frank Leo Sonson Jr., b. 1-3-1930, Washington; m. Genevieve Drago (b. 1-9-1932, Wellsville, Ohio) on 9-5-1955
- Theresa Elizabeth (Betty) Sonson Powers, b. 3-21-1932, Washington; m. Thomas Powers (b. 2-6-1930, Manifold, PA; d. 2-24-2007) on 4-26-1955

**Theresa and Frank's Paternal Grandparents:**

- Vincenzo (Sansone) Sonson, b. Temene, Palermo, Sicily; d. Washington
- Mary Campisi (Camps) Sonson, b. Temene, Palermo, Sicily; d. 2-2-1940

**Vincenzo and Mary's Children:**

- Frank Sr., b. 2-16-1892, Pittsburgh; d. 4-13-1952, Pittsburgh; m. Lula Longo, b. 11-25-1895, Temene, Palermo, Sicily; d. 12-26-1951, California
- Thomas Sonson, m. Sarah
- Charles Sonson, m. Mary
- Andrew Sonson, m. Angeline
- Joseph Sonson, m. Margaret
- James Sonson, m. Florence
- Samuel Sonson, b. Temene Palermo, Sicily; m. Mary
- Lula Sonson, m. Marty Elardo
- Ann Sonson, m. Louis Furano; m. 2<sup>nd</sup> Joe Gilliate
- Mary Sonson, b. Washington; m. Joe Alberta
- Leo and Lula Sonson died in childhood



**Theresa and Frank's Maternal  
Grandparents:**

- Salvatore Longo, and Mary (Sansone)  
Sonson, d. 11-25-1936

**Salvatore and Mary's Children:**

- Rose Longo, b. Pittsburgh; m. James
- Morris Longo, b. Pittsburgh; m. Anna
- Charles Longo, b. Pittsburgh; m. Mary
- Frank Longo, b. Pittsburgh; m. Mary
- Lula Ann Longo, b. 1895, Italy; m.  
Frank
- Salvatore (Sam) Longo, b. Pittsburgh;  
m. Mary

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

June 26, 2017; 3:00 pm; home of Theresa (Betty) Powers

**Interviewers:** Tina Calabro and Dyane Troiano

**Also present:** Genevieve Drago Sonson (Frank's wife)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Where was your mother [Lula Longo] born?

**Theresa Powers:** She was born in Sicily. That was one of their trips. They were there at Temene.

**Frank Sonson:** Almost, close to Messina.

**TP:** They were on a trip and they didn't get back to the United States in time for her to be born here. I have an uncle—the same thing happened to him. On my dad's side.

**TC:** Were the parents of your father [Frank Sonson] from Italy?

**TP:** They were from Italy.

**TC:** Where were they from?

**TP:** Temene also. Temene, Sicily. Palermo.

**TC:** What was their name?

**TP:** Vincent, Vincenzo. He went by Vincenzo. She was Mary. Her maiden name was Campisi, [spells out] C-A-M-P-I-S-I. But in the United States, they called them 'Camps.'

**TC:** Vincenzo, was his name Sansone? [spells out] S-A-N-S-O-N-E?

**TP:** [spells out] S-A-N-S-O-N-E. Right. When they got to Ellis Island, that was when it was changed. They thought they wrote [spells out] S-O-N-S-O-N and they wrote [spells out] S-O-N-S-O-N.

**TC:** Then your parents, Frank and Lula, their children in order, your siblings.

**TP:** Our siblings. Mary was first. She was born September the 18th, 1915. Then, Vincent was second. He was born August the 1st, 1918. Samuel was born February the 7th, 1921. Lula Ann, [spells out] L-U-L-A A-N-N, was born December 11, 1923. Then, she [my mother] thought she was through having babies, then [Frank and I] came along.

**TC:** All were born on Hall Avenue?

**TP:** No, Mary and Vincent were born on Chestnut Street. But I do not remember the house number. Sam was born at 127 Hall Avenue. They owned another house up there. Lula Ann, Frank, and I were born at 153.

[Note from Theresa Powers: Vincent was a twin. His male sibling was stillborn.]

**TC:** Theresa, your husband's name?

**TP:** Thomas E. Powers.

**TC:** What was your husband's occupation?

**TP:** He was a city policeman.

**TC:** What about you, Theresa, what was your occupation?

**TP:** My occupation? I was a housewife, then I went to work in 1979 at Washington Hospital as an admitting clerk. I worked there for 18 years. I was 47. I was working full-time and part-time here and there.

**TC:** Frank, what is your occupation?

**FS:** Meat-cutter.

**Dyane Troiano:** Where you a meat-cutter here in Washington?

**FS:** In Washington, I learned the trade. Then, I got a job with Kroger's. Then, I had to move to Pittsburgh.

**TP:** Tell 'em who you got your job with, your training.

**FS:** I trained with Yenke's Meat Market.

**Genevieve Sonson:** In Washington. He worked there about four years or something. When they closed, he went to Pittsburgh.

**TC:** Military service?

**FS:** Yes. Korea. Korean War Veteran, Infantry. Served from November of '51 to September '53. 48th Infantry Division.

**TP:** Our Grandfather Longo was an orphan adopted by the Longos. So, as far as relationship I'm not sure. His [Frank's]

children looked up our ancestry through their DNA and found out that they're Swiss blood. [Frank's] son came to me at [Frank and Genevieve's] 60th anniversary party. He said, "Aunt Betty, we did our DNA. Why do we have Swiss blood?" I says because Grandpap Longo was adopted. My mother always said he was a blond, blue-eyed, tall man. She said, "We think he came from the Alps." So, it proved it when they did their DNA.

**FS:** Some part of the Alps.

**FS:** It took me a long time to get through basic training because of my parents dying. They had to call me back two times.

**TP:** Kept you from Pork Chop Hill.

**GS:** That's right.

**FS:** I would have been up at Pork Chop Hill.

**GS:** Even though he was at the "front."

**TC:** So, when did your father die?

**TP:** My father died April the 13th, 1952. That was Easter Sunday.

**TC:** What about your mother? When did she die?

**TP:** She died December the 26th, 1951. She died in California! They were out there for the winter.

**FS:** Because I was in the service. I was taking basic training out there.

**TP:** Frank brought [our father] back [to Washington] along with [our mother's] body. [Three months later, our father] died in Mercy Hospital.

**TC:** So, tell us about your mother's immigration from Italy.

**TP:** She was just an infant. I don't know anything more about it.

**TC:** So, her parents, what were their names?

**TP:** He was Salvatore Longo. She was Mary Sansone.

**TC:** So, what year was it when your mother came here?

**TP:** 1895. 'Cause she was only a matter of six weeks old.

**TC:** Did she have any siblings?

**TP:** Yes, one after her and the rest were before her.

**TC:** Did they all come here?

**TP:** Far as I know, the rest were born in the United States. The first one was Rose. After Aunt Rose, put Uncle Morris. Then Uncle Charlie. Then Uncle Frank. Then, mum [Lula]. Then Salvatore [Uncle Sam].

**TC:** The ones older than your mother were all born in Italy?

**TP:** No, they were born in the United States.

**TC:** Okay. So, why was she born in Italy?

**TP:** 'Cause they went over on a trip, visiting. Grandma was pregnant with her. So she was born over there.

**DT:** Were they all in the Pittsburgh area?

**TP:** Yeah, they all lived in Pittsburgh. In fact, they lived right next to St. Patrick's Church down in the Strip District. That's where they were raised. That's the church and school that she went to. She graduated 8th grade and they never went to high school. Back then.

**TC:** What occupation did her father have?

**TP:** I'm not sure.

**TP:** He died before we were ever born. He died when Sam was a baby. Sam was born in '23 and he was already dead. So I don't know what he did.

**TC:** You father, Frank, was born in Pittsburgh.

**FS:** He's the oldest in the family.

**TP:** Children would ask Grandpap [Vincenzo] how many children Grandma [Mary] had. He'd say "She was pregnant 15 times. Ten she raised, two died, three she don't catch. Miscarriages." We'd do that deliberately to get him to tell it. [laughter]

**TC:** Now, what year did your father's parents come to the United States?

**TP:** I have no idea. Probably they met over there.

**FS:** They came back and forth a lot.

**TP:** He wasn't sure if he liked the United States. That was his biggest problem.

**FS:** My dad stayed in Pittsburgh.

**TP:** My dad was born here and raised here. He liked it here. Grandpap [Vincenzo] would go back and sometimes my dad didn't go with him.

**FS:** They had an olive grove over there.

**TP:** My dad liked the United States, and he started his own business when he was 15 years old. Grandpap [Vincenzo] had to sign for him because he was too young.

**FS:** With an "X."

**TP:** If you interview some of my cousins, they'd all say that they owned the business. They did not own the business. I had the papers. I got rid of them, but I had the papers. My father had to have his father sign for him because he was not old enough. He had a grocery store, but his specialty was being the Banana Man in Washington. Is that is what they called him? On Chestnut Street, which would be about seven doors down from the Immaculate Conception Church on the other side.

**TC:** Why did they settle in Washington?

**TP:** I have no idea. Other than, maybe, Grandma Sonson's family [the Campisis] lived here in Washington.

**FS:** That's why.

**TP:** They probably left Pittsburgh and came here. Because Grandma Sonson was a Campisi. Or "Camps." They shortened it. So their family was here.

**TC:** Did your dad go to school here?

**TP:** Oh, yes. He went to Immaculate Conception.

**TP:** [Frank Sr. and his siblings] went to the public school. They lived on Chestnut Street. They had to go to 1st Ward School, which was right down the hill on Franklin.

**FS:** Right on the corner.

**TP:** They come home from lunch. They go tell Grandma [Mary], "We don't go to that school no more, Mom." She'd say, "What do you mean you don't go to that school?" They tried to talk to her in Italian because she didn't speak very good English. [My dad says], "You know that church we go to? The priest and the nun came down and said, "All you Catholic kids stand up." They stood up, then [the nun and priest] said, "Now you come with us. You're going to the new school." That was when the school was built.

**TP:** 1901. That's how they got them enrolled. I said that one day to the priest

and he said, “Oh, if we could only do that now!” [laughs]

**TP:** There was always as many as three Sonsons in a class at one time. [laughter]

**TP:** That’s like when I went up to my cousin’s widow this morning. I said, “Genevieve, I’m sure you probably forgot me, but I know you’d remember me if I tell you who I am. I’m Betty.” She said, “Oh, you were married right before me!” That year, five of us got married. I started it. Mike ended it. I got married in April. Genevieve and Chuck got married ten days after me. You [Frank] on our aunt’s and uncle’s pocketbook. [laughter]

**TC:** So your father went to I.C. School.

**FS:** He went to the 4th grade.

**TP:** I don’t know if you know it, but as Italians, you should know it, that the first-born, male child is responsible for the entire family. So [my father], being the oldest child, was responsible to support them. He did! They all lived in the same house. For years.

My dad did not leave the Chestnut Street residence, probably, until 1919. My mother and her sister-in-law bought a house on Hall Avenue, which was 127 Hall Avenue. Their husbands joined in with it. But it was in their name. It was in Lula Sonson and Sarah Sonson, which meant Lula belonged to Frank, the oldest,


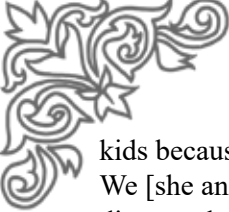
and Sarah belonged to Thomas, the second child. They lived at 127 Hall Avenue. [Our brother] Sam was born at 127. [Our siblings] Mary and Vincent were born over on Chestnut Street, but I do not know the number. The last of us were born at 153 Hall.

**TC:** So your dad had a grocery store. Tell us about your dad’s business.

**TP:** His business was a very good business—a very thriving business. He owned a lot of property. He owned about five other properties besides the store and the house we lived in. However, the house we lived in was the only house that my dad never put his name on. Fortunately. During the Depression, everything went down. But, he would not belly-up! He said, “I pay my bills.” He paid his debts and in doing so, he lost five pieces of property. He would have lost the house if it had been in his name. Family and other people that owed him money didn’t pay him.

**TC:** What did your parents or your older siblings tell you about what life was like?

**TP:** Oh, my older siblings, the four older ones, life was very good for them. Very, very good. He [Frank] and I suffered the brunt of the Depression. We learned a lot from the Depression. He [brother Frank] and I had entirely different attitudes about life than they did. Even after they knew dad didn’t have the money, they still thought they should have it. When they got older and supported their family, they gave their kids more than we gave our



kids because we grew up the hard way. We [she and brother Frank] saved every dime we had because that's the way we were raised. Dad was out of work until 1941 from the time of the Depression. How he worked was he would huckster. He would go downtown Pittsburgh early in the morning. He had a little red truck. He would huckster up and down Route 40 all the way into Wheeling [West Virginia] and come back. There were days when we never saw our dad because we were babies. He'd come home late at night. Then, when he got that job at Wheeling, it was a godsend to us because then we got to find out what it was like not to be told, "No, you can't have that." But the other four never did learn it. As a result, their attitude about money is different than our attitudes.

**GS:** I was told at a wake. A lady came and sat down and said to me, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Frank Sonson's wife." She said, "Oh, the rich ones." I said, "We're not rich!"

**FS:** We were.

**GS:** I didn't know this! Then Frank says, "Yes, Genevieve, my dad was real rich."

**TP:** He had good money.

**FS:** He had gold mines. He had silver mines. He lost them all.

**TC:** So, up until the Great Depression, your parents and family were doing very well.

**TP:** Very well. I know there had to be a second mortgage on the house, because I graduated from high school in 1950. I had to go pay that second mortgage. He wouldn't do it. So my mother would hand me the check when I would go home at lunchtime when it was due. She'd say, "Take this up to Mr. Parkinson in the building on South Main Street," which used to be the city hall a long time ago. It was on the corner of Strawberry and Main Street. There was a house back there. I would take it in and I hated the man 'cause he never had a smile on his face. I always called him "Pickle-puss Parkinson." [laughter] Anyway, I remember taking the last rent check in there the year I graduated from high school, so it took 'em that long to get outta debt. But, my father said, "I do not welch on my bills." So, that's what our life was like. But, we had a good life.

**FS:** He never would declare bankruptcy. Never.

**TP:** No, he wouldn't declare bankruptcy. But even when he went to work, like I said, he made sure we had what we needed. Always! I can remember, a couple times, Dad would leave, if we were awake and he saw us, he'd throw a dollar bill on the table or 50 cents and say, "Feed the kids their lunch." They would go to the neighborhood store. It was a Greek family. She could buy lunch for five, six kids with that. Then the older kids got to work. In our household, it was a rule. Half of what you made goes to the family. So the four older ones did help. But we did too when we got older.

They were doing good. But we still were taught, half of what you make belongs to the household.

**GS:** Still do.

**TP:** And still do. Yeah. My husband learned a lesson from me. He said, "You know, you're the only woman that I know that can tell me you're broke, but you always have a twenty dollar bill." [laughter] That's because I was trained that way. [laughter]

**FS:** Right there. [gestures to Genevieve] That's my financial advisor, right there. [laughter]

**TP:** Right. Plus, the fact that you were trained the same way she was. You don't spend money. Like you told your grandkids, you don't buy what you want, you buy what you need.

**FS:** That's what you do.

**TP:** And that's all.

**FS:** I told my grandson just recently, "When us two [he and Genevieve] got married, we didn't have a mother or father. She had an uncle and an aunt. They helped." But I said, "We didn't have it." He said, "You didn't have no help, did you?"

**TP:** Yes, we did.

**FS:** Very little.

**TP:** Yes, we had help because we had

love! I mean, it's the same as [when] I got married. My brothers and sisters gave me a wedding. It was a wedding that I didn't even want. I wanted a very quiet, go to church, get married, and have a family dinner. That was it. No, they insisted I had to have a reception. But, I thanked them for it because they taught me, too. That life and family is so much more than material things. So, my four siblings above me paid for my wedding. I bought my own clothes. I bought my fabric. A next-door neighbor made my dress for free. But that's what she did with Mary and Lula Ann. She was a neighbor of ours for years and a professional seamstress. She made our graduation dresses as a gift. She made our graduation gowns as a gift and made our wedding dresses as gifts.

**DT:** Was she Italian, by chance?

**TP:** No, no, no. God, her last name was Ewing. My father used to call him "Presbyterian Pickle-face." [laughter] 'Cause he never smiled. [laughter] But, she was a lovely lady. Us three girls, that's what she gave us. She gave us our graduation dresses and she gave us our wedding dresses as a gift. She made them.

**GS:** She fixed my [maid-of-honor] dress [for Theresa's wedding].

**TP:** Yeah, she fixed your dress. She had to alter your dress.

**GS:** She had to alter my dress.

**TP:** 'Cause she was at my wedding and

like I said, all I wanted was a maid-of-honor and best man. That's all I wanted. I ended up having bridesmaids, flower girl, ring bearer. And a nice wedding reception.

**FS:** [to Theresa] How many was at your wedding?

**TP:** I don't know. I have no idea, but it wasn't too many because I got married on a Tuesday—deliberately—'cause I didn't want to be like everybody else and get married on a Saturday. I chose Tuesday.

**FS:** We [he and Genevieve] didn't get married on a Saturday.

**TP:** But you got married on a holiday!

**FS:** Labor Day.

**TP:** But you got married on a holiday so people could go to your wedding. Every one of my uncles were there.

**GS:** My dad had a business at the time so ...

**TP:** I mean, they took off work. Every one of Dad's brothers were there. They took off work and my other uncles, too. Joe was a barber. He was there. Wednesday was his day off. He closed long enough to come to my wedding.

**FS:** We had a thousand people at our wedding. Five hundred doubled is a thousand. Five hundred for the bride and 500 for the groom. That's a thousand.

**TP:** Well, I invited both sides of the family. I mean, Mom and Dad's side of the family. So that would have been about 20-some there.

**TC:** Around 1923, when your family moved to 127 Hall Avenue, that was more of a mixed ethnic neighborhood?

**TP:** Oh, yes! It was a very ethnic neighborhood. My best friends and [Frank's] too was a Greek family. There was eight of those children and six of us. There was an empty lot up there, at the corner about two blocks away, three houses away from where we lived. All the neighborhood kids would play there. They were Greek. We were the Italians. There were Syrians on our street. There were Jews on our street. There were non-Catholics on our street. There were Irish on our street. It was a lovely neighborhood. That's why, when the neighborhood went so bad, my husband said to me as he was dying, "Do not stay here when I'm gone. It's not the neighborhood you grew up in, Betty. You've got to leave."

**FS:** What did I have to do to play with all the kids that we [played with]? I fought my way.

**TP:** Oh, you had to fight your way through because they didn't want to play with the dagos and Greek kids. They didn't want to play with us.

**TC:** But all of you went to Catholic school?

**TP:** Oh, yes. [laughs] Oh, my God, yes. [laughs] Wash High was right across the street. Uh, uh, that was a no-no.

**FS:** I wanted to go there and the coach wanted me to go there because I was a pretty good wrestler. [My parents] wouldn't let me.

**TP:** You know what [my mother's] answer was? "You'll quit school before you go to a public school."

**TC:** Could you describe the personality of your father?

**TP:** My father was just about the same. But it took my mother's death for us to realize—I don't know if you realize this, Frank—that we thought mum called the shots. Uh, uh. Our father called the shots. She had to shoot the bullets. [laughter]

**TP:** However, when we would be up at this corner playing, 9 o'clock at night, the street lights came on and we knew we had to be at the house. Our sidewalk came out, let's say, [gestures] from here to there. He [father] would take his wicker chair and sit out there—facing where we were playing. If we didn't come down the house when the street light went on, you would hear a whistle. I left early all the time and I said to him, "Frankie, we gotta go now! Dad's gonna be whistling." "Oh, he won't whistle." I left. I got down there and he [father] said, "Where's your brother?" I said, "He said you won't whistle." He [father] said, "No, I'll go up there and pull him by his ear!" So he [father] whistled and he [Frank

Jr.] came running! He knew that mum would've disciplined him—not dad. But he was the one who fired the bullets and she shot them. It wasn't until she died that we realized that. Uncle Sam, his brother, said to us, "Now, you know who the boss was. It wasn't your mother. It was your father all the time."

**FS:** We were never allowed to have a key to the front door.

**TP:** No. You knocked on the door.

**FS:** You're going to get the "treatment." [laughter]

**TP:** Right. If you're late, you're in trouble. There was a rule for the boys and a rule for the girls. Of course, the boys got to stay out longer. Of course, we girls would say, "Why do they get to stay out longer than we can?" The answer was: "They're boys." [laughter] I thought, "What the heck does that mean?!" I had to wait to grow up to know what it meant.

**TC:** I wanted to ask you about your father. When he left school, he was probably about 10, 11 years old, I'm thinking. Did he ever talk to you about how he felt about having to leave school?

**TP:** No, because I want to tell you something about my father. My father was a very self-taught, intelligent man. He could help us do an algebra problem and get it right. Never saw algebra [but] he would help us with our homework. Not our mother. She went to the 8th grade. He helped us with our homework.

**TC:** For him, as a businessman, he started at 15, he had to be a go-getter.

**TP:** Yeah. He was. He was a go-getter for everything. Like I said, when the Depression hit, he was out of work. He huckstered. He also had a pop business. Remember that, Frank? He sold soda pop. He went door-to-door with that.

**FS:** That was after the Depression.

**TP:** He always made a living for the family. He lost the business during the Depression. Too many people owed him money and they bellied-up. He would not belly-up. He said, "I bought that merchandise. I'm due to pay them." So, he paid it. By paying it, he lost everything that he had. But that was the kind of morals that he had. He instilled them in us, which was good. Even the four older ones that remember the good times, they learned a lot by dad being that kind of man. Because he said, "You don't walk away from your obligations. Never."

**TC:** Did your parents tell you how they met?

**TP:** No.

**TC:** What about your mother? What was her personality?

**TP:** Her personality was: You better move over, 'cause if you don't you're gonna get your ears pinched. If mum said something, you better do it and you better do it now. Right, Frank? Where did you end up when you didn't do what you was told?

**FS:** I got pepper in my mouth. When I swore a little bit.

**TP:** What else happened to yinz, you boys?

**FS:** Needles on my tongue.

**TP:** Where did she put you when you were naughty?

**FS:** Oh, I went down in the basement!

**TP:** The basement. [laughter] They were put in the basement when they were naughty—the boys. We weren't.

**FS:** I went to the basement and she tied to me to the post. Took all my clothes. I'm there playing outside, bare naked.

**TP:** He was rotten ornery. But we girls, for punishment, all she did was look at us. We knew. We better sit down and we better do what she wants us to do. Do not bug her. The only time I ever remember her getting angry with me enough to chase me and whup me. Every weekend, she would bake 'cause company and them would always show up, right? We had a mantel in the dining room and she would line up all the good stuff in there. For the weekend. This one day she made, besides the other things, she made a three-layer chocolate cake with seafoam icing. I loved the seafoam icing. Well, I went in there. Then, I turned the cake around. [laughter] Well, sure enough, the next thing I heard her say, "Betty! I know you did it! Because the older two are too old to do this!" I started running through the

house. She was behind me. She caught me up in the bedroom. Whipped my butt, but good. That's the only whipping I can remember that I got. [laughter]

**TC:** How old were you at the time?

**TP:** Probably about eight. I chased Anna Marie [Betty's daughter] for the same reasons. Only she did something. I can't remember what she did. She probably does. She hid under the bed. I lifted the bed up. [laughter] I pulled her out from under the bed. I paddled her butt. [laughs] I thought to myself, "Oh my God! I'm my mother all over again!"

**TC:** Now, your mother, she sounds like she was a good baker.

**TP:** Oh! She was an excellent cook! Unfortunately, she got sick when we were quite young. Very young. To the point where she couldn't cook. So, we learned to cook. Both he [Frank] and I and Sam. We cook exactly like our mother. He'll call me very now and then and go, "How did mum do this?" or "How did mum do that? Help me out! I forgot."

**FS:** But I make the best turkey stuffing. She did it with me. Rice. No bread crumbs.

**TC:** So, did her family bring over the cooking?

**TP:** Probably from over there. Our grandmothers must have cooked very good. I do remember going to Grandma [Sonson's] house on Sundays. After Mass,

we would stop up there 'cause she just lived around the corner from us. On Walnut Street. We walked to church then. Our father would say we were going to stop at Grandma's. Sure enough, there'd be Grandma, in her black dress and her pretty apron. She'd make us hot chocolate from scratch! Milk, cocoa, sugar and then she'd give us a hunk of her homemade Italian bread with jelly on it. I used to love going to 9 o'clock mass and we'd stop at Grandma's.

**TC:** What else do you remember about your grandparents?

**TP:** Mostly Grandma. That's about all. I can remember about her. Other than, one day, my mother was ironing clothes. It was a Sunday. That was a no-no. But, somehow, she must have got behind. This was when she still was pretty well. She was ironing clothes and she was between dining room and living room or dining room and kitchen 'cause we had sliding doors. So, she parked her ironing board half in the dining room, half in the kitchen 'cause if you looked in the kitchen door, somebody would've seen her ironing on a Sunday. God forbid. Well, Grandma came in. She said to her in Italian—she yelled at her—we didn't understand Italian, but we knew darn well she was getting scolded. Then she said, in English, "No do this! It's Sunday! It's Sunday!" My mother said, "But I've got to, Mum. It's gotta be done. They need their clothes for school." She sat on the

bushel of clothes. She said, "You won't do no more now 'til I leave." That's all I can remember about Grandma in our house. [To Frank] You remember her being in our house much?

**FS:** Not too much.

**TP:** Yeah. That's the only thing I can remember about her being in the house. She died when I was eight years old.

**TC:** Then, your mother's parents, they stayed in Pittsburgh?

**TP:** Oh, yeah. They stayed in Pittsburgh. Like I said, our grandfather [Longo] died long before we were ever born. Grandma died when I was three years old. So, she died in '35, '36. Somewhere in there.

**DT:** Does your family get together, Betty?

**TP:** We had a reunion last year [2016]. The first one in probably ten years.

[Note from Theresa's daughter, Anna Marie Powers Bonner: The Sonsons also held a reunion in September 2017 at North Strabane Township Park. Approximately 250 family members attended the reunion. One local representative from the families of each of the 11 children of Vincenzo and Mary Sonson was contacted to resurrect the Sonson reunions.]

**TC:** Now, did any of the family keep the name "Sansone"?

**TP:** No. Nobody did.

**FS:** I'll tell ya another story. I was in Korea and there was no place to spend your money. So, I had enough money to buy a new car-cash. I bought the new car. But I wasn't allowed to drive it. Now, the law was, if you were a male and under 25 years of age, you had to have your mother or father or a sibling sign for you. Even though I had insurance, I wasn't allowed.

So I was working two miles away-Yenko's-trying to learn the meat business. I would walk home and walk there. I'm coming back one day and a guy stops. He says, "Frank?" I knew who he was. He was my dad's insurance man. He says, "What are you walking for?" "Well," I said, "I have a car, but, I'm not allowed to drive it because my mother and dad are dead. My brothers and sisters, they can't afford to sign for me because they're having a hard time." That was right after the war, ya know? The Second World War.

He said, "I'll tell ya something. Come up my office. I'm gonna sign for you but I don't want to be disappointed." I said, "I'll never disappoint you!" That's the way it was. But, those were hard times. People don't realize that. Nowadays, they're driving at 16, 18 years old. Some of 'em don't know what a red light is. They think it's a pretty red light, that's all it is. They don't stop. But that's it. Now, I told my grandchildren, "You know, you better watch yourself because even though you got the green light, you might think you have the green light, but somebody's gonna get ya." That's all there is to it.

**TC:** Let me ask you a question about your father. So, in 1941, he got a new job.

**FS:** After 11 years, yes.

**TC:** Where did he get a job?

**FS:** He got it at C.A. Roebrock Company in Wheeling, West Virginia. He said, "You do not have to pay me. I don't want no wages. Give me a percentage of what I sell. Because I'm going to open up a new territory for ya in Washington." He started out with one truck coming in—three trucks a week. Then he was making so much money that they had to cut him down in percentage. That was it. But, that's how he did things. He had the connections.

**TC:** Then he was a distributor of food?

**FS:** Yes. Produce.

**TC:** He did work for them for about ten years and then he passed away. What happened to your mother? You said she was sick.

**FS:** She had [an enlarged heart]. I have two valves leaking and I had a heart attack December 31st, but I'm okay. I just keep goin'. That's it. I do have leukemia and chronic lymphoma and I'm still going. That's it. You gotta keep busy.

**TC:** What was it like to grow up with all kinds of cousins and lots of family all around?

**FS:** There was always something going

on. Some celebration or something, you know? It was good.

**TC:** How did you feel about your Italian heritage?

**FS:** I love it! I was very proud of it and I'm still very proud of it. That's all there is to it.

**TC:** What about your parents? How did they feel about their heritage?

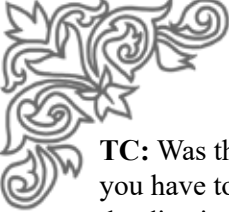
**FS:** They thought that family was the biggest thing that was ever in our house. There was nothing any better [than family]. Everybody helps one another. That's all.

**DT:** Did you ever notice or feel any discrimination when you were growing up?

**GS:** Tell her about what your dad had said.

**FS:** Oh, well, my dad, as soon as he came and settled in Washington, PA, there was signs in the window. I hate this name, but it said, "Help wanted: Dagos need not apply." You can't do that anymore. In our country. Because they have laws.

**FS:** Now, you have to understand, Pittsburgh is a little different than Washington. Pittsburgh is more Catholic than in Washington. You can almost see it. There's what—two Catholic churches? And how many Protestant churches? I'd say 50, maybe 60. That's all there was to it. The ethnic part is you had to stick together.



---

**TC:** Was that your parents' philosophy—you have to stick together in order to face the discrimination? Make your way?

**FS:** Right, right, right. It was hard.

**TC:** But they didn't want to go back to Italy.

**FS:** No. That was it. But there was a lot of stuff here. If you worked hard and done the right things, you could survive. That's all there is to it.

**TC:** Your dad could see that and so he didn't want to go back?

**FS:** No, he didn't want to go back. I knew that, too. I could see it in him.

**TC:** Did he ever describe what it was like in Italy?

**FS:** Oh, yes! He said, "We lived in a barn with the horse and the donkey." In the same stall. You know how that would be! But that's how hard it was. But in those days it was tough. But, we knew what a buck was and that's all there is to it.

**TC:** When you had the big family reunion in 2016, where did you have it?

**FS:** North Strabane Township Park. It was in a big pavilion. Up on top of the hill.

**TC:** Do you have a family historian? Somebody who writes down all the history?

**FS:** No, but I told my one son, "I want you to write a book about it."

**TC:** Okay. Does he want to do it?

**FS:** I think he will. It's a story makes you appreciate the littler things that people do not think about. They think it just comes easy. We come from the same mold, me and her [Genevieve], and that's it.



## Louis Anthony “Sonny” Spossey

Grandson of Italian immigrants



*Sonny and daughter Lisa Spossey Gorby in their shop.*


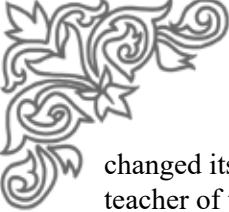
Sonny Spossey, the grandson of Italian immigrants, was the first Italian American to serve as mayor of Washington. In addition to four terms as mayor, Sonny served as a city councilman and city treasurer. Among the many honors he has received for his leadership are the NAACP Human Rights Award and Community Action Southwest Citizen of the Year.

The son of barber Louis Spossey, Sonny followed his father into the profession and worked with him in his West Chestnut Street shop until Louis passed away in 1998. Sonny retired from barbering in 2019 after 64 years of service. He was active in

Barber's Union Local 285, serving as president and secretary. His daughter, Lisa Spossey Gorby, continues to run the family shop, located just few blocks from the original.

When Sonny was a child, growing up on Fulton Street in the Bellevue neighborhood of Washington's West End, he made weekly trips to visit his paternal grandparents, Antonio and Rose Esposito, in Briar Hill, outside of Brownsville.

Antonio and Rose had settled in Briar Hill after emigrating from Sicily by way of Australia. Antonio worked as a coal miner until he sustained a hip injury. The family



changed its name to Spossey when a teacher of their young son Louis told him to start using that Americanized name. The entire family complied.

The Sunday visits also included Sonny's maternal grandparents, Michael and Pauline Chambers (original name Giambra), in neighboring Tower Hill. The couple had settled there after emigrating from Calabria. Michael found work in the coke ovens. Sonny's grandmother Pauline gave him his lifelong nickname.

Sonny's father Louis moved to Washington in the late 1930s when a relative suggested that he would do well as a barber in the city. When Louis opened his shop, there were dozens of Italian barbers in the city and plenty of business. Louis' shop was located near a railroad stop. He gained a reputation for being able to quickly complete a man's haircut and shave in time for him to catch a train.

Like many barbers, Louis was also a good listener—a trait that Sonny recognizes in himself and believes was an essential skill he brought to his 16 years as Washington's mayor. Listening to the ideas and concerns of community leaders and citizens—the “give and take,” he said—is vital in public service. Sonny's notable achievements during his years as mayor include establishing the Neighborhood Drug Corps to address a growing problem in the community and increasing access and equality for people with disabilities.

When Sonny first ran for office in 1984, he knew that some people may have thought, “How can a barber run a city?” But Sonny was not just a barber; he was an emerging leader with a deep commitment to the community. Furthermore, his demeanor—easygoing, responsive, hard working—proved to be a good fit for the job. It was a way of being he learned in the Italian family that raised him.

August 2019



Louis Spossey (original name "Esposito") opened a barbershop on West Chestnut Street in the late 1930s.



Sonny Spossey in the 1990s



Sonny Spossey with mother and father, 1940s



## Family Tree of Louis Anthony “Sonny” Spossey

### **Sonny’s Parents:**

- Louis Edward Spossey, b. 9-2-1909,  
Briar Hill, PA; d. 11-3-1998, Washington
- Margaret Chambers, b. 6-5-1915,  
Tower Hill, PA; d. 10-18-2002,  
Washington

### **Louis and Margaret’s Marriage Date:**

- 7-4-1934

### **Louis and Margaret’s Children:**

- Louis Anthony Spossey, b. 8-20-1937,  
Washington; m. Carolyn Scott, (b.  
7-25-1938, Prosperity, PA; d. 6-15-2011)  
on 1-3-1957
- Bernadette Spossey, b. 12-12-1952;  
m. — Adams

### **Sonny’s Paternal Grandparents:**

- Antonio Esposito, b. Calabria
- Rose, b. Naples

### **Sonny’s Maternal Grandparents:**

- Pauline Farro, b. Naples
- Michael Chambers (original name  
“Giambra”), b. Naples

## Interview

### Date and Place of Interview:

August 28, 2019, Spossey Hair Center, Washington

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Lisa Spossey Gorby (Sonny's daughter), Ron King and Bruce McDowell (board members of Citizens Library), Karen McDowell (Bruce's wife)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Sonny, could you tell me what your date of birth is?

**Sonny Spossey:** 8/20/37.

**TC:** Where were you born?

**SS:** Right here on West Chestnut Street, just down below where we are.

**TC:** Do you remember the address?

**SS:** Probably 350 West Chestnut Street.

**TC:** What was your father's name?

**SS:** Louis Edward Spossey.

**TC:** What was his birthdate?

**Lisa Gorby:** September 2, 1909.

**TC:** Where was your father born?

**SS:** Briar Hill, Pennsylvania, just outside of Brownsville.

**TC:** Do you remember the year he died?

**LG:** 1998.

**TC:** Then, your mother's name?

**SS:** Margaret Chambers.

**TC:** Her birthdate?

**SS:** June 5th.

**TC:** Do you know the year?

**SS:** Same year?

**LG:** No, Grandma was nine years younger than Pap.

**SS:** Nine years younger than my Dad.

**TC:** Where was your mother born?

**SS:** Tower Hill.

**TC:** That's also near Brownsville?

**SS:** Just outside of Brownsville.

**TC:** Sonny, can you give me your children's names?

**SS:** My oldest one was Wray. Then, Mark. Then, Lisa.

**TC:** Lisa, I know you're the keeper of the dates. Could you tell me the birthdays of your brothers?

**LG:** Wray: December 3, 1957. Mark:  
June 11, 1959. Myself: February 5, 1961.

**TC:** Do you remember the date?

**LG:** June 15th.

**TC:** Sonny, do you or did you have a  
spouse?

**TC:** 2011?

**SS:** Yes.

**LG:** Yes.

**TC:** Her name?

**TC:** Your wife, did she have an  
occupation?

**SS:** Carolyn Scott.

**SS:** She was a housewife. Pretty much.

**TC:** Her birthdate?

**TC:** I know you just retired from your  
work as a barber.

**LG:** 7/25/1938.

**TC:** Your wedding date?

**SS:** Last Wednesday.

**LG:** January 3, 1957.

**TC:** Last Wednesday! That was August  
21, 2019. Why did you pick that date?

**TC:** Where was your wife born?

**SS:** I decided that when I was 82, I was  
going to quit barbering. I was 82 on the  
20th of August and I retired on the 21st of  
August.

**LG:** Prosperity.

**SS:** Prosperity, I think it was.

**TC:** In what town or city were you  
married?

**TC:** You stuck to your word. Do you  
have any plans for retirement?

**SS:** Oh geez, Virginia?

**SS:** No major plans, just kind of, do what  
I feel like doing.

**TC:** I take it that you eloped?

**TC:** What about military service?

**SS:** Yeah, we did.

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Your wife—is she living?

**TC:** Your siblings, what are their names?

**SS:** No. She passed.

**LG:** Bernadette Adams.

**LG:** Eight years ago.

**SS:** That's my sister.

**TC:** Just one?

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Is she still living?

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Do you know her birthdate?

**SS:** December 12th.

**TC:** Older? Younger?

**SS:** Younger. 15 years younger than me.

**TC:** So, you're '37. She's '52?

**SS:** 15 years—'52, yes.

**TC:** What is her occupation?

**LG:** Retired.

**SS:** She's retired now.

**TC:** OK, what did she retire from?

**SS:** She worked for the county [of Washington].

**TC:** Now, the interview is going to focus on your Italian grandparents. On your dad's side you had Italian grandparents. On your mom's side, I assume you did not have Italian grandparents. Is that correct?

**SS:** Oh, no! They were all Italian.

**TC:** Oh, OK! So, your mother was

Margaret Chambers—she was Italian.

**LG:** Her real name was Giambra.

**SS:** Giambra. Her mother was Pauline and her dad was Michael.

**TC:** So, your mother also was Italian.

**SS:** 100% Italian.

**TC:** Somewhere along the way the name was changed to Chambers.

**SS:** You probably heard this story before: They got into grade school, if the teachers couldn't understand what the name was, then they would just give them the name that they wanted to give to them. Hers got to be Chambers.

My dad was Esposito. They [the teachers] didn't like that, so they called him Spossey.

**TC:** So, it's your understanding that for both your mother and your father, who had Italian names and parents from Italy, that when they started school, the school suggested Americanized names?

**SS:** Absolutely.

**TC:** That's what you heard from your parents?

**SS:** That's exactly right.

**TC:** When they were young children and the school system changed their names to be more Americanized, did the whole

family change their name at that time?

**SS:** Yes, they did.

**TC:** Did you ever hear any stories about whether that was a difficult process or whether it was something that they went along with pretty easily?

**SS:** My dad told me that it was very simple. The teacher just decided that's what they were going to call him and that's what they used. There were no papers, or anything done. They just changed the name.

**TC:** Did they have to go to court?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Anything of that nature?

**SS:** No, no, no.

**TC:** Just changed it in class.

**SS:** They go into class and they said, "You're going to be Spossey from now on." So, that's what he was. I didn't think it was that hard.

**TC:** Your mother and father grew up around Brownsville, in two little areas. Sounds like two little villages—Briar Hill and Tower Hill.

**SS:** Yeah, they were coal miners.

**TC:** Coal mining towns.

**SS:** She went to Redstone High School

and my dad didn't go to high school.

**TC:** They had a similar experience with their names when they went to school, but they didn't go to the same school.

**SS:** No.

**TC:** It was a similar experience so we can assume that there were similar experiences other people had as well?

**SS:** That's right.

**TC:** So, let's talk about your four grandparents then. Let's start with your dad's side. What were their names?

**SS:** Rose was my grandmother's name. My grandfather's name was Antonio.

**TC:** Rose and Antonio—did they meet in Italy?

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Do you know what town they were from?

**SS:** Well, my mother's a Calabrese so it'd be Calabria. [Sonny later reported that his paternal grandfather was from Calabria, and his paternal grandmother was from Naples.]

**TC:** Did you ever hear—from them or from other members of the family—how they came to meet each other in Italy?

**SS:** No. I don't have any idea.

**TC:** Were they married over there?

**SS:** To the best I know, yes.

**TC:** Now, your mother's parents. What were their names?

**SS:** Pauline and Michael.

**TC:** Did they ever go by Italian names?

**SS:** Yes. Giambra.

**TC:** Pauline and Michael—their first names—did they ever use Italian versions of their first names?

**SS:** Not that I ever remember.

**TC:** Do you happen to know your grandmother, Pauline's, maiden name?

**SS:** Do not.

**TC:** Did Pauline and Michael meet in Italy?

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Do you know what town they were from?

**SS:** No, I did not ever hear about where they were from.

**TC:** Let's go back to Rose and Antonio, your paternal grandparents. What was Antonio's occupation?

**SS:** He was a coal miner.

**TC:** He was a coal miner here. What about in Italy? Did he ever talk about what he did over there?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Do you know what year he came to the United States?

**SS:** He went to Australia first. I know that. Then, from Australia, he came here.

**TC:** What did he tell you about, or did you hear from other family members, about why he went to Australia?

**SS:** I think it was their easiest way to get to the United States.

**TC:** Do you have any sense of how long he was there?

**SS:** No, I don't know.

**TC:** He went from Australia to the United States. Did he come directly to this area?

**SS:** Briar Hill is all I remember. I don't remember him being any place else.

**TC:** Did you know Rose and Antonio? Did you grow up with them?

**SS:** Yeah, usually, yeah.

**TC:** Do you remember how old you were when they passed away?

**SS:** His age was 91 when he passed. Rose died before that. Probably 10 years before that. He lived all those years thinking he was a boss. But that didn't work that way.

**LG:** They didn't speak English. At least grandma did not speak English.

**TC:** Your grandfather came to Briar Hill to be a coal miner. Did he tell you anything about what that was like?

**SS:** He would tell me about when they would go in the mines and they weren't happy with the way things were being run, so I can remember John L. Lewis came in with a Mine Workers Union and he was telling me about the times he would go to work and people would be upset with him because he was wanting to go to work. But that worked its way through when they finally all agreed to become unionized. But these people worked hard. They worked.

**TC:** Was he a coal miner all his adult life?

**SS:** Well, until he got hurt in the mines. He had a hip problem. At that time, they didn't do surgeries or things like that, so he always walked with a cane after that. So, he had to quit coal mining.

**TC:** Did he do something else after coal mining?

**SS:** He used to have gardens. A lot of gardens. He would sell some of the vegetables from the garden. That's one of the things that he did.

**TC:** Then, your grandmother, Rose, did she ever have an occupation outside of the home?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Let's talk now about your mother's

parents, Michael and Pauline. They met in Italy. Then, to your knowledge, they got married there.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** What about Michael? What brought him here?

**SS:** He worked in the coke ovens.

**TC:** Did he come directly to Western Pennsylvania?

**SS:** To my knowledge. Yes.

**TC:** What did he tell you about working in the coke ovens?

**SS:** I can remember him saying that it was very hot. [laughs] But he stayed with it as long as he could. After a while, he pulled out because it was just too much.

**TC:** What about Pauline? Did she have an occupation?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Just curious: Where did your parents meet?

**SS:** I don't recall how they met. I'm sorry.

**TC:** Sounds like they were from that Brownsville Area.

**SS:** Yeah. Redstone High School—maybe they met around the school.

**TC:** What brought your family to

Washington, PA?

**SS:** My aunt—she had lived here, and her husband saw my dad was a barber. So, [my dad] moved to Washington to start a barber shop here. That was down on Chestnut Street.

**TC:** Do you remember the number of the shop?

**SS:** It's about 345 or something like that. West Chestnut.

**TC:** So, he came here. He had already been a barber in the Brownsville area?

**SS:** Yeah.

**TC:** Then came here to Washington. Do you know what year that would've been?

**SS:** I was born in '37 ... I was born here.

**TC:** So, they came to Washington before 1937.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** How did your dad like working here as a barber?

**SS:** He never quit.

**TC:** Could you tell me a little bit about his barbershop?

**SS:** Well, it was like a two-chair barbershop. But it had the old equipment in it. They used to do a lot of shaving in that time, so they had that strop on the

side. They had the sink in the middle with the—I forget what kind of sink it was, but it was a different kind of sink.

Didn't shampoo hair like we got into in later years. He shaved a lot. Then he moved down the street, just about two or three houses. He had his barbershop there because he kind of grew out of where he was.

He was very fast. A lot of guys would come in from Washington and there was a railroad stop down here at the bottom of the hill on Washington Street. So, they'd come around, get a haircut and a shave and he had them done in enough time for them to catch another train. It was very quick.

**TC:** What did he like about barbering?

**SS:** I think he liked the talking with the customers and people that he met. He developed a very nice trade, took care of my mother and I very well. We built a house up here in Bellevue where we grew up. That's it. I would say his involvement with the customers. That was the big thing he liked about it.

**TC:** You said he never quit. Do you mean he was working as a barber up until his final days?

**SS:** Absolutely.

**TC:** Why was it so important to him, to keep working?

**SS:** That's what he did. That group of

people—they just didn't quit. That's the way they were. I grew up here in Bellevue and he used to walk from there down the railroad tracks to Chestnut Street to his barbershop. He started by nine o'clock in the morning. In that time, they worked until six. Then, he would walk back. God bless him! I don't know how he did it.

**TC:** When you're talking about Bellevue, you're talking about the area right above the shop here. Up Chestnut Street and to left which would be the southern side of Chestnut. You grew up there. You said your father made a good living and was able to build a house there. What street was that on?

**SS:** Fulton Street.

**TC:** What was the address there?

**SS:** 76.

**TC:** Did you live anywhere else before that?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** I want to ask you about a comment you made a few minutes ago about your grandparents. Michael worked in coke ovens. Your other grandparent, Antonio, worked as a coal miner. You said, "They worked very hard."

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Could you elaborate on that? When you said they worked hard, you seemed

to say it with a sense of awe about how hard they worked. Was that your feeling at the time you knew them?

**SS:** It's just that, they felt that's what was necessary to take care of their families because they all had a few kids. That's what they felt they had to do and that's what they did. There was no ifs, ands, or buts about having to go to work. You just went to work.

Unfortunately, it's not like that about a lot of things nowadays, but these people, they worked.

**TC:** Lisa, I heard you say that Antonio did not speak English.

**SS:** He spoke some English. But he was more Italian than English. But you could understand. If you were around him enough, you could understand what he was saying. We moved him up in Bellevue eventually ... next door ... 100 Fulton Street.

So, my dad would go visit with him and the two of them would be talking Italian and if I walked in the room then they made it a little easier for me to understand them.

**TC:** Did you always feel like you were able to understand your grandfather and what he was talking about in stories that he told, even with him speaking not completely?

**SS:** When they wanted me to. [laughs]

**TC:** When they didn't want you to?

**SS:** It was all Italian!

**TC:** So, you said that Rose and Antonio moved to Fulton Street. What about Pauline and Michael? Did they also?

**SS:** No, they didn't. They stayed in Tower Hill.

**TC:** Did you go and visit them?

**SS:** Sunday—it was automatic. You were going to Briar Hill and Tower Hill on Sunday. Nowadays, kids want to tell their mother and dad where they're going to go. It was just automatic. You got up and that's where you were going on Sunday. So, we would go visit the ones on Briar Hill. Go visit the ones on Tower Hill. Turns out, one of my mother's sisters married a gentleman from down there who was a barber. So, he was right in Brownsville.

**TC:** Both sets of grandparents were there until the point where Rose and Antonio moved up here?

**SS:** That's right.

**TC:** Were Rose and Antonio living there on Fulton Street during the years you were growing up?

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Immigration for your grandparents—both sets—did they tell you anything about their immigration

experience, what it was like, was it a difficult journey? Anything like that you can recall.

**SS:** No.

**TC:** Sonny, can you tell me what brought your grandparents to the United States? What was their motivation to come here? Did they have relatives here?

**SS:** It's all because they wanted to better themselves as best they could. Because they didn't have much going on, apparently, where they were so they wanted to improve themselves as much as they could.

I never remember them saying they were out of work. They were able to come and get something and they worked. As I said, one was in the coke ovens and the other was in the coal mines. That's what they did.

**TC:** Did they have relatives in the Brownsville area?

**SS:** Nothing.

**TC:** Did they ever tell you why or how they heard about the area?

**SS:** Not that I can remember.

**TC:** Did they ever keep in touch with their relatives back in Italy?

**SS:** I don't think so.

**TC:** You talked about living on Fulton

Street. Here in the area that's called Bellevue. There's Bellevue Avenue, and Bellevue is the name of the neighborhood. Was Fulton Street an Italian neighborhood? Was Bellevue?

**SS:** It was not an Italian neighborhood. There were a lot of homes there. There may have been one other Italian family on the street but no, it was not an Italian neighborhood.

**TC:** Did your parents, both being Italian Americans, have a camaraderie with other Italians Americans of their generation?

**SS:** I don't remember there being too many socials with anybody else. My mother was a gem, but she just didn't have that social-type instinct for that. So, no, I don't remember her involving herself with anything.

**TC:** So, after your dad came here and opened the barbershop, would you say that opening a barbershop with a connection to the Italian community here was secondary in his life? Or would you say it was a primary influence?

**SS:** There was always the indication: "Italian?" ... "Yeah." That question was always there. Not that he tried to distance himself from it, but he would find out, in the shop, who the Italians were. But every barber in town was, just about, Italian.

**TC:** He was Esposito until he went to school. Did he speak Italian and what about your mother? Did they speak

Italian when they went to school or did they speak English?

**SS:** They had to learn to speak English, but they continually were able to speak Italian and understand Italian.

**TC:** So, it sounds like, when you would go back to Brownsville, that might have been more of an Italian culture and neighborhood there. Is that correct?

**SS:** Maybe with my mother's people. But I don't remember that many with my dad's in Briar Hill.

**TC:** Was there a sense in those communities—either one or both—that there were immigrants living there? For example, were there Italian shops or things of that nature?

**SS:** No.

**TC:** What was life like as you were growing up? What was the neighborhood like up here?

**SS:** Well, it seemed like everybody on the street had some kids. Of course, the school was just about a block away, if you could squeeze through somebody's yard to go there. We didn't have any problem relating to everybody. As a matter of fact, we boys used to, in the morning, [go] up on the hill to play ball. We would leave in the morning and when we came home, we came home. They knew where we were. But it was a very nice neighborhood. We just had a good relationship with a lot of people there.

**TC:** You went to Trinity High School.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** What about your parents? In your home, did they carry on any Italian traditions?

**SS:** Cooking.

**TC:** Could you tell me more about that?

**SS:** Everything was Italian flavor ... the pasta was always there ...

**TC:** Did you ever have any Italian relatives come to visit you?

**SS:** Sure. We had some from Morgantown [WV] come to visit us. My cousins were down on Beau Street and we would visit with them. Yeah, there was a lot of cousins around eventually so we would get to see them.

**TC:** Your mother was the cook in the family, I assume? Did your dad do any cooking as well?

**SS:** Oh, no.

**TC:** Tell me more about your mother as a cook. What were some of her specialties?

**SS:** Whatever she made was a specialty. But, yeah, just about whatever she put on the table was fine. You know that she had spent time preparing it. Whenever it was time to eat, which was whenever Louis came home, that's what you had. Pasta. Of course, we had pasta every

Sunday when we went to Brownsville. That was one thing. But she would make green beans and she would make greens and stuff like that. Whatever was there, you had to learn to eat.

**TC:** Sounds like your mother absorbed a lot of the culinary skills of the Italians.

**SS:** Oh, that's where she learned. You know, she learned from my grandmother, Pauline. No question about that.

**TC:** What about religion? When you would see your grandparents or when your grandparents came to live with you here in Washington, was religion an important part of their lives?

**SS:** No. It wasn't. They never strayed from the Catholic type, but they never went to Mass. They lived the right kind of life, I would say, but no. As far as going to Mass, my mother, later as we went on, she would take me to Mass occasionally. Or my cousins would come up and we'd go to Mass. Other than that, there wasn't really a strong tie to the church.

**TC:** When they did go to Mass, was it here at Immaculate Conception?

**SS:** Yeah, Immaculate Conception.

**TC:** Did your grandparents become American citizens?

**SS:** You know, I don't know that. I would imagine they did. I can't say unequivocally.

**TC:** Now, you talked about your grandfather, Antonio. He was the one who created a garden after he retired from the hard labor? Or was that Michael?

**SS:** Well, actually, they both had gardens. Michael had a garden right beside his house. It was a fairly good size, I would say. It was 100 by 50. Antonio had an unbelievable number of gardens. [Another] house up in Bellevue up here had a huge, huge yard. They had chicken coops and they had all that stuff in the backyard. That's when I learned not to like chicken a lot because I remember when they killed them all. [laughs]

**TC:** Was the garden for your own consumption or did he sell from the garden?

**SS:** They didn't sell from the garden. They were into giving some stuff away. Then, he found a lot across the street from where we lived on Fulton. Higgins lived over there. So, he started putting a garden there.

One day I saw him and said, "Pap, maybe I can help you." So, he gave me a spade. Then, I got fired. I didn't do it just the way he liked it. [laughs] I thought I was doing all right but it wasn't the way he liked it.

He used a cane all the time and really, God bless him, how he worked! I keep saying that, but they just worked. That's what they did.

**TC:** Did your mother's parents have long

lives?

**SS:** Her dad died kind of young, I think. Probably early 60s. My grandmother, she lived longer than him. She was probably, at least, 65, I would say.

**TC:** It sounds like your grandfather, Antonio, despite the hard work, was able to thrive.

**SS:** Oh yeah. He was 91 years old when he passed.

**TC:** So, gardening was definitely a skill that both your grandfathers got from Italy.

**SS:** Oh yeah.

**TC:** You were talking about Bellevue School. That's right on Altamont Avenue. I know that because my grandparents had a store on Altamont Avenue—"Calabro's Grocery"—and it's right next door to Bellevue School. Could you tell me just a little bit about your experience at Bellevue School?

**SS:** There was one teacher for two classes. You have 3rd and 4th grade. Then you had 1st and 2nd grade. Then you went up like that. There was no one grade for everybody.

The teachers, they made sure you did your work. You knew just about every kid, at least in your classes. Even some of the kids in the other one, some younger. We had a lot of good times and got a recess, played football and basketball.

It was a very good experience. The one who was in charge of it, Mrs. Samson, was—you listened to what Mrs. Samson said because you didn't want that paddle. But they were very good.

**TC:** Tell me about your nickname, "Sonny." How did you get that name?

**SS:** One day, somebody came to the door. We had a cellar. My grandmother [Pauline] was staying with us for a little while. Somebody knocked at the door and she opened the door and he said, "Is there anybody else here?"

She said, "My grandson. Hey, Sonny, come here!"

That started "Sonny." Just a simple thing like that. From then on, everybody called me Sonny. Everybody has a lot of respect for my mother's mother, believe me. So that's how it happened.

**TC:** Could you tell me a little more about that? You said everyone had respect for your mother's mother, Pauline. What was it about her that caused that?

**SS:** She was a very warm person. [My mother] took after her. You knew when [my mother] was upset with you. Whenever she called me "Sonny Anthony Spossey," I know time was over. She raised the kids, you know. The way the father worked, he wasn't there all day. So, the mother had to raise the kids at the time. So, she handled them very well. You knew how far you could go with them at the time. We know things have

changed a lot. But she was a very soft-spoken lady. No screaming at anybody. She was just a real sweet lady.

**TC:** What about [Pauline's] husband, Michael? What was his personality like?

**SS:** He was a little more vocal. When he spoke, he was a little more bravado. But they all treated me so well. I was blessed, and when Michael wanted to tell you something, you just knew he was telling something. I mean, it wasn't like he was going to soft sell you into it.

That's the way it was. Michael said that's what you do and that's what you did. He was in charge. No doubt about that.

**TC:** What about your father's parents? What were their personalities like?

**SS:** My grandfather was, pretty much, quiet. He didn't say a whole lot. He used a cane, as I said. He liked to smoke a pipe. He sat around. He smoked his pipe. Then, every once in a while, he'd be out on the porch, rocking in his rocking chair. He was easy going.

I never heard him raise his voice much, if any. He may have thought so, but we knew who was in charge. Rose—she was the boss. But I don't remember them raising their voice. They didn't have to. I mean, you just know. That's what they told you. That's what you did. They were just that type of people.

**TC:** Now, when Italians came here to Western Pennsylvania, and throughout

the country, sometimes they would encounter prejudice or discrimination. Did your grandparents ever experience that?

**SS:** Not that they ever said anything about it. They seemed to be able to get along with whoever was around them. So, they didn't have that. My grandfather, Antonio, he had a grape arbor and they would make wine. His buddies would drink wine. He liked to drink some wine. When he was sitting around up home, pretty soon he was going to go down and smoke his pipe, but we all know he was going to go down and get a glass of wine, too. [laughs] That's the way it was.

**TC:** What about your father coming here as a barber and setting up his shop in the 1930s. Did he experience any prejudice or discrimination?

**SS:** Not that we ever noticed or encountered. He may have and not mentioned it. I never saw it. You know, at one time that was a big issue with people. They thought you were Italian so there was something wrong with you. That went on. Let's face it. They got over that.

**TC:** What are your feelings about yourself as an Italian American having very deep roots in Italy through your grandparents?

**SS:** Personally, I feel blessed. The demeanor they taught me, the demeanor they used, the way I saw them, moving with their families ... they were not argumentative. Occasionally, there was

a little flare up because Italians will get excited once in a while.

I just feel blessed. I'm very fortunate. It's been special for me. Thank God.

**TC:** You were the first and, probably only, Italian American to serve as mayor of Washington, PA. Is that correct?

**SS:** Correct.

**TC:** OK. You served four terms.

**SS:** Yes, ma'am.

**TC:** For a total of 16 years.

**SS:** Yes, ma'am.

**TC:** Tell me about your interest in public service.

**SS:** It all started when I was president of Washington Youth Baseball. At that time, we were going out soliciting money at different municipal buildings when they met. I can remember going to the City of Washington and listening to the discussions going on and I thought well, you know, I think I could do that.

So, I came back to the shop and I started talking to some of my friends. They all agreed that I'd probably be a pretty good fit.

**TC:** Tell me more about that. What exactly did you see and what were you thinking?

**SS:** I just listened to the types of discussions that were going on. My demeanor was so much different than theirs. I thought that the type of person that I was would fit into that mold, you know. To me there's a give and a take. Some people just don't understand that. I said, "This is something I can do," and that's when I came back to the shop and there were certain guys that I knew might be interested. So, I asked them what they thought.

There was no question about it. They really felt that I could handle what was going on in the city at the time ... I decided to put them together. I had a campaign committee. I was going to run for either City Council or mayor. I mentioned it to an individual because this person was on Council. I said, "Let me know what you're going to do because I don't want to wrestle with you about it. Tell me what you're going to do, and I'll do the opposite."

He never came back and gave me the information. By that time, my team was starting the work and said, "You're going to run for mayor." So, that's when we decided to run for mayor. Fortunately, of course, as you might know, one of the things was, what can a barber do as mayor? How can a barber run a city? Thank God we were able to show them a lot. We were very successful.

**TC:** I'd like to ask you a little more about that. At the time you ran for mayor, you had been a barber for a number of years.

**SS:** Maybe 15, 20 years.

**TC:** For political office, you talked about your demeanor that you thought would be a contribution to the political discussion. How would you describe your demeanor?

**SS:** Kind of easygoing. I always like to hear from both sides before I make a decision. You don't make a lot of issues; you listen to what people are saying and you make a determination based on what you think is the right way to go.

That, to me, is a big factor. Sometimes we miss that. You have to have the right people around you. I was blessed that when I won, I was able to make a good relationship with the staff and the city. Brought the right guys in for chiefs of police because the mayor is in charge of all the police departments.

I was very fortunate that it worked that way and we were able to notice some things that needed done. Some of the people there were more than anxious to get involved in doing the things that we thought were right, which turned out to be the right things to do.

So, I was truly blessed with that too. You have your hard times, you know? There are things you wish you could've done more of.

I remember when I won the first mayor's position [in 1984]. I said the people were wondering how a [barber] can run a city. Well, I'd attended W&J [Washington & Jefferson College] for two years so I had

some additional education in addition to the high school education, and I was always good with numbers, figures, things like that.

I had no concerns about it because four and four is eight regardless of how you do it. Responsibility is the big thing. I had a great staff. The Council was a very good Council. They taught me a lot as I went around.

The thing is that you have to be open to listening to that and making the decisions that you feel are right with that. You can't just come in and say, "I'm Sonny Spossey. I'm mayor so here's what we're going to do." It just doesn't work that way.

I remember the chief of police, at least twice a week we'd go to the City building and we'd meet. I'd tell him something that I'd think. I'd say, "Now, really, it'd probably be a good idea to do such and such a thing."

He'd sit there and he'd say, "You know, Sonny, Mayor, I don't think that's such a good idea." We'd talk about it and I'd say, "OK, whatever you think."

So, when you leave the City building, you have to walk down some steps to go to the police station. He'd say, "I may have disagreed with you when we were talking, but I knew when I went down those steps what we had to do." [laughs]

But it was, just, there were good relationships. You developed those

relationships with those people, and they would do anything for you. I was truly blessed and, I don't know, maybe it's my personality or the personality of the people I'm dealing with, but you just can't be "I know it all. I can do it all." It's not "I, I, I." It's not like that.

You know, we founded the Neighborhood Drug Awareness Corps. We got involved with the handicapped associations. We put together a drug and alcohol program. There were just a lot of things that we did that were very, very rewarding for people. Open Doors for the Handicapped. It was very good.

**TC:** You talked about thinking about becoming mayor and how it might be a good role for you. It sounds like you didn't really aspire to elected office throughout your life. But once you got there, it was the right fit for you.

**SS:** I was comfortable in it. Like I say, in that position you ran into a lot of situations where, you wish you didn't have to address them, but you do have to address them because that's what you do. Some people don't like my personality because I'm sort of a soft-type individual. But sometimes it works out better that way.

**TC:** While you were mayor, what happened to your barbershop?

**SS:** My dad was still working at the time when I first started. He was here. We were off Mondays and I would go down to the City building for half a day on Thursday.

Then, in the evenings, you had Council meetings at night. There was always room to do what you needed to do. I had a phone in the back room. It was direct to the City. They knew that I knew that whenever they called me on that phone, they needed me for something.

I was the mayor when they had the tire fire. It was a big tire fire here in the city. I was cutting hair and the phone rang. I answered the phone and [the chief of police] said, "Mayor?"

I said, "Yeah. What's going on?"

He said, "Look out your back window. Look towards the City building."

I did and there was that black smoke. I said, "What's going on?"

He said, "The tires are on fire."

I thought, "Oh my God!" They came up and picked me up, and we saw the firemen working.

**TC:** You talked about some of your accomplishments as mayor. The Neighborhood Drug Corps. Involvement with people with disabilities. Accessibility. Were there other accomplishments that you'd like to mention?

**SS:** I was on the Board of Barbers' Examiners. They elected me their chairman. We'd meet once a month in Harrisburg. I was on the executive board for the Barbers' Association.

**TC:** You were also elected a City Council member and as county treasurer as well.

**SS:** I didn't win for county treasurer. I ran for that, but I didn't win. On the year I didn't make it for mayor, I was on Council for two years. Then, I ran for mayor again. But I was city treasurer for four years also in all that time.

**TC:** What would you say were your biggest challenges as mayor?

**SS:** One of the people on my [campaign] committee was working in the City building. I don't remember what he did, but he sent me a little note that said, "The first thing you have to learn is to count to three. There are five people on Council, and you need three votes to do anything." So, you have to try and convince other people to get to that three. That was the most trying thing, I would say. They're all not thinking in the same terms. As small as a city is, it's as bad here as you get in the federal government.

They're worried about getting re-elected. To this day, there are things that I really wanted to see the city do. But I couldn't get the three votes because they were worried about getting re-elected.

**TC:** What were some of those disappointments?

**SS:** ... [One involved W&J College.] I met regularly with the president of W&J.

She and I developed a strong, communications-type thing. I was there through [the presidency of] Howard Burnett. Howie was a real challenge. He and I had some heavy discussions. They wanted to close Lincoln Street.

I went into the meeting with all kinds of big-time people. He said, "Well, I'll tell you—my board decided that they want to close Lincoln Street."

I said, "Dr. Burnett, we're not going to close Lincoln Street."

He said, "Well, if you're not going to close Lincoln Street then there's no use in me staying there."

"You're right," I said. "It's not going to happen."

He didn't leave. So, one of the guys who was an engineer said, "We have an alternate thing." We came up with the alternate to that situation.

But, anyway, back to [the previous] president—we used to have breakfast together ... People in this town think that because W&J is tax-free that they take away a lot from the city. But no one figures what would be over there if it wasn't for W&J.

But, anyway, W&J decided that they needed a larger facility for their gymnasium and everything else. So, they decided—she and I talked about this—we went to one of their board meetings and we talked about the possibility of them

building the building from College Street up to where the City's parking garage is.

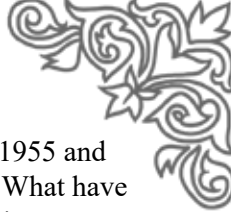
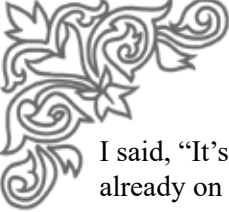
A multi-million dollar, a two-million-dollar building. This building was going to bring in people from all over the country because it was going to be a Division 3 facility. Swimming, basketball, whatever—all these people would come into the city. They were going to buy a lot from us for \$150,000. If they didn't build it, they just said the money's yours because we're not going to do anything with it.

In addition to that, we were going to look into building a—you'll notice, from the top of the city's parking garage to Main Street is almost even. We were going to build a bridge from that building to Main Street so that people could park there and go to the facility to see what was going on.

So, I thought I had some facility people who were willing to help. One of the guys I had who I thought was going to be supportive of it, he all but ran from me that night when it came time to vote. It was the same bull.

Well, you know, there are people in this town who don't like W&J. I said, "Do you realize what we're giving away here?"

Later years, I mentioned that to a guy who's a chairman on the Chamber of Commerce. He said, "We'll jump on that right away!"



I said, "It's too late. W&J started doing it already on their side."

Can you imagine what that would have meant to the city? [It was] so hard trying to get these people to understand what we lost. Everybody says, "Gee, the city ought to do this, do that." The city has had good situations where they could've done these things. But it goes back to the same politics.

That's where the tough part was. See, that's been hurting me ever since.

**TC:** It seems that your pathway to being mayor was more like a typical citizen than like a politician, and that political stagnation is what you encountered.

**SS:** Yeah. That's the whole idea. You have to be listening to what everybody says. Then, sift through what is a waste and what isn't a waste. So, you make a decision based on all the good information you get. Then, you go from there.

**TC:** Do you have a sense that your style as mayor has contributed to your being elected so many times?

**SS:** Oh, I think so. I think that has a lot to do with it. When I finally got beat, I was afraid because I knew the person that was running—I just knew the temperament wasn't right, from the beginning, when we had some discussions. You could just tell the temperament wasn't right. It was right. She failed.

**TC:** You started as a barber in 1955 and retired this year after 64 years. What have you enjoyed about that occupation?

**SS:** The big thing about barbering—and it goes back to what my dad thought, too—is the people that you encounter, the different personalities. You talk to this guy; he has something to say. You talk to that guy; he has something to say. It's amazing the things you learn. Everybody has something—maybe a little different—and you listen to it.

A lot of times you want to just say, "Why don't you just keep quiet!" [laughs] But you don't do that. You listen to what they have to tell you. I'd say that the relationship that you have with your customers is the big thing. That's part of that Italian temperament. You know how loveable we are. [laughs]



**TC:** You talked about how when your father came here to open his barbershop there were a lot of Italian barbers at that time. I have some of the names and I wanted run those by you and see what other ones you know.

Of course, I have Don Zenner and his father Frank. Today, there's a barber—Rich Sonson.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Did he come from a family of barbers?

**SS:** Yeah, his dad was a barber over here.



**TC:** Then, we have Floyd Marasco and his brother.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Pat Cimino.

**SS:** Yes. Absolutely.

**TC:** Carmen Alberta. He's a hairdresser, too.

**SS:** Oh, OK.

**TC:** Sacco is another name. D'Alessandro.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** What was the first name?

**SS:** Tony.

**TC:** Tony. Is that back in your father's day?

**SS:** Yeah.

**TC:** Russo.

**SS:** There's Angelo. There was his brother. There was his uncle.

**TC:** Miscio.

**SS:** Mike Miscio. Jimmy Miscio. Frank Palermo.

**TC:** Tocci.

**SS:** I don't remember that one.

**TC:** Lucatorto.

**SS:** Oh, absolutely!

**TC:** Luppino. Dessaro.

**SS:** Joe and Tony Luppino.

**TC:** Dessaro?

**SS:** Tony.

**TC:** Cancelmi.

**SS:** Yes.

**TC:** Angelo Musto.

**SS:** Angelo Musto.

**TC:** Any other names that I'm missing?

**SS:** Well, let's see. DeSensi. Tony DeSensi. Patsy DeSensi. Greco, Ralph Greco. Julian, Frank Julian.

**TC:** So, right there we have about 20 barbers, at least.

**SS:** When I was secretary-treasurer of the Barbers' Union, we had somewhere close to 40 to 50 people.

**TC:** Do you have any records to see the names?

**SS:** I don't have them anymore.

**TC:** Where were these shops located? Were they mainly in the downtown area?

**SS:** You have Marasco's down there [in Tylerdale]. Pat Bovine. Pat Bovine was a barber, right around the corner. Alberta. Two Albertas. Belcastro. Lou Belcastro and his son, Louis.

**TC:** So, if there were about 40 barbers around the time that you were secretary-treasurer of the Barbers' Union, about what decade would that have been? 70s or 80s?

**SS:** Well, I started when I was 55 so, I'd say '75.

**TC:** Obviously, there'd be enough business for all these barbers here.

**SS:** They all seemed to do all right.

**TC:** So, what is it about the Italian barbers? What do they bring to the occupation?

**SS:** What they bring to the occupation is a type of temperament that it takes to deal with the public. That's what it takes. You have Lou Reda down there?

**Male Voice:** Tony Mastrangelo.

**SS:** Tony? Can't remember that one.

**Male Voice:** Yeah, he did barbering for 50 years. John Tiano.

**SS:** John Tiano! Exactly.

**TC:** What about the artistry of barbering? You talked about the temperament. But what about the artistry? Do you think the

Italian barbers brought something to the art of the work?

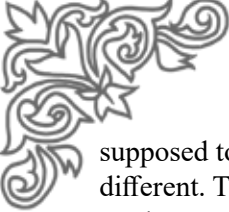
**SS:** It's almost born into you. I think it's just something that's there so you work at it. In my situation, my daughter's done that, too. You go to classes to really improve yourself. I know I did. I went to different classes. It's the temperament and the way you present. Guys used to come in and say "I tell Lou how I want my hair cut and he'd do what he wants anyway."

**TC:** Some people might say that Italians have brought to America a sense of being very fastidious about appearance and about grooming. We have a lot of Italian tailors, shoemakers, barbers and so on. Maybe it's a combination of that social sensibility with the artistic.

**SS:** It's a good point because without both of them, you wouldn't survive. You have to have both of them. I had good teachers. My dad was a good teacher. "This is the way you do it," and "this is the way it has to be done," and you worked.

I remember the first time I told my dad I was going to take a vacation. Three days. I was going to a barbering [event]. "What do you mean you're going to go on vacation?" I said, "Well, Dad, it's a barber thing." He said, "All those customers are going to leave and they're never going to come back."

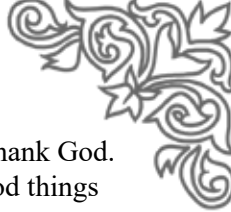
Well, I went, and thank God, the people came back. But you worked. You were there to work. That's what you were



---

supposed to do. You don't do anything different. That's why I keep referring to work.

she does a good job. Overall, thank God. I'm very fortunate. A lot of good things have happened to me.



**TC:** So, anything that you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

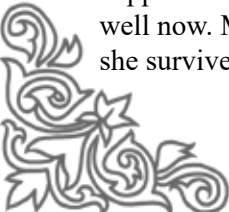
**SS:** I don't know what we haven't covered. As I told you before, I really feel blessed. Blessed with three lovely kids. Now, I'm blessed with grandchildren. Great-grandchildren. Misfortune several years ago. I lost my wife.

But, you know, it was a blessing when she went because she was very bad, very ill. I lost a granddaughter. She was involved with drugs. She died young, very young. My sons had some problems with that when they were growing up. That resolved itself.

It's strange how those things ... I remember when we did the drug prevention stuff and we were up at Lemoyne Center. Mrs. Griffin, she was one of the people involved with the Black community. Very nice lady. I was up front talking about this and that. This lady sitting beside her said, "How can he talk about that? What's he know about it?"

[Mrs. Griffin] looked at her and she said, "Both of his sons have been incarcerated because of drugs. He knows what he's talking about."

Things happen that you wish didn't happen. Thank God they both are doing well now. My daughter, I don't know how she survived all that but, God love her,



## **Aimono (Amon) Trapuzzano**

**Son of Annibale Trapuzzano and Maria Falvo Trapuzzano**



Aimono (Amon) Trapuzzano is the son of an Italian tailor who learned his trade while in an orphanage in Gizzeria, Catanzaro, Calabria. Amon's father Annibale and his uncle Theodore (also a tailor) emigrated in 1906 to McKees Rocks, where they had relatives, and found work in a hotel. When they heard that tailors were needed in Washington, they set up shop on the second floor of a building at 19. N. Main Street, and lived on the third floor.

The brothers' tailor shop quickly became a place for friends to gather while admiring the tailoring skills of the two brothers. "They were perfectionists," Amon said. "They could take a piece of material and make a beautiful suit."

Annibale and his wife Maria Falvo, also from Gizzeria, raised four children at 275 Grant Street, near Washington & Jefferson College. Annibale engaged the children in various aspects of tailoring as they were growing up. Two sons—Modesto and Theodore—carried on the tailoring tradition. Son Amon became an industrial designer and daughter Carmela, a teacher. More than 100 years later, the Trapuzzano name is synonymous with tailoring in the City of Washington. The tailor shop, located at 27 West Chestnut Street since the 1960s, is still in operation under the ownership of Annibale's grandson Joseph Trapuzzano and business partner Bob Johns.

August 2017



Annibale Trapuzzano, circa 1920



Trunk with belongings of Dana Flais, the wife of Modesto Trapuzzano, for her move to the U.S.

### Family Tree of Aimonio (Amon) Trapuzzano

**Amon's Parents:**

- Annibale Trapuzzano, b. 10-24-1887, Gizzeria, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. 5-3-1966, Washington
- Maria Falvo, b. 1-15-1900; d. 12-5-1990

**Annibale and Maria's place of marriage:**

- Gizzeria, Catanzaro, Calabria

**Annibale and Maria's Children:**

- Carmela I. Trapuzzano Davis, b. 7-15-1920, Washington; d. 5-31-2007; m. Earl Davis
- Modesto (Mod) Trapuzzano, b. 2-8-1925, Washington; d. 4-18-1989, Washington; m. Dana Flais, b. 10-19-1928, Cave' del Perdil, Udine, Italy; d. 4-17-1992, Washington
- Theodore (Ted) Trapuzzano, b. 6-6-1927; d. 6-3-2013, Washington; m. Mary Komec, b. 12-20-1923, d. 4-10-2012
- Aimonio (Amon) Trapuzzano, b. 3-27-1933, Washington; m. Frances Blake (b. 12-21-1935, Beckley, WV) on 6-15-1957

**Annibale's Brother:**

- Theodore Trapuzzano, b. Gizzeria, Catanzaro, Calabria; d. circa 1960; m. Angelica, b. Italy, d. Washington

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

August 27, 2017; 1:30 pm; Citizens Library, Washington

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Frank Trapuzzano (Amon's nephew)

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Would you spell your father's name?

**TC:** So, the oldest of Maria and Annibale's children is Carmela.

**Amon Trapuzzano:** Annibale. [spells it out] He changed his name. On my birth certificate, it was Hannibale. [spells it out].

**AT:** Yes, our sister Carmela.

**TC:** What was her married name?

**TC:** Did he go by that?

**AT:** Davis.

**TC:** Her date of birth and death?

**AT:** No, he went by Annibale.

**AT:** July 15, 1920 and May 31, 2007.

**Frank Trapuzzano:** In Italian, he pronounced it Annibale [Ann-e-bah-lay].

**TC:** When did your father die?

**TC:** What day was he born?

**AT:** May 3, 1966.

**AT:** 1887. October 24, 1887.

**TC:** And your mother?

**TC:** Where was he born?

**AT:** December 5, 1990.

**FT:** Gizzeria. In Calabria.

**TC:** The next brother is ...

**TC:** [To Amon] Your mother's name?

**AT:** Modesto.

**AT:** Maria Falvo.

**TC:** His birthday?

**TC:** What was her birthday?

**AT:** February 8, 1925.

**AT:** January 15, 1900.

**TC:** What day did he die?

**TC:** Where was she born?

**AT:** April 18, 1989.

**AT:** Italy. The same place.

**TC:** Then, Ted.

**AT:** June 6, 1927, and died on June 3, 2013.

**AT:** He's got dogs.

**TC:** Then, you were the last of the children?

**TC:** You said you were married. Are you divorced?

**AT:** Yes. I'm the last.

**AT:** Yeah. Her name was Frances. She was born December 27, 1935. Her maiden name was Blake.

**TC:** Did you have an Italian name?

**TC:** Did you get re-married?

**AT:** Yes, it's on my birth certificate. It's Aimonio.

**AT:** No. Once was enough. [laughter]

**TC:** But you've always gone by Amon?

**TC:** When did you get married?

**AT:** Yes.

**AT:** June the 15th, 1957.

**TC:** Was Annabelle, your brother Ted's daughter, named after her grandfather?

**FT:** Aunt Franny always tells me she blames me that my mother couldn't make it to the wedding. I was born the week before.

**AT:** Yes. She [Annabelle] is just like my father. It's eerie. I watch her write her name, she writes it just like my dad did.

**TC:** Where was Frances born?

**TC:** Did your sister Carmela have children?

**AT:** Beckley, West Virginia.

**FT:** No. She had cats.

**TC:** You're retired. What was your occupation?

**AT:** Dogs.

**AT:** Draftsman. Designer.

**TC:** Joe [Modesto's son] has children.

**TC:** What was Carmela's husband's name?

**FT:** He has three. Christopher is the oldest. Andrew is the second. Patrick is the youngest.

**FT:** Earl.

**AT:** My son Anthony has a daughter, Nicole. I don't know what her married name is now.

**TC:** [To Frank] Your Mom, Dana, what was her birthday?

**FT:** October 19, 1928.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**FT:** It's called Cave del Predil [Spells it out] Udine. It's the Northern Province. I don't know what "Cave" translates into.

**TC:** [To Frank] What day did your mom die?

**FT:** April 17, 1992.

**AT:** It was three years difference from your dad.

**FT:** Three years to the day. '92 was a leap year. She kept asking me what day it was the whole week before. It was almost like she knew. It was three years to the day.

**TC:** [To Amon] You're retired as a draftsman? Tell me a little more about the work that you did?

**AT:** Yeah. I was what they call a Pipe Draftsman. Pipe designer. We laid out plants. We laid out chemical plants. Renovated old ones too.

**TC:** Where did you get your training to do that?

**AT:** In Charleston, West Virginia, at Union Carbide.

**TC:** Was it a specialized program?

**AT:** Yeah. I went to school for it. When I was in Charleston, there were all kinds of chemical plants down there. I don't know how many they destroyed, but there's not

that many down there now. The one that I worked in is leveled off. It's not there any more.

**FT:** You worked for Carbide, right?

**AT:** Yeah. They leveled that place off. Tore it down. Dow Chemicals bought it and they just tore it down.

**TC:** How did you get interested in this career?

**AT:** I just fell into it. I went to school for it. I went to college. It's the University of Charleston now, but it used to be Morris-Harvey College. I didn't know what I was going to do. I started working on it. I liked what I was doing.

**TC:** Frank, what about you?

**FT:** I'm retired as well. Heating and air conditioning instructor at Western Area Career and Technology Center.

**TC:** What about military service?

**AT:** Yeah, I was in the service. 1953 to January of '55.

**TC:** What branch of the military?

**AT:** Army.

**TC:** Frank, were you in the military?

**FT:** No. I missed the draft by two days. They terminated the draft on May 30th [1973] and my birthday is June 2nd.

**AT:** All the guys on Grant Street said they were going to Europe. I thought I was going to Europe, too. I was the only one that went to the Pacific. [laughter]

**TC:** Was that the Korean War?

**AT:** Yeah. Mod and Ted and those guys were in WWII. My sister was, too. She was in the WAVES. In pictures, she's in a Navy uniform.

**TC:** What was your highest rank in the military?

**AT:** PFC [Private First Class].

**TC:** What about your brothers?

**FT:** My dad [Mod] was a Corporal when he came out. Ted was a long story. My Uncle Ted told me that he loved the Navy and he wanted to make a career out of it. But when he was in the Navy, my grandfather claimed a hardship case.

**AT:** He blamed me and my sister.

**FT:** He [Frank's grandfather] said he needed help running the business. But Uncle Ted loved the Navy. He was going to be a "Twenty Year Man."

**AT:** He had a tailor shop all set up in the ship.

**FT:** He was his own boss on the ship.

**AT:** Now, what rank he held, I don't know. My sister worked at the War Department in Washington, D.C.

**TC:** So all four siblings were in the military.

**AT:** Well, there were five of us [in the military] counting my dad. He was on the wrong side, though. We always teased him that he was on the loser side.

**TC:** Let's go back to your Dad, again. Did he have a nickname?

**AT:** Trap. We always called him "Trap."

**FT:** Everybody in the family called him "Pap."

**TC:** Did he [Annibale] have any brothers or sisters who came here to the US.?

**AT:** Yeah. He had a brother who came with him in 1906.

**TC:** What was his name?

**AT:** Theodore.

**TC:** 1906 is when he came here [U.S.].

**AT:** Yeah. Give or take one or two years.

**TC:** The two of them came together.

**AT:** They were orphans.

**TC:** Their parents over there had died?

**AT:** No, no, they just gave them up. I think that's just the way it was back in those days. My dad and my uncle, they were together. They had a shop together. Dad was about 19. I don't know how old

my uncle was. I think he was a couple years younger.

**TC:** Where did they enter the country?

**AT:** Ellis Island and then they went to McKees Rocks.

**TC:** Why did they go to McKees Rocks?

**AT:** Their sponsor was there, another Trapuzzano. I think he was Frank, but I'm not sure.

**TC:** So there were Trapuzzanos here in Western Pennsylvania?

**AT:** Just over in McKees Rocks.

**TC:** In their generation, do you remember any of their names? People born in the late 1800s.

**AT:** That was a funny family over there [in McKees Rocks]. Had two families here in the United States. Frank had his first wife, Pat. They had Pat, Joe, and Tony. Tony played football for W&J. Then he took a second wife. They had Frank, Leena, Chip. That's a big family over there.

**TC:** Those were all cousins?

**AT:** Yeah.

**TC:** So when your dad and his brother came here [to the U.S.], they first went to McKees Rocks because they had cousins there and they were already established?

**AT:** Yeah. Then they came to Washington. How they came to Washington? I don't know.

**FT:** My dad told me the story that Pap was working in a hotel in downtown Pittsburgh, and he fixed some slacks for some guy. He told Pap that there were no tailors in Washington. So Grandpap got on the streetcar, everything he had was in one bag, and he came to Washington because there were no tailors in Washington. I don't know how much truth there is to the story or not.

**TC:** [To Amon] Let's go back to your dad and his brother when they were kids in Italy. Their parents could not take care of them anymore. How long were they on their own? How young were they?

**AT:** When they were put in the orphanage? I don't know how young they were. My dad told me one time that he was 19 when he came over here. He had fifty cents in his pocket when he hit Pittsburgh. Then, when they came to Washington, they went into business themselves.

**TC:** They were in an orphanage in Italy, but did they have other brothers and sisters?

**AT:** Yeah. They had, I think it was, a half brother—Amon. That's who I was named after.

**TC:** Did they ever get to see him again?

**AT:** They were getting ready to bring him

over. They were going to sponsor him to come over. He passed away over there. He was really young.

**TC:** [To Amon] Your dad married your mom in Italy?

**AT:** Yeah.

**TC:** They had Carmela over there?

**AT:** Yeah.

**TC:** When your dad came here with Theodore, did your mother stay back in Italy?

**AT:** My uncle Ted was drafted in the United States Army during World War I. My dad was drafted by the Italian army. The war ended in 1918. He married my mother over there between 1918 and 1920. He came back to the United States around 1921. My mother stayed back there. She didn't come with him. He came back by himself. After about 1922, he got my mom back here to the United States, my sister Carmela and my mom.

**TC:** [To Amon] Your dad was drafted by the Italian Army and Theodore was drafted by the U.S. Army.

**AT:** Yeah.

**FT:** I got the story on that from my cousin Ted. My grandfather went back to fight in the Italian Army because neither [he nor his brother] had gotten citizenship yet. [President Woodrow] Wilson had developed a program that if you didn't

have naturalized citizenship, you could automatically become a U.S. citizen if you went into the army. So Theodore went into the army to get his U.S. citizenship.

**AT:** My father went back to Italy before the war started, though. That had to be back in 1913. The war started in 1914. So between 1913 and 1914, he went back to Italy. That's when he got drafted into the Italian Army.

**TC:** [To Amon] Did your dad receive his citizenship later?

**AT:** Yeah. I assume.

**TC:** Do you know how your mother and father met?

**AT:** No. I have no idea. That could've been an arranged marriage.

**FT:** In other words, it was a predetermined match.

**TC:** Theodore and Annibale, how did they learn their tailoring skills?

**AT:** They learned over in Italy. In the orphanage.

**FT:** In the school system in Italy, you follow an educational track for business or you follow a trade guild. They were in the area where they had trade guilds.

**TC:** In a way, being in the orphanage worked to their benefit.

**AT:** Yeah. They had been running the streets.

**TC:** What was their shop in Washington called?

**AT:** Trapuzzano Brothers, I guess.

**TC:** Where was their first shop?

**AT:** 19 North Main Street. In fact, the building is still there.

**TC:** So, when they came here, they lived in the same building that they worked in?

**AT:** I think they both lived there at the time. Then, they both got married. I don't know who got married first. Then they bought a house on Grant Street.

**FT:** They both lived in that house while they were building a duplex [across the street].

**AT:** One side of the duplex was supposed to be for my uncle and the other side for my dad. But they had a falling out. So my uncle took another house on the other side of the garage. My dad stayed in the duplex. As for the arrangements they had, I don't know. I don't think I was born yet.

**FT:** The house was built in 1928. We, to this day, don't know what happened between the two of them.

**TC:** Did Theodore have a nickname?

**AT:** I think they called him Trap or Ted.

**TC:** What was Theodore's wife's name?

**AT:** Angelica.

**TC:** Was she born in Italy?

**AT:** Yeah. She was a Trapuzzano.

**TC:** A cousin of some kind. They had children?

**AT:** Yeah. Hannibal. Benny. Camillo. Teddy.

**TC:** Hannibal's the oldest?

**AT:** Yeah. Neb. He went by Neb. [spells it out].

**TC:** Was Angelica from the same town?

**AT:** Yeah, they all were.

**TC:** [To Amon] When your father moved into the duplex on Grant Street, which side of the house did he live in?

**FT:** 275. The left hand side.

**TC:** Who lived on the right hand side?

**FT:** I think he rented it out.

**AT:** He rented it. They'd planned on living side by side. It didn't work out. But actually, in a way they did. He just lived next door to him.

**FT:** On the other side of the garage.

**TC:** Were they mad at each other for a long time?

**AT:** Oh yeah, a real long time. When Frank [their sponsor] died, over in

Pittsburgh, my dad didn't have a car, but Uncle Ted had a car. They were going to go to the funeral. They hadn't been talking to each other for years. Everybody on Grant Street sat outside to see what was going to happen. So my dad got into the car with my uncle and they went over to Pittsburgh. That's when they started talking again. I forget what year that was.

**FT:** Grandpap never learned how to drive.

**AT:** He'd walk or take a taxi cab. That was his favorite—taking a taxi cab. He liked that.

**TC:** They were mad at each other for awhile, but they worked together?

**AT:** No, they split their business up, too.

**FT:** They were both on Main Street.

**AT:** On the same block. It had to be the early forties. Before [WWII].

**TC:** Did they love tailoring?

**AT:** They had to like their craft because they worked seven days a week. I remember when my dad paid the house off, it was during [WWII], he burned the mortgage note. It was 1945, '46. He finally had that paid off.

**TC:** That had to be right around the same time that your brother Ted came back from the Navy. Tell me that story. Your father called him back home.

**AT:** Yeah. At that time, my sister and I were doing all the writing [of letters]. Whatever we had to do to get him back. My dad had a lawyer. I don't know who it was, but he pulled some strings. I don't know how it happened. He went on a hardship case.

**FT:** He tried to get [my uncle Ted] a deferment. He had left school to go to the service, didn't he?

**AT:** Yeah. Ted never finished high school.

**FT:** My father [Mod] went in in '43 so I think my uncle Ted went in in '44. My father enlisted. He enlisted with Pete Polites. Pete said he couldn't swim so he should join the Army. Then they ended up on the boat going into Anzio. [laughter]

**TC:** [To Amon] It sounds like your dad did not approve of Ted enlisting.

**AT:** My dad? No, he wasn't in favor of that! My dad didn't like that at all. Ted got mad at me and Carmela because he thought we were ram-rodding the whole thing.

**TC:** Because you were writing the letters!

**AT:** We were doing what my dad wanted us to do. During the war, I did all the writing for the letters. They had those "V Mails." They sent back and ...

**FT:** I have those. My dad saved all of his, too.

**AT:** Is that right?

**FT:** There's a stack of them [gestures as to the size] this big.

**TC:** So Ted had to come back. He had to leave the Navy.

**FT:** Yeah. He was coerced. He [Amon] got the blame for it. It was my grandfather's doing.

**AT:** My dad had Lindy Cancelmi coming up to the shop. My dad was sick. She came in and ran the shop for him. I don't know what happened there, but he said, "We gotta get Ted back here." [laughter]

**TC:** [To Amon] It sounds like your dad was a pretty strong person. Strong-willed.

**AT:** Yeah. It had to be his way or the highway. [laughter]

**FT:** Just to share a story: My father [Mod] told me that he and my uncle were working at the shop. They got a hundred dollars a month. One year they borrowed your [Amon's] car because neither one of them had a car. My uncle Amon was the only one who had a car. My father took Amon's car and went to Atlantic City for a week. When he got back, my uncle Ted took his car and went to Atlantic City for a week. At the end of the month, my grandfather gave them 75 dollars because they had taken a week off. He said, "You only worked three weeks. You only get paid for three weeks." So that's the kind of will he had.

**AT:** He worked out of his pocket. He didn't want anybody taking care of his

money. They got a cash register when they moved down on Chestnut Street. A new store and they had a Coke machine there. Well, all the policemen used to come in to the shop. They would loaf there. Get a Coke there. They would need change for the Coke machine and they would go to the cash register there and help themselves.

That burned my dad up that they would go into the cash register and make change. They were good friends of ours, too, to begin with. My dad said, "That's the biggest prostitute in Washington County—that cash register!" [laughter]

**TC:** On West Chestnut Street, was that their second place? What's the address?

**FT:** Yeah, 27 West Chestnut Street

**TC:** Why did they move to that location?

**AT:** They bought that building. See, they were renting where they were, upstairs [on Main Street], on the second level. They had fire escapes going up the sides. They got into the tuxedo business and made-to-measure. Then doing work for different stores in town. My dad used to work up there until eleven o'clock on Saturday nights. That's when all the stores stayed open uptown.

**FT:** He never took a vacation.

**AT:** No! I took them on their first vacation. My dad got sick when he came back. He blamed it on me. No more vacations, he told me. He told my

mother, "If you want to go, go. I ain't going no more!" [laughter]

**FT:** Well, Grandma never went on vacation with us until Grandpap passed away.

**TC:** So, the two brothers, they got trained in Italy to be tailors. They came here [to the US]. They picked it right back up. They built a business. It sounds like your dad was a good businessman.

**AT:** He was.

**TC:** Are there some stories you would like to recall?

**AT:** I don't know whether you want to print it or not, but I'll tell you anyways. A lot of stores around here were owned by Jewish people. At the end of the month, that's when the stores would pay my dad. Say the bill was 200 dollars. They would make a check out for 150 dollars. My dad wouldn't say anything. He'd say, "No, no. Just keep quiet." Back then there were probably about 14 different tailors in town. It was almost like a union. This went on for years.

I kept the books for my dad from the time I was 10 or 11 years old. Even during the war, I was keeping the books. Then, Mod and Ted came back from the service. They were still working out of the first shop on Main Street. So it was either Ted or Mod, one of the two, when the first month's bill came for Jack Hart, say like it was a 200 dollar bill, they cut a check for 150 dollars.

Well, they'd been doing this for years. So, either Mod or Ted went back up and handed them the check and said, "The bill's 200 dollars. That's what you're gonna pay—200 dollars."

They didn't like that too well. "Well, we'll change and go to somebody else!" [Mod and Ted] said, "Go ahead and go to somebody else!" But, I mean, all those years that they shorted my dad, I don't know how much he was in.

**TC:** That speaks to how did people make their way. The Italians were coming into an area where other ethnic groups are more established. How did our Italian ancestors make their way? How did they get established? How did they make relationships with people so that they could thrive? That sounds like a good example of how your dad decided to just let it go because the bigger idea was keeping the client.

**TC:** What was your dad's relationship with other Italians who were doing different things? Some of them had grocery stores. My mother's dad was an appliance salesman up on Main Street. Different people doing different things—like working in the glass factories. What do you remember about your dad and your mom, getting along with other people—whether it was other Italians or trying to make their way in their new life?

**AT:** My dad had the first shop and he had a lot of customers come in there. Plus, he had a lot of old timers. When I say "old

timers,” I mean, like my dad. They lived up there. Angel Moyer. John Tiano, Ralph Posa, and Mr. DeRosa.

**FT:** John Tiano never learned to read or write but he always bought a newspaper first thing in the morning and walked around with it under his arm so nobody would know he was illiterate. But he had a [good] mind.

He told my grandfather—and at that time he could have bought it for about a quarter an acre—that there was farmland that went from Chestnut Street over to Route 19. That whole area, where the Franklin Mall is and those houses, there was nothing there and he could’ve had it for a quarter an acre. He told my grandfather that the property was going to be worth a lot of money and my grandfather thought he was stupid.

**AT:** My cousin [Dominic] had this mine down in Langloth.

**FT:** They were buying into the mine.

**AT:** My dad helped. He lent them some money to get the mine. They were up at the shop at that time. They had the map there of the mine. John Tiano got a look at the map and he said, “Don’t buy this mine. The mine’s full of water.”

My cousin [Dominic] said, “What do you know? You can’t even read and write and you’re looking at a map and telling me it’s under water.” He said, “I’m telling you—it’s under water. Don’t buy that thing!” Well, they bought it. Guess what?

It was under water.

**FT:** It wasn’t even two years and they filed for bankruptcy.

**TC:** That’s another example of how people made their way. When a lot of Italians came here [to the U.S.] they didn’t read or write. They had to use their intelligence to find other ways to understand. Obviously, he [Tiano] could read a map and understand things in other ways besides written words.

**FT:** I think it was more communal because they all looked out for each other.

**TC:** Amon, is that what you remember about those days? You mentioned men who were sort of loafing at the tailor shop.

**AT:** It’s like a social gathering.

**TC:** There’s a sense that the tailor shop was a social place.

**AT:** Yeah.

**FT:** Yeah, there was always somebody in there.

**AT:** There was one policeman, when the shop was on Main Street, a Swede. On Saturday night, he’d come up to the shop and sleep for about three hours. He’d say, “Wake me up when nine o’clock comes.” So, he’d go down and direct traffic. [laughter] One night we were up there and we said, “Hey, Swede, it’s time to go down to the street.” He walked on down

there. He had to direct traffic on Main and Chestnut Street. They had a stoplight but they still had to direct traffic. There he was, out there directing traffic, he didn't have his gun on or nothing. He left it up in the shop! We had to take the gun down to him. [laughter] Back then, everybody was easy. You didn't see any fights or anything. Well, fights, but nothing serious.

**TC:** Because they were in the center of the town, I wonder if that didn't lend itself to people just gathering. Getting to know a vast number of people.

**FT:** My father told me at one time, when they moved to the store to Chestnut Street, that my grandfather was cutting material, sewing, whatever, and he just stopped. My father asked him what was wrong and he said they'd drugged him or hypnotized him. "I didn't want to move down here," he said.

His problem was, the way the tables were and the way the shop was configured, he couldn't see anything. At the old place on Main Street, he had his work table right by the window. He could work and see everything that was going on out on Main Street. He'd be working and he could wave at somebody or when the windows were open, he could talk up and down through the windows.

My father [Mod] said that he was all excited when they moved in the new building because it was a new place. But after awhile, he missed that contact because he couldn't yell out the window at somebody.

**AT:** He was proud to open that building though!

**FT:** Oh, yeah.

**AT:** That was his pride and joy after he got down there. My dad used to work until eleven o'clock. That's when they stayed open until nine o'clock. Jack Hart brought pants down to be fixed. He wanted them right away. He wanted to wait for it. My dad got mad. It was summertime and the window was open. He said, "I ain't gonna fix these!" He threw it and they went out the window. [laughter] That guy had to run down the stairs to get the pants. But he brought it back up.

**TC:** You said there were 10 or 12 tailors. Your dad and uncle were the first.

**AT:** Yeah. They might have been first or second.

**TC:** But they were needed because there weren't enough. Were some of the other tailors Italian?

**AT:** Yeah, they were all Italian.

**TC:** Do you remember any of the names?

**AT:** Yeah. Ruffa was one of them. DeRosa was another. Tracanna.

**FT:** He was down on Chestnut Street, too.

**AT:** Yeah, he [Tracanna] was upstairs on the second floor.

**TC:** You said it was like a union. They

were a community of craftsmen. Did they talk to each other?

**AT:** Oh, yeah.

**TC:** Did they exchange techniques?

**FT:** They probably all belonged to the lodge, too.

**AT:** Oh yeah! The Sons of Italy.

**TC:** On Maiden Street?

**AT:** Yeah. Now, Tracanna had a shop in the front of the Sons of Italy back then, too. He worked out of his house, too.

**TC:** Did a lot of Italians use your dad's services or was it mainly non-Italian customers?

**AT:** Non-Italians went there. He did jobs for other stores in town. Caldwell's. Jack Hart's. The Hub and there was Bell Sportswear, Sol Mintz.

**TC:** There was plenty of work.

**AT:** Oh yeah.

**FT:** Somebody actually did a Google search on my grandfather's name. It came up. It was probably in the early '30s. It was a half-page newspaper article. I think it was Hal Lewis. But they had my grandfather's picture in there because he was one of the tailors they had under contract. In other words, Hal Lewis had an ad in the paper and it said these are the people who are doing our tailoring. My

grandfather and four or five others. They actually published their pictures in the paper.

**AT:** Hal Lewis? That was a women's shop.

**FT:** Yeah. When I saw his pictures, I thought it was going to be like he was advertising.

**TC:** There's a certain prestige to the craft. Italian tailoring would be something that would say that [a store has] excellent tailors who learned their craft in Italy. It kind of stood in opposition to the discrimination that other people may have been experiencing in some other professions around the city. The tailors came with skills and that made a difference for them. What other words would you use to describe you dad?

**AT:** Well, if he had an idea, it was his idea and he stuck to it. When he'd tell you something, it had to be this way. He was a hard teacher. I don't know how Mod and Ted put up with him. I got a lot of backhands. [laughter] I think after a while, he said, "I don't want you in here."

**TC:** Did he start them with tailoring from a young age?

**AT:** Oh, yeah. Ted and Mod started at a young age. Ted could cut out a suit when he was thirteen years old.

**FT:** Uncle Ted told me this story [about an experience after the war]. There's a certificate from a technical school in New

York City. It was to be a Master Designer. I actually found it in a trunk down in the basement. It was a one month, modified course. My father was going to do women's clothes and Uncle Ted was going to do men's clothes. So my father got on a train, went up to the school, and after two weeks, they sent him home with a certificate. They said, "We can't teach him anything [because he knows everything we are teaching]." [laughter] Then it came to be my uncle's turn. He got on a train. He went to New York and it was the same deal.

**AT:** He taught there for a couple weeks before he came home.

**FT:** Is that right? They basically told him the skills we're going to teach you, you already have. Here's your certificate. Go back home. My grandfather had started them way young. They already had the skills that they'd have learned at this technical school in New York. They'd already had it when they'd gone up there.

**AT:** Oh, my dad was tough to work for! He was a perfectionist.

**TC:** How would he describe what makes a good tailor?

**AT:** Perfection. Mod and Ted are both perfectionists. My dad was up until he got real old. That's how he taught it. You had to be perfect.

**TC:** He was trying to teach you as well.

**AT:** Yeah. I couldn't make it. I had a pair

of pants. I marked it. I made a mistake on them. We didn't have electric irons back then. We had irons that you put on the stove. We didn't have a big presser or anything. I went to take the iron and get the chalk out of it. I put the iron on the pants and it left an iron mark on there. Oh, man! My dad chased me around. [laughter] He said, "Get the hell out of here!"

**FT:** My Aunt Carmela, Uncle Amon, Uncle Ted and my father all went to public school. But my Aunt Carmela also went to Catholic school. When they had the store on Main Street, they had a gas stove to heat the irons up. I remember Aunt Carmela telling me that she had a key to the store. Because she had to go to school early, she had to get the irons hot so that when my grandfather finished his breakfast and [went] up there, he could start working right away. Now, she's eight or nine years old? She was going to Immaculate Conception, but her job was to heat the irons.

**TC:** That also speaks to the importance of the family in making the business a success.

**FT:** Yeah.

**TC:** For a good good tailor, there's a very small margin of error. You're always under the pressure of that. Does a good tailor also have to have a good sense of design?

**AT:** Oh yeah.

**FT:** I was only about nine or ten when my

grandfather passed away, but I can still vividly remember my father and Uncle Ted always saying how upset they were if they were somewhere and they saw someone wearing something that was not a good fit. In other words, even if it wasn't something they tailored. It could be a perfect stranger. They'd look at the sleeves on his jacket and they would talk about [what was wrong with it] for ten minutes. They could be at a wedding or something and they would be talking about someone else's clothes. "You know, we could fix that!" It never turned off.

**AT:** I still do that! I'm not a tailor and I can still look at somebody and say, "That's not right!"

**FT:** Yeah.

**AT:** Look at your collar up there. Gotta fix your collar. Some other people wouldn't see that, but I've been around enough to know.

**FT:** I can't get a good fit in anything off the rack. Every year or two, I get custom made shirts. I took two of my nephews up there and they said, "I can go to the mall and get this." I said, "No, you can't go to the mall and get this. This is designed for you and it's going to fit." I feel more comfortable in it, and it looks better, too. You can tell the difference in something that's tailor-made.

My nephew got married two years ago and he didn't even have a suit for the rehearsal dinner. He was wearing the same suit that he had in high school. So I

took him up and your brother [Patsy Calabro] made him a suit. He looked better in the suit at the rehearsal dinner than he did in the tuxedo at the wedding.

**AT:** Yeah. Who's this?

**FT:** Patrick got married. Basically, a tuxedo is off the rack. You're going to get something—they're not going to tailor the sleeves or the pants as long as they're close. I guess Grandpap just instilled that in them from early on. From what my dad told me about my grandfather, there was no margin of error. You either did it right or if you didn't do it right, you were going to do it again.

**TC:** [To Amon] It's interesting that your dad and his brother fell into tailoring. Did they have a choice when they were choosing that profession when they were in the orphanage? Look at all the generations of all of you and how visual you are. How you can look at someone and see something doesn't fit right.

**AT:** Yeah.

**TC:** Do you ever ask yourself whether that's from heredity or is a century of paying attention to the art of tailoring?

**AT:** It's a combination. We get to talking every once in a while. Somebody will say, "You know out in West End back in '42, '43 ..." I'll say, "All I know is Grant Street and Main Street. We weren't allowed to go any further than that!" [laughter] I don't know what was out in West End. I heard about it. I heard about Tylerdale.

**TC:** Because the business was all-consuming?

**AT:** Yeah, it was up on Main Street.

**TC:** It was something your family was involved in from morning until night.

**AT:** Oh, we were all involved in it. I got the worst end of it. You ever see spittoons? I had to clean those out every week! [laughter] I had to mop the floor. I'm only about ten or eleven years old then. That was the worst part. I hated cleaning those spittoons. With all those guys standing around, they're spitting in there, smoking cigars, dropping their cigarettes. It was nasty.

**FT:** Wash High used to be grades 8 to 12. But when you were in 8th grade, as soon as school let out, we went to the store. We stayed until 5, went home, and ate dinner. Mondays and Fridays we went back until 9. Then we worked on Saturdays. As soon as we started high school that was a routine and Mary Ann, Toni and Annabelle [Trapuzzano] [Frank's cousins] did the same. [My brother] Joe and I got lucky since we were the boys. On Sundays, after we had gone to church and we had eaten the early meal at noon, we were on mop detail. But we didn't have the spittoons. [laughter]

**AT:** Good thing!

**FT:** It was a carryover. What he went through, 20 years later, is what my

brother and I went through. Sort of like, "It's your turn. Pass the torch."

**TC:** Frank, did anybody in your generation go into tailoring?

**FT:** Not really. By the time my brother got involved in the business, it was mainly tuxedos and the uniforms. He got into doing a little bit of alterations here and there. My brother could never fathom doing the things my grandfather, uncle, and my father did to make a living. To take a swatch of material and four days later, it's a three-piece suit. No.

**AT:** Mod and Ted were like my dad. They couldn't teach anybody [to do what they did]. When I came back up here to go work with them up here, I went out on the road selling police uniforms. I didn't know how to measure somebody. I'd never had to measure anybody. I made a sale and I told them, "Somebody's going to have to go down with me. I'd never measured anybody." They said, "No, you're going to have to learn."

I practiced on them. Every time I took a measurement, I said, "Fifteen inches?" They'd say, "No, that's not right." "Fifteen and a half?" "No, that's not right."

[I'd say], "What is it? What am I doing wrong?" [They'd say], "Well, you'll just have to work it out and find out what you're doing wrong."

I got disgusted and said I'd do it some way. I made the sale. I went down and measured everybody up. Evidently, I

messed up one's guy's measurements. I told them that they messed it up.

**FT:** When they used to do the tuxedos, when a customer came in, there was a small index card. They would put everybody's measurements down. My grandfather's handwriting looked like calligraphy. I don't know whether he was trained like that or it came to him naturally. My handwriting is terrible. I try to print something if I have to write something. My father had a beautiful signature, but his writing was terrible. My uncle Ted was the same way. They would write down all the measurements and we would have to get all the cards to prepare the tuxedos. Well, when the tuxedos came out, was it a 34-inch pants or was it a 38-inch pants. We couldn't read it.

It was our fault because we didn't ask what it was. Some weekends, we had 300 tuxedos that went out. There were five of us in the back. "Is this a five or is this a seven?" We were afraid to go up. They were teaching you the way they were taught.

**TC:** It's intimidating.

**FT:** A little bit.

**AT:** Yeah.

**TC:** It's an art and in a sense couldn't be taught. They're doing it by feel. It isn't what the measuring tape says; it's what they know. Where to place it. That kind of thing.

**FT:** My uncle Ted, he had one sewing machine up there that nobody was allowed to use. The reason for that, and I don't know how he did it, but he had taken the original motor for the sewing machine off and he found another motor that ran at three times the normal speed. Whenever he was doing a pair of slacks or whatever, he'd buzz through in a couple seconds. If you weren't careful, it would basically take your hands in it. So, I mean, we did a few things here and there around the store, but stay away from that machine because that was his. He knew that machine, like you were saying, having a feel for it. My father didn't even use it.

**TC:** What's going on with the shop now? Who owns it?

**FT:** My brother and Bob Johns are partners. They own it jointly now.

**TC:** They're keeping the name, of course.

**FT:** Right, but, it's strictly just uniforms.

**TC:** Amon, I didn't ask you about your mother. What was your mother like?

**AT:** She was a workaholic, too. We knew what we were going to eat on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We had the same thing every week. Monday, we had chicken noodle soup. Thursday, we had pasta.

**FT:** You had soup on Monday because that's the day she did laundry, too.

**AT:** Yeah.

**FT:** She could have the soup going while she was doing laundry. When we were kids even, she had the soup on while she was going up and down doing the laundry.

**AT:** We had veal chops on Tuesday. Friday was fish. I never ate fish. Saturday was when she did all her baking and everything. She baked bread and baked pies and everything. Sunday we had spaghetti and the whole ten yards and everything. That's what I grew up on.

When I went in the service, I didn't know what SOS was. I thought, "Who would eat SOS? I ain't eatin' this stuff!" I was in the service for two weeks and wound up in the hospital. I was starving myself. The doctor looked at me and said, "I'm going to tell you what, you got two things to do. You're going to eat or you're going to die. Pick one." [laughter] I had to go back to the barracks there and start eating that SOS. I liked that SOS. That's ground beef, gravy. I got to like it.

In the service, we had eggs in the morning. When I grew up, we never had eggs in the morning. Only on Fridays. When I went to school, we had toast and coffee. That's what our breakfast was. One boy at school, Jimmy, he ate the same thing I did for breakfast [toast and coffee]. He got embarrassed when the teacher would ask, "What did you have for breakfast?" The other kids would say, "Well, we had bacon and eggs and toast," and when they came to him, he'd say,

"Oh, we had eggs!" The toast was hard. Hard bread. [laughs]

**TC:** Frank, what do you remember about your grandmother?

**FT:** You hate to stereotype, but my grandmother was a stereotypical, Italian grandmother. Nothing bothered her. She was about 4'-6", 4'-7". Very short. She was a beautiful woman, but when I was growing up, she was built like a Weeble. She was either in the kitchen, in the garden, doing laundry or she had her chair in the living room and she was always knitting or crocheting. One of the two. All the stereotypes you could say about her, she nailed it right there. My dad always told the story (and we don't know if it was true or not) but they had midwives until the late '40s, early '50s. He told the story about when Grandma was pregnant with you [Amon]. He said my grandmother got up in the morning, came downstairs, made breakfast, went back upstairs with the midwife, delivered Uncle Amon, came down and cleared the table. [laughter]

**AT:** The midwife was Julia Posa. She and her husband, Ralph, were my godfather and godmother. He looked like Hop-a-long Cassidy. He had gray hair from the time I knew him. Good-looking guy. The whole family was good looking. He was a brick layer.

**FT:** They lived two blocks from 275 [Grant]. It's the same house. We don't know if whoever built it used the same plans, or what, but it's the same house.



## **John Louis West Jr., Linda West Dickson, Shirley Sorge Blue, Norma West, and Bill West**

**Great-grandchildren of Donato Alfano West and Louisa Turano Alfano West**





This is an interview with five members of a large Italian American family of Washington. The interviewees are descendants of two brothers who emigrated permanently to the U.S. from Spezzana della Sila Grande, Consenza, Calabria, in 1902. The Alfano brothers—James (“Yincinro” on ship manifest), age 16, and Santo, 18—arrived in New York City, then went to Providence, Rhode Island, where they had relatives and, according to the ship manifest, had lived as children from 1889 to 1895. The West family today still has relatives in Providence.

The brothers found work with the railroad and around 1905 ended up in Washington, when the railroad they worked for ran out of money. In Washington, the brothers discovered work opportunities and decided to stay.

The brothers settled in the West End of the city, not far from the Hazel Atlas #2 glass factory, where Santo found work that continued for 40 years. James opened a neighborhood grocery store. Both brothers changed their last name to “West,” so as to better establish themselves as new Americans. Their ability to speak English and to understand the pathways to success in their new country served them well.

The brothers were active in creating “chain migration” from Spezzano della Sila Grande to Washington. Having settled in Washington, the brothers returned to their Italian hometown to bring their parents (Donato and Louisa Alfano) and their five siblings (Peter, Mary, Mike, Louis, John) here. All took the new surname “West.” The brothers



also helped other people from Spezzana Della Sila Grande emigrate to Washington and find jobs.

Santo married a woman from Spezzana della Sila Grande, Teresa Astorino, in Washington in 1909. James married Anna Earliwine (also spelled “Earlywine”) from Elm Grove, WV, in 1907.

Santo, James, and most of their siblings raised families in Washington. In time, the West clan grew to become one of the largest in Washington. Family members’ residences and the West neighborhood grocery store were all located near the intersection of Hayes Avenue and Fayette Street in the West End.

Interviewees John L. and Linda West (siblings), Shirley Blue, and Norma West are the grandchildren of James “Jim” (Alfano) West. Interviewee Bill West is the grandson of Santo “Sandy” (Alfano) West. In an interesting turn of events, one of the younger members of the family today, Bill West’s son Marc Joseph West, a chef, has reclaimed the name Alfano.

May 2017



Louis West, Jim West, Mary West, Anna Earliwine West,  
late 1910s



Louis West, the seventh child of Donato and Louisa Turano Alfano West, performed in Washington's Harold Ballentyne Orchestra. Louis is at far left.



## Family Tree of Siblings John L. West Jr. and Linda West Dickson

**John L. and Linda's Father:**

- John Louis (Lou) West, Sr., b. 1923, Washington; d. 2007, Washington

**John L. and Linda's Mother:**

- Theresa Scalzo, b. 1919, McKeesport, PA

**John Louis (Lou) Sr. and Theresa's date and place of marriage:**

- 5-1-1946, Washington

**John Louis (Lou) Sr. and Theresa's Children:**

- John L. West, Jr., b. 4-19-1948, Washington; m. Mary Ellen Bebout, b. 1956, Washington
- Linda West, b. 2-8-1950, Washington; m. Robert Garey Dickson, b. 4-26-1950, Washington
- Dennis West, b. 3-16-1956, Washington

**Paternal Grandparents:**

- James "Jim" (Alfano) West, b. 6-23-1886, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria, Italy; d. 3-3-1976, Washington
- Anna (Annie) Earliwine (also Earlywine), b. 4-1-1888, Elm Grove, WV; d. 9-8-1988, Washington

**Jim and Anna's date of marriage:**

- 2-25-1907

**Jim and Anna's Children:**

- Louise West, b. 6-3-1908, Washington; d. 9-2-1984, Washington; m. Ed Sorge, b. 6-18-1908, d. 2-24-1987
- Frank West, m. Frances
- Joseph West, m. Virginia
- John Louis (Lou) West Sr., b. 1923, Washington, d. 2007; m. Theresa Scalzo, b. 1919, McKeesport, PA

**Paternal Great-Grandparents:**

- Donato Alfano West, b. Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. circa 1918, Washington
- Louisa Turano, b. Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 8-25-1939, Washington

**Donato and Louisa's Children:**

- Santo (Sandy) (Alfano) West, b. 10-18-1883, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 8-8-1952; became U.S. citizen 1-25-1939; m. Teresa Astorino, b. 1888, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 1953, Washington
- James (Jim) (Alfano) West, b. 6-23-1886, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria, Italy; d. 3-3-1988, Washington, m. Anna (Annie) Earliwine (also Earlywine) b. 4-1-1888, Elm Grove, WV, d. 9-8-1988, Washington
- Joseph (Joe) West
- Peter West, m. Rose
- Mary West
- Mike West, m. Lina Van Dine
- Louis West, m. Florence Alfano
- John West, m. Florence



### Family Tree of Shirley Sorge Blue

**Shirley's Father:**

- Edward Sorge, b. 6-18-1908, Washington; d. 2-24-1987, Washington

**Shirley's Mother:**

- Louise West Sorge, b. 6-3-1908, Washington; d. 9-2-1984, Washington

**Shirley's Spouse:**

- James L. Blue, b. 3-18-1930, d. 6-26-2000, Washington

**Maternal Grandparents**

- James "Jim" (Alfano) West, b. 6-23-1886, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria, Italy; d. 3-3-1976, Washington
- Anna (Annie) Earliwine (also Earlywine), b. 4-1-1888, Elm Grove, WV; d. 9-8-1988, Washington

### Family Tree of Norma West

**Norma's Father:**

- Frank West, b. Washington

**Norma's Mother:**

- Frances

**Norma's Spouse:**

- Jack Barker

**Norma's Brother:**

- James F. West, b. 12-11-1931, d. 10-31-2006, m. Connie

**Paternal Grandparents**

- James "Jim" (Alfano) West, b. 6-23-1886, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria, Italy; d. 3-3-1976, Washington
- Anna (Annie) Earliwine (also Earlywine), b. 4-1-1888, Elm Grove, WV; d. 9-8-1988, Washington

## Family Tree of Bill West

### **Bill's Father:**

- John L. West, b. 2-26-1923, Washington

### **Bill's Mother:**

- Ruth Gregosky, b. 12-13-1925, Meadowlands, PA

### **John L. and Ruth's Children**

- Bill West, b. 6-4-1948; m. Betsy (b. 12-21-1950, Washington) on 5-8-1970
- Marsha Ann West, b. 3-2-1953, m. — Deeb

### **Paternal Grandparents:**

- Santo "Sandy" (Alfano) West, b. 10-18-1883, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 8-8-1952; became U.S. citizen 1-25-1939
- Teresa Astorino, b. 1888, Spezzana della Sila Grande, Cosenza, Calabria; d. 1953, Washington

### **Santo and Teresa's date and place of marriage:**

- 1909, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Washington

### **Santo and Teresa's Children:**

- Donald, b. 9-13-1910; d. Washington; m. Jennie Ardeno
- Samuel, b. 1-3-1912; d. Washington; m. Mary Rosa
- Mary, b. 5-3-1913; d. Washington; m. William Howden
- Pasquale (Patsy), b. 1-3-1921; d. Washington; m. Alice Quatrone
- Angeline (Angie), b. 1-3-1921; d. Washington; m. Samuel Livolsi
- John L., b. 2-26-1923; d. Washington; m. Ruth Gregosky, b. 12-13-1925, Meadowlands, PA
- William, b. 4-5-1927; d. 10-2-1929

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

May 22, 2017; 1:00 pm; Citizens Library

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Also Present:** Aaron Lytton, photographer

**Transcriber:** Tina Calabro

**Editor:** Liz Terek

**Tina Calabro:** I am interviewing five members of the West family about their experiences growing up as Italian Americans in Washington, PA. We're going to start with Bill. What is your date of birth?

**Bill West:** 6-4-1948.

**TC:** Where were you born?

**BW:** In Washington.

**TC:** Let's move on to Norma. Your date of birth?

**Norma West:** 8-26-1939.

**TC:** Where were you born?

**NW:** In Washington.

**TC:** Shirley?

**Shirley Blue:** Shirley Sorge Blue. My mother was a West. She married a Sorge and now I'm a Blue.

**TC:** OK. Linda. Your date of birth?

**Linda Dickson:** February 1950.

**TC:** The place?

**LD:** I was born in Washington.

**TC:** John, your date of birth?

**John L. West Jr.:** 4-19-1948 and I was born in Washington Hospital.

**TC:** We'll start with Bill. Bill, could you tell me who are the sources of all of you? [laughs] How are you related? Do you all have the same grandparents?

**BW:** We have common [great-grandparents]. Donato and Mary West.

**TC:** For all of you, great-grandparents?

**Collectively:** Yes.

**BW:** My grandparents were born in Italy. My parents were born here, then, us.

**TC:** [to Bill] OK, so, who was your father?

**BW:** My father's name was John L. West.

**TC:** Your mother?

**BW:** Her name was Ruth. Her maiden name was Gregosky.

**TC:** OK, and your dad's birthdate?

**BW:** He was born in 1923, February 26th or 27th. They kept changing it, so it is

one of the two.

**TC:** He was born in Washington?

**BW:** Yeah.

**TC:** Is your father still living?

**BW:** No.

**TC:** Your mother's birthdate?

**BW:** She is December 13, 1925. She's still alive.

**TC:** Was she born in Washington?

**BW:** No. She would have been born in Meadowlands.

**TC:** In your [immediate] family, could you run down the children of the family?

**BW:** It's just me and my sister, Marcia Ann Deeb.

**TC:** What is her date of birth?

**BW:** You're asking me a lot of tough questions.

**TC:** Or her age.

**BW:** She was in 1953. March 2.

**TC:** What is your spouse's name?

**BW:** Betsy.

**TC:** Her birthdate?

**BW:** 12-21-1950.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**BW:** Washington.

**TC:** Your date of marriage?

**BW:** May 8, 1970.

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**BW:** IC [Immaculate Conception Church]. 47 glorious years. Make sure you write that down.

**TC:** What is your current occupation?

**BW:** I'm a realtor.

**TC:** Did you have military service?

**BW:** I was in the National Guard.

**Norma West:** Our great-grandparents are buried here, and they came from Italy.

**TC:** Let's jump ahead. Who were the first Italian immigrants?

**BW:** I'm not sure. I think it was my grandfather. He was the oldest.

**TC:** What's his name?

**BW:** Santo. They called him Sandy. His wife's name was Teresa. Her maiden name was Astorino.

**TC:** He was from Italy?

**BW:** Yes, he was.

**TC:** Where did he come from in Italy?

**BW:** My dad always told me it was a place called Spezzana Grande. I don't know if that's right or not, but that's what he told me.

**TC:** Do you know what region?

**BW:** It's Calabria.

**JW:** Spezzana della Sila Grande. There's also Spezzana della Sila Piccolo. It's smaller. Small Spezzana and Large Spezzana—two villages beside each other. One above the hill and one below the part of the mountain. We come from the big town. We come from the Grande.

**TC:** Do you know the region in Calabria?

**BW:** Cosenza.

**TC:** How did [Santo and Teresa] meet?

**BW:** I have no idea. I know they got married in this country, but they came over separately.

**TC:** Where was Teresa from?

**BW:** They were both from the same village.

**TC:** Did you do the [family] history?

**BW:** No. It was done by my dad's sister, Mary. My dad was the youngest of his

brothers and sisters who survived. There was another boy after him. His name was William. He was born two years after my dad. I think he lived a year or so.

**TC:** What were [your father's] siblings' names?

**BW:** His oldest brother was Donald. He was named after his grandfather. Then, there was Sam. Samuel. Then, Mary. Then, twins—Pasquale and Angeline. Then, my dad, John L., and then, William.

**TC:** They're all deceased now?

**BW:** Yes.

**TC:** OK, going back to Santo and Teresa, you think they knew each other [in Italy]?

**BW:** Evidently. I would guess. I don't know if it was a made marriage or they knew each other. I have none of that [information].

**TC:** Where did they get married?

**BW:** In Washington.

**TC:** [To John] Let me ask a question for clarification. Your grandfather was the brother of Santo?

**JW:** Yes. There were seven brothers and the one sister. The sister never was married, and the seven brothers all had large families except John.

**BW:** He only adopted.

**JW:** Our history is that [my grandfather, James (“Jim”) (Alfano) West] came with his brother, Santo. They came together on the boat and landed in Providence, Rhode Island. They got jobs on the railroad, eventually. I don’t think right away because my grandfather also could speak French. From what I was told, he could speak French, Italian and English. They came on the railroad, working on the railroad. The railroad ran out of money in Washington, PA. Then, the two brothers—Santo and Jim—worked in Washington. What they did, I have no idea. But they brought [over] their mother and father which would be ...

**BW:** Mary and Donato.

**JW:** To America and the rest of their brothers and their sister.

**BW:** I’m not sure, John, if all those boys [were born there]. I think some of the younger ones were born here.

**JW:** They may have been. Our histories may be a little bit different from the family traditions, as it’s a verbal tradition. We never wrote anything down so I’m curious to listen to what Bill has to say. I know [my grandfather] came with a brother. I assume it was Santo.

**BW:** Yeah, it would have been.

**JW:** They were the two oldest.

**BW:** I saw a ship’s manifest from Ellis Island. My grandfather went back to Italy and [to John L. West, Jr.] I don’t know

if your grandpap went, too. But they brought the mother and dad over.

**NW:** Grandpap went. Oh, yeah. My brother told me that.

**BW:** My grandfather actually fought in the first world war in the Italian army. Santo. My dad told me he was a general in his troop [everyone laughs]. He was probably a barber or something. We have a picture of him in an Italian Army uniform.

**JW:** I remember my grandmother, who would have been my grandfather Jim’s wife, [say] that Grandpap Jim was drafted by the Italians and they wanted him to fight. But he never did. The war ended.

**BW:** OK, he kind of made it.

**JW:** He was three or four years younger. But he didn’t have to go.

**TC:** [To Linda] Who is your grandfather?

**LD:** James. Jim.

**TC:** I remember reading online that there was no [Italian language] equivalent for James. They try to say what is the closest and it is “Giacomo.”

**TC:** What was [Jim’s] wife’s name?

**NW:** Anna.

**TC:** What was her maiden name?

**JW:** Earliwine. The family spells it both ways [also “Earlywine”].

**BW:** She lived to be a hundred, didn't she?

**JW:** She lived to be a hundred. She was not Italian. She spoke Italian and could write in Italian. She did all the correspondence for my grandfather, back to the old country.

**SB:** She was very smart.

**TC:** How did your grandfather meet her?

**JW:** She came to Washington to visit some relatives.

**NW:** Up on Fayette Street.

**JW:** She may have later on worked at the glass factory, but she came to visit some relatives of hers who lived in Washington and met my grandfather.

**TC:** Which brother [Jim or Santo] went back to get their parents?

**NW:** I know for sure that our grandfather [Jim] went back because my brother told me. My brother spent a lot of time with grandpap.

**TC:** They went back and [brought] Donato and Mary [here].

**BW:** I think [Mary's] maiden name was Turano or something like that.

**TC:** [To Bill] Did you ever meet your great-grandparents [Donato and Mary]?

**BW:** No. He died early. I think 1918 or

something like that.

**TC:** Your great-grandmother?

**BW:** No, I believe she died before I was born. My dad [John L. West] talked about her.

**NW:** [Great-grandmother Mary] died the day before I was born. August 25th, 1939.

**TC:** Where did [Donato and Mary] live? What was their address?

**NW:** Hayes Avenue.

**BW:** It was right off of Chestnut (Street).

**TC:** Do you know if your grandfather, Donato, had an occupation here?

**BW:** He worked in the glass factory for, I think, 40 years. Hazel Atlas ... No, no. That was the grandfather, not the great-grandfather. When [great-grandfather Donato] got here, he didn't live long, so I don't know if he [had an occupation].

**TC:** Was Hayes Avenue the only place they lived?

**BW:** Yeah, I believe so. I don't know if they lived anywhere else.

**TC:** With the great-grandparents, what do you know about them? Did you hear any stories about their personalities? What was your great-grandfather's occupation in Italy?

**JW:** The family—from what I was told by my father—were peat farmers. That would be burned in the houses in Cosenza for fuel. So the whole family would load their shotguns, get their donkey and their cart, and head down the mountain from Spezzana della Sila to Cosenza. They would all guard the wagon from the bandits because they had to deal with bandits on the way down. It was worse coming back.

**NW:** They had money.

**JW:** They sold their peat. They were peat farmers. It's hard working, digging up with a hoe. Peat is sort of like coal but it's soft coal. That's how they made a living.

**TC:** Santo and James—were they peat farmers before they came here?

**JW:** My dad said that the whole family, boys and all, would load shotguns, so I assume that all seven of the boys and their father, Donato, all were the people who were loading their shotguns to go down with peat.

**BW:** Sounds like a family business.

**LD:** James was 16 when he came ... I just found the naturalization certificate. He was naturalized as a citizen in 1911. He was married in 1906 so they had to have come much earlier.

**JW:** I thought I was told by somebody, way back, that they came in 1903.

**LD:** If he was 16, he was born in '88 or

'87. That'd be about 1903.

**BW:** My grandfather [Santo] was born in 1883.

**JW:** [Santo] was 20. Our grandfather [Jim] was 16. So, the two brothers were 20 and 16. 1903 is when they came.

**TC:** When Donato and Mary came over, did they come with any other siblings and children?

**BW:** I don't know because I think some of them were born in the United States. Some of the younger ones, I think, but again, I don't know for sure. Was the youngest Uncle Mike?

**NW:** Uncle Louis. Dougie's dad.

**JW:** I don't think he spoke Italian, did he?

**NW:** Probably not.

**BW:** My grandfather [Santo] spoke Italian. They didn't speak much English.

**TC:** Bill, your father's first name was John?

**BW:** Yes, that's right.

**TC:** [To John L. West, Jr.] Your father's first name was John?

**BW:** Yes, they wore out the same names in the family.

**BW:** [His name is] the same as my dad's.

**JW:** I'm John Louis, Jr. [Bill's] dad is John Louis. I'm John Louis, Jr. and my dad was John Louis. Their uncle was John.

**BW:** Yeah, there was an Uncle John.

**JW:** There were four Johns, so they called my dad "Louie." They couldn't keep it straight. But they also had an Uncle Louie.

**LD:** He had a son, Louis.

**JW:** I don't know how that simplified it.

**BW:** Well, now, they only used about four names on everybody else.

**NW:** Everybody got one!

**TC:** [to Norma and Shirley] Then, the two of you ladies, your dad is?

**SB:** He was a Sorge.

**TC:** Your mom?

**SB:** Louise.

**TC:** [To John L. West Jr.] Louise was your dad's sister?

**JW:** That's right.

**TC:** [To Norma] Your dad was?

**NW:** Frank West.

**JW:** [Grandfather] Jim had four children. He had three boys and a girl. So the girl

was Louise. That would be [Shirley's] mother.

**NW:** Then my dad.

**JW:** Then, [Norma's] dad, Frank. [There] was another brother, Joe. Then [my] dad (John). That was Jim's family—four children.

**TC:** Besides this history, did anyone ever do a family tree?

**BW:** No.

**JW:** I don't believe so.

**BW:** It's more like a bush than a tree.

**BW:** [To John L. West Jr.] Your mother was 100% Italian?

**JW:** My mother was, yes.

**TC:** When Santo and James came here [to the U.S.], how did they know where to [settle]?

**BW:** I'm going to assume what John was saying is probably true: It was work-driven. The railroad came so far. They just ended up here [in Washington].

**JW:** The railroad ran out of money.

**TC:** Do you know where they came in? Did they come through Ellis Island? The two of them?

**JW:** They came through Providence, Rhode Island.

**BW:** I did find information that one of those trips [home], they did come back through Ellis Island.

**TC:** Do you know if your [grandfathers] knew anybody [in Providence]?

**JW:** We had relatives in Providence ... Then, when they came to Washington, PA, from the family history that I was told, they brought people from the village where they were from to this country or people would look them up. Everybody networked. "There are opportunities. Come. We know people. We'll help you find jobs." That sort of thing. They brought friends. Relatives? I don't know if they brought relatives.

The Paresos are from our same area in Italy. I was told by the Pareso family, because we're all interrelated, that it went back even to the old country.

**TC:** [To Bill] You remember Santo?

**BW:** Oh, yeah.

**TC:** How old were you when he passed away?

**BW:** He passed away in 1952, I would have been four ... I was with him the day he died. I remember seeing him dead in the backyard.

**TC:** What kind of work did he do?

**BW:** He worked at Hazel Atlas about 40 years. Here's an interesting little side story: They found out my grandmother had terminal cancer. They called all the kids

home to tell them that she was going to die and that day, he died. It's kind of interesting. They took a picture of him on their swing in West End probably two hours before he died. Just went in the backyard and dropped dead. I think, probably, the stress of everything for my grandpap, Santo.

**TC:** Did his wife then die?

**BW:** One year later ... They were young. He was 68 and she was only 63.

**TC:** What do you remember about your grandfather [Santo]?

**BW:** Well, you know, I was just a kid. I just remember hanging out with him. I know he smoked a pipe and he made me this little pipe. He put tobacco in it. I'd smoke it with him, and my grandmother would go crazy because you know, I was four years old smoking a pipe. That was the stuff that he did.

He had a little yard. Like most of the people in West End, the yard wasn't big, he had a 28-by-100 or something like that. He had chickens, a garden and grapes.

**BW:** Everybody had grapes. I know that they made wine. They did all of that sort of thing but some of it is my actual memory and some of it is my dad [John L.] filling in the blanks. I would ask a lot of questions. You know it's funny and I don't know if your experiences were the same, but they didn't talk a lot about the old days.

**NW:** No.

**BW:** When they came here, they were just bent on their kids becoming Americans as quick as possible. I know my grandmother and grandfather very rarely spoke Italian in the house to the kids. They wanted them to learn English and make the transition. Which, I believe, they all did. We're pretty successful.

**TC:** Was there a family home?

**BW:** Well, I assume it would have been the grandparents' [Donato and Mary's] home.

**NW:** The brick house.

**BW:** It was a brick house. [Jim and his family] lived right next door. They had a grocery store and lived in the other half of the house. My grandfather [Santo] lived down Fayette Street just right around the corner. My Uncle Donald lived next to him. We lived a little further down.

**NW:** Uncle Pete lived across the street.

**BW:** We all lived in that same little block.

**JW:** My dad [John L.] said that they built that red brick house.

**BW:** They may have, John. I don't know.

**JW:** They lost it during the Depression. They lost the farm and they lost that house. They were investing and buying stock.

**NW:** I remember hearing that.

**JW:** They had chickens and they had eggs.

**BW:** Where was the farm?

**NW:** Taylorstown.

**JW:** Two of the brothers worked the farm. I don't remember which two.

**NW:** My dad used to work down there.

**LD:** Probably Uncle John?

**NW:** I would say Grandpap [Jim] was down there, too.

**JW:** No, he ran the store.

**NW:** Well, he ran the whole show!

**JW:** They had the chickens and the pigs so they would grow all that and sell it in the store. It was a family business ... But during the [Great] Depression, they lost it all.

**NW:** Do you think Uncle John, maybe?

**JW:** I think, Uncle John, because he was the farmer. I don't know who the other one was. Some of them were shoemakers ... Sam was a shoemaker and somebody else was a shoemaker.

**BW:** Pete was definitely a shoemaker.

**NW:** Uncle Joe!

**BW:** Joe? He died early though.

**JW:** Which one was the brother of W&J Shoeshine?

**NW:** Uncle Mike.

**JW:** Mike was the partner in W&J Shoeshine?

**NW:** Yeah. But Uncle Joe was down on Chestnut.

**JW:** I remember that, going in there when I was a kid, right next to I.C. Church.

**BW:** Yeah, that was my Uncle Sam's. He was there until Kmart came and took him out of business ... But Uncle Mike, when he had the W&J Shoeshine place, I guess they lived in that building and my dad told me that his boys were a little rambunctious and what he would do was just turn the radio up real loud and go beat 'em.

[Everyone laughs]

Then, turn it back down.

**TC:** When Santo and James came here, did they intend to stay, or do you think they intended to go back to Italy?

**JW:** They intended to stay.

**BW:** I know from my grandfather that he went and fought in the war. He could have stayed then. I think their life was here. They knew that.

**TC:** I understand from talking to [John L. West Jr.] that [Jim and Santo] could speak English pretty well ... What do you know about that? How did they learn English so well?

**BW:** Well, they lived here. [laughs]

**LD:** Our grandfather [Jim] probably learned from his wife [Anna]. She learned Italian from him.

**NW:** Grandpap [Jim] was an interpreter up at the courthouse.

**JW:** He would also go with the doctors to do home visits ... He would translate because they were bringing in family and friends from Italy. Our grandfather, Jim, was friends with some of the judges and lawyers.

**NW:** Fergus?

**JW:** Fergus. Curry was the other one. Curry?

**LD:** Kerr.

**JW:** Fergus and I forget who the other one was. Anyway, the paybacks were that he would register all those Italians as Republicans.

**NW:** [laughs] Yeah.

**JW:** Because the Democrats didn't want all those Italians taking their jobs at the steel mills and the glass factories, so they weren't cooperating with our generation of immigrants in the early 1900s. So

they weren't helping the immigrants. But the Republicans wanted their votes. My grandfather registered all the immigrants that he met, as Republicans.

**NW:** [laughs]

**BW:** My dad used to tell me that [Jim] was like the mayor of Hayes Avenue.

**NW:** Oh, he was. If they would vote Republican, he'd give 'em a shot of whiskey.

**TC:** You're describing immigrants that came to Washington, but they had already lived somewhere else [in the U.S.]. They were in Providence for a while?

**BW:** Not long.

**JW:** Maybe a year or two.

**BW:** You know, if you think about being able to travel back to Italy, I assume that cost something. So they might have had some resource. No one in the family, of that generation, was considered very rich. They had a little bit, but not much.

**TC:** Do you know why [Jim and Santo] settled in the West End [of Washington]? Do you know why that appealed to them? There were some other [Italian neighborhoods where] they could go.

**BW:** Hazel Atlas #2 was right at the end of [Hayes Avenue]. It might have been the proximity of that factory. I would guess that it was just a work issue.

**TC:** Your grandfather [Jim] didn't work in the factory. He ran the grocery store.

**NW:** Yeah.

**TC:** What was the grocery store's name?

**NW:** [laughs] West.

**JW:** [Jim and Santo] changed their name ... from Alfano.

**NW:** To West.

**JW:** Our family tradition was that because Mr. Hayes of Hayes Avenue, who was the magistrate, or constable, or whatever, of that area, said to my grandfather [Jim] that you're only selling to the Italians and if you want an Italian store where a lot of the Italians are buying on credit and not paying you, then you need to change your name to be Americanized.

You need to change your name so that people come to your store—the Americans come to your store, not just Italians. So they changed it to "West." For West End, really.

**BW:** That's sort of a variation on the story [that] to gain influence with that Italian name you were going nowhere. But your grandpap [Jim] never looked American his entire life.

**NW:** No.

**BW:** He spoke English, but it was broken ... they all spoke with a certain accent. [My grandfather Santo] could

write in English because I have a little book where he writes English and then Italian. I think they weren't dummies, you know.

**NW:** Oh, no.

**JW:** [Showing a picture] Pretty smart. He was very swarthy looking.

**BW:** Swarthy is a good word.

**JW:** He's only, what, 4'-10"?

**BW:** Yeah. None of them were really tall.

**NW:** Uncle John!

**JW:** John was over 6 foot.

**NW:** Yeah. Uncle Mike wasn't really short.

**BW:** I think my grandpap was 5'-8," 9" or 10" ... I've seen pictures of him standing next to my dad. My dad and I were about the same height so ...

**TC:** Is it your impression that the two brothers were together trying to make their way in Washington? To find what their path to becoming Americans here.

**NW:** They must've.

**JW:** Helped each other out.

**BW:** They lived in such close proximity that I'm sure there was a shared interest.

**TC:** They liked each other?

**BW:** Oh, yes.

**TC:** How did you know that? What have you heard?

**NW:** Family meetings [laughs].

**JW:** Well, not only have I heard, at the West reunions or parties at Uncle John's farm, when all the brothers were still alive ... I remember all those people. All day long, laughing and telling stories, speaking Italian and doing all kinds of things, but I remember going down on the farm and I was bored to death so I would take a fly swatter, go down, and kill flies off the chickens' house. It'd keep me busy all day.

**NW:** [laughs]

**JW:** I never got tired of killing those flies.

**TC:** Where was the farm?

**JW:** On Walnut Ridge Road.

**BW:** They used to called it Tuttle Road a long time ago.

**TC:** In North Franklin?

**NW:** In North Franklin.

**BW:** There's a church there right now. The farmhouse, [John's] house, is still there. I don't know if he owned both sides of the road or not.

**JW:** I think they owned that farm, pretty much, all the way to Route 40. I hunted

there when I was a teenager.

**BW:** Yeah. Then Junior built up there.

**JW:** Junior sold all of his lines where Uncle John's property [was].

**TC:** Now, who owned the farm?

**JW:** John ... my grandfather's brother.

**LD:** This is not the Taylorstown [farm]. This isn't the family farm.

**JW:** Yeah, this is a later farm.

[Note from Linda West Dickson: John West, son of Donato and Louisa, had a farm in the 1950s and 1960s that was his personal residence.]

**NW:** Turkeys. He raised turkeys.

**TC:** What about church for the older people? Where did they go to church?

**NW:** Oh, Catholic church. I.C.

**JW:** They were all Catholic.

**JW:** All the older people were Catholics. Not very many of the younger people are Catholic.

**NW:** Not me.

**JW:** You're not Catholic. Your mother wasn't.

**SB:** No, she started. My granddad [Jim] made her go and she came home and told him she wasn't going back. She couldn't understand it. She wouldn't go. It's a wonder they didn't kill her. [laughs]

**TC:** What was the neighborhood like? You remember grandparents and know everyone up in the West End. What was it like? Were there Italians living there?

**NW:** It was, I think, a mix.

**LD:** I never thought—who was Italian and who wasn't.

**NW:** I'm thinking back—up Fayette Street. Up the hill. Those were Americans.

**JW:** It was a mix. Everybody in West End was different.

**NW:** They got along like one big, happy family.

**LD:** [sighs] It was different times.

**TC:** Back in the your grandparents' day, do you remember if there was anything that brought people together? Any kind of community gatherings? Any clubs that they belonged to? Anything like that?

**JW:** Not that I know of. I don't know that they belonged to the Sons of Italy or anything like that.

**LD:** I think they were just all a family. They socialized with their family.

**JW:** They socialized with the family. [To Norma] Of course, I remember your mom and dad having parties.

**NW:** At the house.

**JW:** Between the two houses. All of us [in Grandfather] Jim's family would meet. But that was a lot of people.

**NW:** It was nice.

**SB:** Oh, yeah.

**TC:** So you're talking about a very, very large group of people descended from the [seven sons of Donato and Mary]? Did you ever count them all up?

**JW:** No. I remember somebody telling me one time that they looked at it and there's one of our relatives in every state in the Union. I know there's Wests in Texas. There's Wests in California.

**LD:** Arizona.

**JW:** There's Wests in Florida. There's Wests in Rhode Island. Providence.

**LD:** Arizona.

**JW:** So we have family throughout the country. With seven brothers, they all had their descendants all scattered.

**TC:** Did you ever see a picture of the two brothers, Santo and Jim, together? Those two were the ones who made it all happen.

**JW:** Well, yes, but I think, when I was younger.

**LD:** I didn't know Santo at all.

**JW:** No. I don't remember Santo.

**NW:** I do.

**TC:** Santo and Jim, they were the oldest?

**JW:** Yes. That we're sure of.

**TC:** Do you remember if your grandparents spoke Italian in the home?

**NW:** If they didn't want you to know something, yeah.

**JW:** Yes. But they didn't permit the children to speak Italian. My dad said they were not allowed to speak Italian.

**LD:** I always had the feeling that my dad understood it.

**JW:** He did. My dad said he understood Italian. If somebody talked to him, he understood what they were saying. He just could not speak Italian. He would never try.

**SB:** I knew swear words. That's all I heard.

**JW:** I never heard my dad swear in Italian.

**TC:** Was it like, "Speak English—you're in the United States now?"

**JW:** Well, I don't remember ever being told that we were Italians. We were Americans ... They never talked about being proud to be Italian. They were Americans. I don't remember anyone ever saying, "We're Italian," "We're proud to be Italian Americans." They were proud to be Americans. They didn't talk about Italians.

**TC:** Did they have any Italian traditions?

**JW:** Not that I know of ... remember, my grandfather's wife was not Italian.

**TC:** Your family story is pretty fascinating because the way [the two brothers] got here with the railroad and then, they had a strategy when they got here. They knew English or learned it very rapidly. They strategized with their English. They got into the political system and they found ways to survive, to thrive and make a home here. Then, they went back and got the rest of the family. They brought them all over and they all got established. It's a really active family. At the same time, you're saying that they, in a way, downplayed being Italian. They highlighted assimilation ... and [possibly] emphasized that over the old country or the Italian ways. But what does being Italian mean to you all?

**JW:** I'm more Italian than my father in terms of what I'm involved with.

**NW:** Oh, yeah. Ain't that something?

**JW:** I have a garden.

**TC:** What caused you to get interested?

**JW:** I'm very proud to be an Italian American. As John Kennedy said when he spoke to the Sons of Italy: "Italians ... built America." I think we did do that as an Italian people. We're part of the fabric of this great country—an important part of the fabric.

**TC:** What about you, Norma?

**NW:** Oh, I feel the same way. My mom was Polish. But we lived Italian. That's what we ate.

**SB:** I think I'm more American. My mother, she used to stay at home, and they had spaghetti. Someone would knock on the door. She would hide. My dad was American. I was always there with them. I realize we were just kind of more American.

**JW:** "Sorge" was German?

**SB:** Yeah.

**TC:** What about you, Linda?

**LD:** More than anything, the food. Catholic. I love the beach and I think that has something to do with it. I'm proud.



## Donald Joseph Zenner and Eleanor Capo Zenner

Descendants of Italian Immigrants




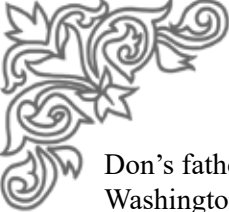
*Don and Eleanor Zenner*

Donald (Don) Joseph Zenner (original name “Zenone”) and his wife Eleanor Capo (original name “Capozzoli”) have strong ties to Washington’s Italian American community.

Don’s paternal grandfather, Pietro Zenone, died (possibly in a fire) soon after emigrating from Piemonte in northern Italy to the United States, leaving his wife Mary with three young children, one of whom was Don’s father. Mary later married Frank Patrene (an immigrant from Tuscany) and had ten more children, creating a large blended family.

Don’s mother, Mary Liberatore, was born in Abruzzo (or “Abruzzi,” as the region was called at the time). At age five in 1910, she emigrated to the U.S. with her father Gaetano Liberatore and mother Virginia Pacilla.

Eleanor’s father, Louis Capo, was born in 1902 in Bellosguardo, a town from which many of Washington’s Italians hailed. At age 17, Louis emigrated with two brothers to Detroit. He then moved to Washington, while his brothers remained in Detroit. Another brother remained in Italy. Louis married Sarah Zuckett of Washington.



Don's father, Frank, became one of Washington's many Italian barbers. He started his career in Canonsburg, where he cut hair alongside Perry Como before the singer became famous.

From the 1920s through 1970s, Italian barbershops lined Washington's main thoroughfares. Don recalls many of their names: Spossey, Marasco, D'Alessandro, Russo, Julian, D'Agostino, Miscio, Tocci, Lucatorto, Alberta, Luppino, Dessaro, Cancelli, Ruschel. "Downtown was like a big outdoor mall then, with all kinds of barber shops," he said.

Don cut hair alongside his father for many years, as did his sister, Alma Jean DonGiovanni, a beautician. In the 1970s, when longer hair for men came into fashion, Don and Eleanor opened Washington's first-ever hairstyling studio for men called "Private World." Don's father also joined them. "Our customers went out looking like movie stars," Don said.

When Don returned from active duty in the Coast Guard in 1955, he saw Eleanor's picture in a Washington High School yearbook and set out to meet her. For their wedding in 1956, Eleanor used her artistry to design an elaborate wedding cake. For the couple's 60th wedding anniversary in 2016, their daughter Dawn commissioned a replica of the cake. Now retired, Eleanor had a long career in retail and in real estate.


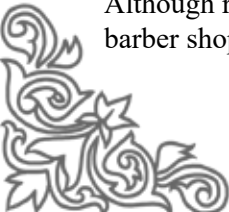
Although retired, Don still maintains the barber shop at 322 S. Main Street. He

and Eleanor live above the shop, which is filled with memorabilia, including Don's many awards as a long-distance runner. By the age of 75, Don had completed 500 races and earned age-group records in Pennsylvania. He ranked in the top five percent in his age group nationally in a series of 5K runs. Don's achievements date back to his days at Wash High, where he was a four-year varsity wrestler, winning WPIAL championships and receiving three college scholarship offers. He was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame (Washington-Greene chapter) in 1996 for track and field.

In addition to barbering, Don earned a bachelor's degree in Biblical studies and theology in 1962 from New York's Nyack College. He became an ordained minister in 2016. One of the joys of his life has been informally counseling customers who were seated in his barber chair.

Don reflects that, even to the present day, there is a mystique around barbershops. He frequently sees college students from Washington & Jefferson peering through the windows of his old shop to see if any barbering is going on.

October 2018

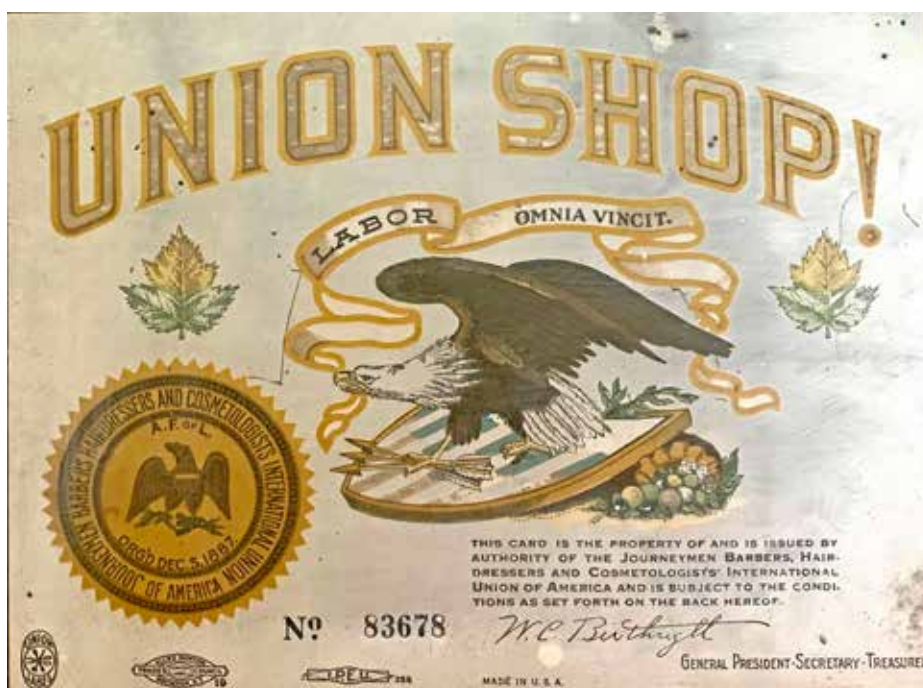




Don and Eleanor Zenner, June 3, 1956



Barbers Frank Zenner, left, and Louis Spossey in front of Zenner's shop on South Main Street



In the mid 20th century, Washington had 35 union barber shops and 52 union barbers.



## Family Tree of Donald (Don) Joseph Zenner

### **Don's Parents:**

- Frank Zenner, b. 11-4-1907, Strabane, PA; d. 1978
- Mary Liberatore, b. 8-14-1905, Abruzzo, Italy, d. May 1994

### **Frank and Mary's Children:**

- Alma Jean Zenner, b. 11-20-30; m. — DonGiovanni
- Donald Joseph Zenner, b. 1-11-1932, Canonsburg, PA; m. Eleanor Capo (b. 9-28-1936, Washington) on 6-3-1956

### **Don's Maternal Grandparents:**

- Gaetano Liberatore, b. Abruzzo, Italy
- Virginia Pacilla, b. Abruzzo, Italy

### **Gaetano and Virginia Liberatore's Children:**

- Mary Liberatore, b. 8-14-1905, Abruzzo, Italy; d. May 1994
- Frank Liberatore
- Ralph Liberatore
- James Liberatore
- Julie Liberatore
- Anthony Liberatore

### **Don's Paternal Grandparents:**

- Pietro Zenone, b. Piemonte, Italy; m. Mary

### **Pietro and Mary Zenone's Children:**

- Frank Zenner, b. 11-4-1907, d. 1978
- Rose Zenner
- Tony Zenner

After Pietro died, Mary married Frank Patrene and had ten children.



## Family Tree of Eleanor Capo Zenner

### **Eleanor's Parents:**

- Louis Capo, b. 5-28-1902, Bellosguardo, Campania, Italy; d. 1992
- Sarah Zuckett, b. 4-12-1913; d. 1996  
Sarah was one of 13 children.

### **Louis and Sarah's Children:**

- Eleanor Capo, b. 9-28-1936, Washington; m. Donald Joseph Zenner (b. 1-11-1932, Canonsburg, PA) on 6-3-1956
- James Louis Capo, b. 6-17-33; d. 7-12-2009

### **Louis Capo's Siblings:**

- Joseph Capo, b. Italy, remained in Italy
- Frank Capozzoli, b. Italy, remained in Detroit
- Mike Capozzoli, b. Italy, remained in Detroit
- Rosina Capo, b. Italy, lived in Washington

## Interview

### Date and Place of Interview:

October 29, 2018; Zenner Barber Shop, Washington

**Interviewer:** Tina Calabro

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editors:** Tina Calabro and Eleanor Zenner

**Tina Calabro:** Is "Don" short for Donald?

**DZ:** Mary Liberatore Zenner. No middle name.

**Don Zenner:** Yes.

**TC:** What was her birthday?

**TC:** Do you have a middle name?

**DZ:** August 14, 1905.

**DZ:** Joseph.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**TC:** Donald Joseph Zenner. What is your date of birth?

**DZ:** She was born in Italy.

**DZ:** 1-11-1932.

**TC:** Do you know what town?

**TC:** Where were you born?

**DZ:** She was born on the Aegean Sea side. Abruzzi.

**DZ:** Canonsburg.

**TC:** When did your dad die?

**TC:** What was your father's name?

**DZ:** My dad died in 1978.

**DZ:** My father's name was Frank. No middle name.

**TC:** When did your mom die?

**TC:** What was his date of birth?

**DZ:** May 1994.

**DZ:** November 4, 1907. My mother was born in 1905. She was two years older than him.

**TC:** What are your children's names?

**TC:** Where was your dad born?

**Eleanor Zenner:** Donald Joel and Dawn Ellen

**DZ:** He was born in Strabane.

**TC:** Two children? What are their ages?

**TC:** Your mother's name?

**EZ:** Donald, who is known as Joel, was born 10-11-1957. Dawn was born October 8 of '67. They're ten years apart.

**TC:** Both of your kids and you have names that sound the same.

**EZ:** I did that on purpose. But we call Donald Joel, "Joel" and then, "Dawn Ellen" and he [Don Zenner] is "Don." But everyone calls him "Donnie." It's even in the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. They put in parentheses, "Donnie."

[Note from Eleanor Zenner: "Dawn Ellen" stands for a variation of "Don" and "Eleanor."]

**TC:** So, you go by "Donnie?"

**DZ:** Yes.

**TC:** Eleanor, what was your maiden name?

**EZ:** Capo.

**TC:** When were you born?

**EZ:** 9-28-1936.

**TC:** Where were you born?

**EZ:** In Washington.

**TC:** When did you get married?

**EZ:** June 3, 1956.

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**EZ:** The Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, Walnut Street. Where the Friendship Baptist Church is now.

**TC:** [To Eleanor] You're retired. What was your occupation?

**EZ:** Most recently, a realtor.

**TC:** What did you do before you became a realtor?

**EZ:** Oh, all types of retail sales. Kay Jewelers was one of the last ones. Fashion Bug and Pomeroy's, when it was there—I just did all kinds of retail sales.

**TC:** Tell me, Eleanor, your father's name.

**EZ:** Louis Capo. No middle initial.

**TC:** When was he born?

**EZ:** In 1902. May 28.

**TC:** When did he pass away?

**EZ:** He passed away in 1992. He was 90.

**TC:** Your mom's name?

**EZ:** Sarah Zuckett Capo.

**TC:** What was her birthday?

**EZ:** It's April 12, 1913. She was about 11 years younger than my dad.

**DZ:** She was 83 when she died.

**TC:** [To Eleanor] Where was your dad born?

**EZ:** He was born in a little town called Bellosguardo. They have a picnic and all

the Bellosguardo people get together.

**DZ:** Yeah.

**TC:** Where was your mom born?

**TC:** What happened to him?

**EZ:** In Washington.

**DZ:** They think he was killed in a fire.

**DZ:** My dad never knew his father. They know he was born in Italy, in Piemonte. His mother had 10 children to my step-grandfather. She [had had] three children—my dad, his sister Rose, and brother Tony—to a father they never knew. I only knew my step-grandfather. As a matter of fact, I never knew my mother's dad either. He died in his forties. He died of what they called, back then, dropsy.

**TC:** Your dad's dad, Pietro, what about his wife? Your biological grandmother?

**DZ:** I knew her.

**TC:** What was your step-grandfather's first name?

**DZ:** I can't recall.

[Note from Don Zenner: His step-grandfather's name was Frank Patrene.]

**DZ:** Oh, yeah.

**TC:** Your dad's family was 13 children. He, his sister, and brother were the oldest of the kids?

**TC:** When he died, was he here?

**DZ:** Yeah. They would've been born first, yeah.

**DZ:** Yeah.

**TC:** Do you remember his name?

**TC:** [Asks for spelling of step-grandfather's last name]

**DZ:** Liberatore. Guy. Gaetano.

**DZ:** Patrene.

**TC:** Your dad's dad's first name?

**TC:** Your mother, Mary, and her dad was Guy. What was her mother's name?

**DZ:** Pete.

**EZ:** We just called her Nonnie!

**TC:** How do you think the original last name was spelled?

[Note from Don Zenner: His paternal grandmother's first name was Virginia.]

**DZ:** Zenone.

**TC:** Did he [your paternal grandfather] come to the United States?

**TC:** Do you know her maiden name?

**DZ:** Pacilla. The day my grandmother, grandfather and—my mother was five—the day they left [Italy], [my grandmother's mother] killed all the chickens and said, "I'll never see you again." She had an emotional breakdown. She knew she'd never see my mother again. They didn't have any money. It was poverty there. She knew she'd never go over there [to U.S.], and my mother would never come back. She took it real hard.

**TC:** Eleanor, your dad, Louis, he was born in Bellosguardo. Did his parents come here?

**EZ:** No. I never met them. No.

**TC:** Your dad came here ...

**EZ:** When he was probably 17.

**TC:** Did he come directly to Washington?

**EZ:** Detroit.

**DZ:** He had a job there.

[Note from Eleanor: At some point, her father changed his name from Capozzoli to Capo. His brothers in Detroit kept their original name.]

**EZ:** They might have thought the jobs were better there. It probably was better employment ... They went to Detroit, from getting off the ship.

[Note from Eleanor: Her father also had a sister, Rosina Capo, who came to Washington and married Louis Macchiaroli.]

**DZ:** Ellis Island.

**TC:** So, he came with his brothers? Do you know how many brothers?

**EZ:** Uncle Joe stayed in Italy. So, Frank, Mike, and my dad [came to the U.S.] The two brothers stayed in Detroit. They ended up marrying and having families there. My father came here [to Washington]. I can't figure out why. I'm glad he did because he met my mother here.

**TC:** Well, there's people from Bellosguardo here.

**EZ:** There is.

**TC:** [To Don] Frank, Rose, and Tony—all born in the US?

**DZ:** Yes.

**TC:** Did [your mother] Mary have brothers and sisters?

**DZ:** Yeah.

**TC:** What were their names?

**DZ:** Frank, Jimmy, Tony, and Julie. My mother was the oldest.

**TC:** [To Don] Military service?

**DZ:** I was in the Coast Guard from 1952-1955, active duty. Then five years inactive.

**EZ:** He was a radio man. RM 2. Second

class petty officer.

**TC:** [To Don] Your brothers and sisters?

**DZ:** I have one sister. Alma DonGiovanni. Alma Jean.

**TC:** What is her birthdate?

**DZ:** November 20, 1930.

**TC:** Eleanor, your sisters and brothers?

**DZ:** One brother—James [Louis] Capo. He's deceased.

**TC:** What's his birthday?

**EZ:** June 17, 1939.

**TC:** Where did your parents meet, Don?

**DZ:** They met in Houston or Strabane. I think Strabane. They met in Strabane. At a party. He came in late to the party. All the chairs were taken. I used to tease my mother about it. He went to my mother and pushed her off the chair. She let him sit there. It was their first date. It was a romance that lasted 50 years. Then he died a year later. My mother was only 4'-11".

**TC:** [To Eleanor] What about your parents, Louis and Sarah? How did they meet?

**DZ:** A friend of his married one of your [Eleanor's] aunts. He asked if she had any sisters. They told him that the one who wasn't married was Sarah.

**TC:** How did the two of you meet?

**DZ:** When I came out of the service, I didn't have a girlfriend. The whole time I was in the service, I didn't have a girlfriend. I said, "I've got to find someone to date." So, I went to my yearbook. My high school yearbook. I saw her picture. I liked the way she looked. She had a nice smile. So, I called her up. When I asked her out, I was popular. I was a little cocky.

She said, "I don't know you." She didn't receive it well.

I said, "I'll call you again in a couple days. You ask about me. You'll find out."

So, she did that. I guess people told her I was a nice guy. She said, "All right. I'll date ya."

I said, "I'm going to a wrestling match on Friday. Why don't you go to that match?" I looked over and saw her on the other side. I went over to her and said, "How about I walk you home?"

From that walk home to 63 years later, she's been my girl. I started dating her and I went to her house. There were all kinds of guys she was talking to. I said, "When I date a girl, there's exclusivity. I don't want you dating anybody else."

She said, "I don't know if I can do that."

I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." She lived in a house that was a long walk away. I said, "If you decide you'll go

steady with me, you have to tell me before I reach that car. Once I reach that car, I'll pull away and that's it."

She said, "You're kidding."

I said, "No." I started walking and didn't hear anything. I thought, "Oh my God!" So, just as I reached the car, I heard, "Donnie!"

I said, "Yeah?"

She said, "I'll go with you."

She didn't see, as I was going back, going "Yes!" That was it.

**TC:** Eleanor, you both went to Wash High. What year did you graduate?

**EZ:** 1954.

**TC:** You've lived in several places. Could you go through the different towns, why you moved, that sort of thing?

**EZ:** Most of the places were when [he was] in Nyack [College]. I accompanied him. I typed his paper.

**DZ:** We were married in '56. Went to school that following fall.

**EZ:** We had our son there, too.

**EZ:** We were married and then went straight there—enrolled in college for the fall term. We spent a lot of years there. After graduation, we just stayed in New York for awhile.

**TC:** How did you end up coming back home?

**EZ:** Actually, we came because of his father.

**DZ:** He got sick. He had said if I wasn't in ministry there, could I come home and take care of the shop. It was a shock. He was only laid [up] for a while.

**TC:** So, you came back.

**DZ:** To take over the shop. While he was recuperating.

**TC:** Was this the shop right here? This was his shop?

**DZ:** Uh huh.

**TC:** When you came back, the two of you and your children, lived in ... ?

**EZ:** We only had our son. [Our son and daughter] are 10 years apart. He was [12] and she was [two years] old.

**TC:** When you came back here, your dad was living above the shop here?

**DZ:** Uh huh.

**TC:** Your mom also?

**DZ:** Uh huh. We started moving to different places around here.

**TC:** When did you move here [current address]?

**EZ:** Actually, we moved [here] in 1994. [Don's] mother was still living. She was in a nursing home and she told us to move here.

**EZ:** This is Reverend Donald Zenner. He doesn't like me to say Reverend.

**DZ:** No, no. I never use that.

**EZ:** I liked it. All those years of study. All those traveling years! He did everything in college. He painted the outside of Nyack High School. He was a barber. He worked at the Western Union there. He even met Shelley Winters. The Western Union was located around Broadway. It's actually where Helen Hayes had her mansion.

**DZ:** It was 25 miles north of the city. Helen Hayes lived there. Helen Hayes came in there. She was called the first lady of Broadway. Shelly Winters came in there and actually flirted with me. She got in her Rolls Royce, did a U-turn, and went the other way. There was a playhouse in Nyack. They did summer stock. The Broadway actors would come down and do a gig at the playhouse in the summer. I met a lot of those Broadway stars. I met the guy who [sang] "Old Man River" [in the musical Showboat].

**TC:** Paul Robeson?

**DZ:** Uh huh. Met him.

**TC:** Let's now talk about the barbering. You come from a long line of barbers. Who was the first?

**DZ:** You got to remember the context. Back in the middle 30s, 40s, 50s, [downtown] was like a giant mall. Anything you wanted was here in Washington. You had four theaters. You had gas stations. You had drug stores. You had Montgomery Ward, JCPenney's, five and dimes. All the stores were here. Route 40 came right through here. National Road. This was before the turnpike.

I think they called it a third-class city. There was just everything here. It was a giant outdoor mall. You had all kinds of barbershops. The first was my dad and Sonny Spossey's dad. Floyd Marasco's dad. Jimmy D'Alessandro's dad was a barber.

**TC:** What was Sonny Spossey's dad's name?

**DZ:** Lou.

**TC:** Those four barbers—they're the same generation?

**DZ:** Yeah. Floyd Marasco's father and brother, Gene. Then, Angelo Russo. Tony D'Agostino. Cliff Majors. You had the Miscio brothers. Tocci. His son had Club Forty. Well, the father had it first then the son took over after he had an accident. There was one off North Main towards the First Financial Building. I don't remember any of their names. There was one Black barbershop. It was in the space between the First Financial Building and that alley. Also, across from the First Financial Building was Lucatorto. That was Lucky Lucatorto's dad. I think in '49

or '50, he died of a massive coronary. Lucky took over. I don't think he even got to finish high school. But his dad was in that first generation.

**TC:** So, you're saying there were about ten different barbers.

**DZ:** There's more! Wylie Avenue was Alberta. Alberta had another barber with him [Belcastro]. They were around the corner from the drug store. Alberta and another barber or two.

My dad was a master barber, but he admired those barbers over on Wylie Avenue. Why? They had mostly Syrian clientele. The Syrians had mostly black hair and white scalps. Back then, they did tapers. If you could taper that hair and run it all over without making spots, that was an accomplishment. Those barbers did that. They did the fine tapers and never did black and white spots. They had it all [blended] in. My dad said, "Son, that's some kind of barber there." Today, they call it the "fade." If you want to see what a good haircut looks like, watch those old, classical movies. Those tapers were beautiful.

**TC:** How did your dad get into barbering?

**DZ:** When he was in Canonsburg, before he came to Washington, he was friends with a guy. He used to joke that he'd had to sell everything except his tools. He learned a lot under his friend, Tedrow. Pike Street and Central Avenue in Canonsburg, southwest corner building, there used to be a shop. In that shop down

there, my dad used to [cut hair] with Perry Como. He said Perry was always humming tunes in his shop.

Later on, he had a barbershop down below the church. The Greek weddings would take all the men down there for haircuts. My dad was there with two other barbers. Perry [Como] decided to see if he could get a contract with his voice. So, my dad worked briefly with Perry Como, in this building in Canonsburg.

**TC:** What about Miscio brothers?

**DZ:** They were down where the Union Grill is. You had to go down the steps. Then, there's Joe Luppino.

**EZ:** [Don's] cousin is Tony Zenner.

[Note: Tony Zenner is a barber.]

**TC:** Lou Spossey was on Chestnut Street.

**DZ:** Lou's on Chestnut.

**TC:** What about D'Alessandro?

**DZ:** D'Alessandro was right up here [on South Main]. You see, my dad bought Jimmy D'Alessandro's grandfather's [Battista's] barbershop. This was later. 1950. He came here and bought it. Battista had it before. Now, Battista started out in Canonsburg. Back when they had the Black Handers, Battista had a scar. I used to ask how he'd got that scar. He said, "The Black Handers." There were Black Handers in Canonsburg in the late

19th century into the 20th century. 1930. The law got rid of them all. I guess Battista wouldn't pay out, so he ended up with the scar.

**TC:** What about Angelo Russo? Where was his shop?

**DZ:** Angelo Russo. Where the Community Bank is, there was a building that they tore down. On the corner, they have a tire shop.

**TC:** What street is this?

**DZ:** Chestnut. Across from the Millcraft [Center]. Back when I was a kid, there was a restaurant on the corner. Then, there was a funeral home and Russo's Barbershop.

**TC:** What about Julian? Where was his shop?

**DZ:** Again, by the Millcraft on the Franklin Street side. You could go down the stairs. Underneath. My dad worked in there with Tony and Pat Julian. Across the street, there was a barbershop called "The Shop." It has Tocci in there.

**TC:** What about D'Agostino?

**DZ:** Right on Main Street.

**EZ:** Right where the restaurant called Peppino's was.

**DZ:** Tony D'Agostino. His son [Lou] became a barber. Worked in there with his dad part time. Lou never went into it full time, just part time.

**TC:** We have Spossey, your dad [Frank], Marasco, D'Alessandro, Russo, Julian, D'Agostino, Miscio, Tocci, Lucatorto, Alberta and Lupino.

**DZ:** There's also, down on Chestnut, where you drive into Shop 'n Save, there was a barbershop. Frank Gross' barbershop. Also, there was a barbershop on Chestnut, it was Majors.' Cliff Majors.'

**DZ:** Also, on Chestnut, from Franklin to Main, on the left, there's a barbershop. [Rich] Sonson runs it. Back when I was a kid, there was Rex's barbershop. One of the barbers was Cancelmi. Below where Sonson is now.

Marasco's barbershop was called Marasco's. I don't know about the one around the corner. Alberta and another barber or two. They were excellent at cutting Syrians' hair.

**TC:** How did your dad get into barbering? Why did he choose that profession?

**DZ:** He didn't get into barbering right away. He worked in a tin mill. I guess he decided to do something artful.

**TC:** He enjoyed the art of barbering.

**DZ:** Oh yeah, as a matter of fact, tonsorial artist is what they call it. It's a hair and beard trimmer.

**TC:** Where did he get his training?

**DZ:** Canonsburg under Mr. Tedrow. I don't know if it's his first or last name.

Just Tedrow.

**TC:** So, he didn't go to school, he was like an apprentice?

**DZ:** Back then, they were all apprentices. School came later. I think 1932 was the first year for a license for a barber. Before that, you just cut hair. I don't know if that's factual. I know my dad's first license was 1932.

**TC:** Your dad liked the art. When did he start this shop?

**DZ:** When I was a teenager, he worked for Angelo Russo. They were partners. I started as a shoe shine boy at Russo's barbershop. I would scrub the floor, clean the spittoons. My mother was against drinking and smoking. When she found out I was cleaning those spittoons, she said, "Frank, if he has to clean those, he won't work there." They said I didn't have to clean them anymore. Clean the shop. Shine the shoes. They were so messy. Full.

**EZ:** Mucus and tobacco. Disgusting!

**DZ:** The union came in the 40s. The union meant they all agreed to work certain days and have certain days off.

[Note from Don Zenner: All union barbers were required to charge the same price.]

**EZ:** We forgot Tony DeSarro.

**DZ:** His barbershop was right across the

street from the magistrate on Maiden Street. The building is still there. There used to be a bus terminal there. He's deceased. He would have been [working in the same period] as my dad.

**DZ:** That's the first wave. That first was all the up through the 70s, I think.

**EZ:** [We had] the only hair cutting salon [Private World] that was exclusive for men. No women.

**DZ:** We couldn't get away with that today.

**EZ:** In the 70s.

**DZ:** Another wave came through. There was a guy named Ron Largent. He and his wife [Judy] cut hair ... The shop was next to Sears. The mall was called something different back then. Franklin Mall. [The shop was] was outdoors, next to Sears ... Across from Angelo's [Restaurant], was George Silvers. His brother is still living. I don't know his brother's first name. Now, uptown, across from Shorty's, Sonson was a school teacher who retired and took up barbering—he bought the shop from a big fellow named Steve.

**EZ:** I don't know Steve's last name ... Did he just call it Steve's Barbershop?

**DZ:** Yeah. Now, Sonson, it's his shop now and there's another barber in there with him. I don't know who that is. Also, after Lou Reda took up barbering, he had a shop in a building called the Labor Building across from W&J College. It's

College and Beau St. The shop was called “La Trim.”

[Around] 1972, I worked for a couple years in South Hills Village in the Village Barbershop. [Then] we decided to open a shop in Washington.

**EZ:** It was called the Global Building then. We were on the front, 150 West Beau Street. We named it Private World because we wanted to keep it for men only. It was the only shop, seriously, that was only for men in the tri-state area. We’re so proud of that. No women. Donald owned it and we stayed for a good ten years.

**DZ:** Then, my dad died. He couldn’t help anymore so I let it go.

**EZ:** We had all kinds of people coming in there. Doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs! [Some] judges. Just people walking [in off] the street. The college kids. We had such a different clientele. It was so interesting. We had a lot of fun.

**DZ:** That was when the long hair was starting.

**EZ:** He and his dad did absolutely beautiful styles on men’s hair. That’s why they called it Private World Hair Styling. They did long looks where all the hair is tapered.

**DZ:** Shag. Before that, a man’s man wouldn’t be caught dead in a [beauty] salon. With a barber, a dad would bring his son in, the son would have long hair.

The dad and the barber would conspire to cut the kid’s hair. The son wouldn’t want much off, but we’d gang up on his son.

The son would go home and cry to their mother. Then, the mother would take him to her salon. That’s the first time men went to women’s salons. The barbers didn’t handle it right. So, barbers went to hair styling school and learned to cut long hair. It wasn’t until the horse was out of the barn.

**EZ:** [We] fixed the rooms in little booths. Two booths. Private, you and your client. [Don] employed another barber.

**DZ:** Angelo Russo’s nephews [Angelo and Tony] came over from Italy. They took over Angelo’s barbershop. [The elder] Angelo retired to South America. They were there at the time of Private World. [The younger] Angelo finally got out of the business and became some kind of guard or something in a prison.

**EZ:** We also sold hair pieces in Private World. All kinds of products.

**DZ:** Barbers finally went and held seminars to teach barbers to cut long hair. They’d lost all those kids to the beauty salons. Barbershops had dominated the landscape. You didn’t hear much about beauty salons. To this day, there’s a mystique about a barbershop. I’d be inside of here, with the lights off, and people will walk by saying, “Is that a barbershop?”

**EZ:** People will wave and say, “Can I

get a haircut?" We say no. We don't tell them [that Don] has a problem—macular degeneration.

[At Private World] he and his dad would send these guys out looking like movie stars. People were so happy. It was very private.

**DZ:** It was an innocent age. There were no drugs. People slept with just screen doors. There was very little crime ... They had [four glass factories] ... There were four theaters—the Court, the Basle, the Washington, and the State.

**EZ:** I sold the one on the corner, as a realtor. It's a church now.

[Note from Eleanor: "I listed and sold the former Basle Theater, located on the corner of Main and Chestnut."]

**TC:** [To Eleanor] What kind of work did your dad do?

**EZ:** He worked with the Pennsylvania Railroad. He used to hold the little sign down here by Chestnut Street. He was a crossing watchman.

**TC:** [To Don] Your dad was born in 1907. He probably started becoming a barber in his 20s. He worked for several barbers in Canonsburg and Washington. When did the family move to Washington?

**DZ:** When I was three years old.

**TC:** What street did you live on?

**DZ:** 608 Broad Street.

**TC:** So that's West End?

**DZ:** That was when the West End was a very nice place to live.

**TC:** Did your family move because of your dad's work?

**DZ:** I don't know the reason.

**TC:** [To Eleanor] What street did you grow up on?

**EZ:** Hall Ave. Then, we moved to Donnan Ave. 536. House is still there.

**DZ:** I suspect the reason was that there were more opportunities [in Washington] for a barber.

**EZ:** [To Don] You were born on Elm Street in Canonsburg.

**DZ:** That house is still there.

**EZ:** We both were born with similar backgrounds, midwives in the house.

**TC:** Your dad got his first license in 1932?

**DZ:** It must've been. I suspect that they didn't license barbers until then.

**TC:** You did not plan to become a barber?

**DZ:** Yeah, I apprenticed under my dad. The union dues were sent to Chicago. We had one barber who would work Sundays.

They called him a “scab.” The barbers kept asking why we sent the money there. We had no control over it. Sure enough, the guy in control of it stole the money, and went to Italy. That was the end of the union.

**TC:** You went to college for a semester then to the Coast Guard. Then you came back to Washington. You two met. Then, you went back to college for theology. Ministry. But all that time, you expected to be a barber?

**DZ:** I kept being a barber. I had a New York license.

[Note from Don: “I had been a barber since I was a teenager and up through the years I was in college.”]

**TC:** With your theology degree, what did you want to do?

**DZ:** I wanted to be a minister. I got sidetracked. Nothing immoral!

**TC:** What was it like to cut hair with your dad?

**DZ:** It was fun. Barbershops are appreciated because it was good experience. Conversation. Airing opinions and differences. It was an event. They had one thing—it was a rub and tonic for 25 cents. They had all these towels in the back. Dad would say, “Ask them if they want a rub and tonic, it’s an extra 25 cents.”

You had to come in and wait your turn. I

had an elderly guy in my chair with this white hair. I was trying to convert [customers to use] rub and tonic. So, I asked [this] customer to tell everyone how he got his massive amount of hair. Shiny. He said he used [Octagon] soap on his hair his whole life! He was supposed to say “rub and tonic.” My dad banged his comb on his forehead!

**TC:** Your dad didn’t know his father.

**DZ:** He was killed.

**TC:** His stepfather was Italian. When you were growing up, what kind of Italian traditions did you have?

**DZ:** Real traditional Italian. The only thing I regret, they used to speak Italian to each other. I think they wanted to keep secrets from us. I regret never learning.


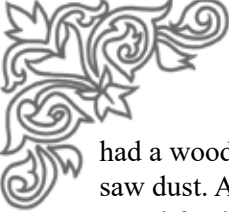
[Note from Don: “Italian is such a beautiful language.”]

**TC:** Did your dad speak Italian?

**DZ:** Yeah, and my mother.

**EZ:** My parents did too.

**DZ:** We weren’t real Italian Italian. We didn’t eat spaghetti everyday like some other families. My mother was more American-style. My dad liked all the food from Italy. Exotic type. The first Italian store was [on Jefferson Avenue between Chestnut and Beau streets]. The Italian store smelling like the beautiful aromas of Italian food. I remember it vividly. They

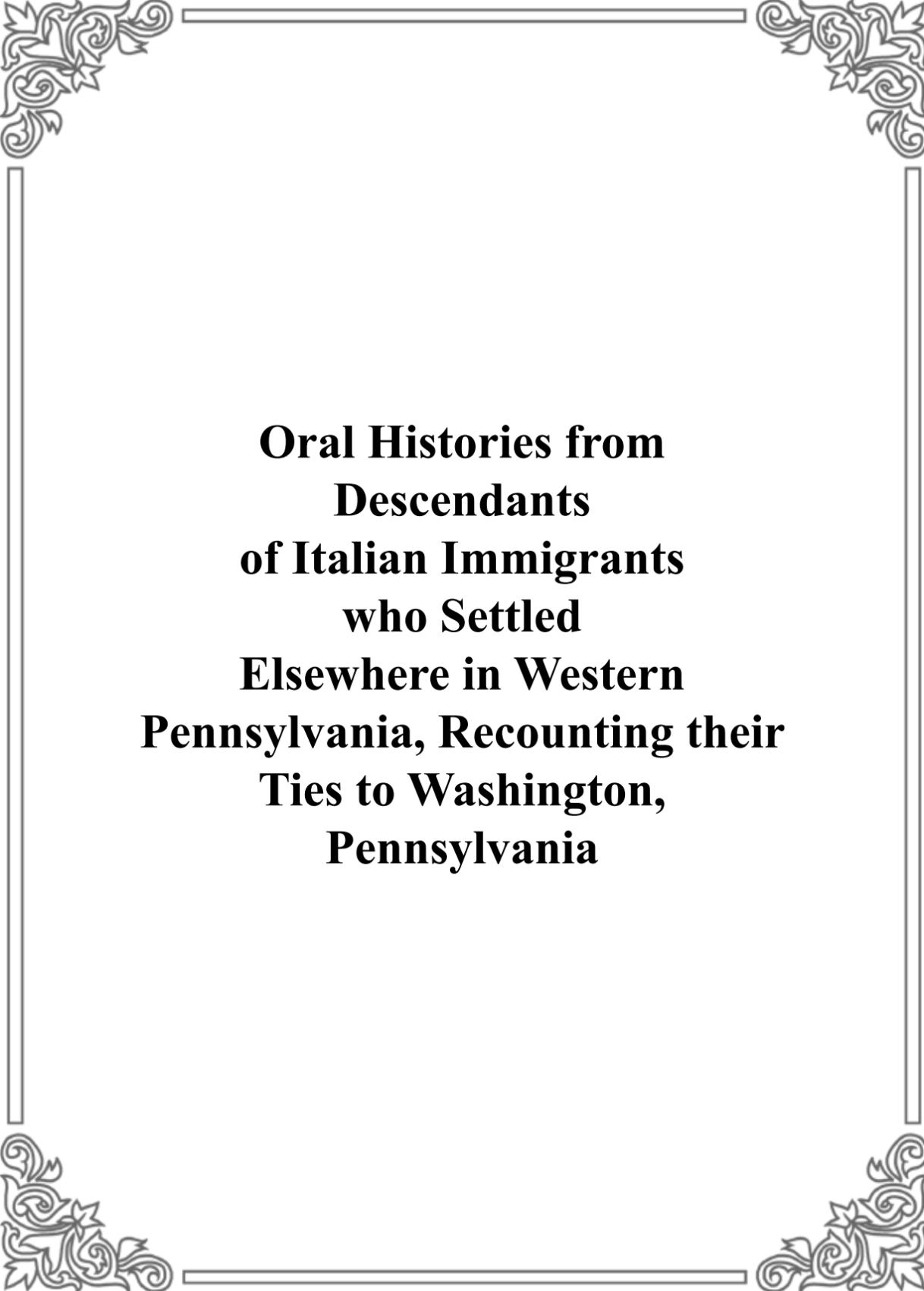


had a wooden floor that they cleaned with saw dust. All those rich Italian aromas. Yanni family. His parents, the original Yanni, and then the next generation.

**EZ:** [To Don] Your mother shopped [for the best Italian products] at the Italian store. She would not use Crisco [only extra virgin olive oil].

**DZ:** My father was a meat and potatoes guy. My mother always made a tossed salad with olive oil and vinegar for every meal. After wrestling practice, I ate a meal that she had kept warm for me. I ate good.

**EZ:** My mother cooked Italian food. Rigatoni. Spaghetti on Sundays. Both mothers baked. Italian pastries. Homemade bread and buns. Easter cakes.



**Oral Histories from  
Descendants  
of Italian Immigrants  
who Settled  
Elsewhere in Western  
Pennsylvania, Recounting their  
Ties to Washington,  
Pennsylvania**



## **W. Bryan Pizzi II, Esq.**

**Grandson of Fiorendo Antonio Pizzi and Elvira Serafina Josephine Gattone**



W. Bryan Pizzi II, Esq., is the grandson of Italian immigrants from Abruzzo and the son of Wilson B. Pizzi, one of the first Italian American doctors in Washington.


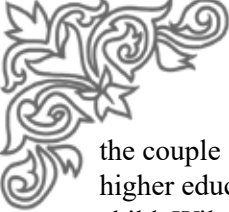
W. Bryan's grandmother, Elvira Serafina Josephine Gattone, emigrated at the age of three with her parents and two siblings from San Martino, Chieti, Abruzzo, to Connellsville, PA, in Fayette County, in 1886. The Gattones acquired land by the Youghiogheny River and established themselves as growers of gladiolas, which they transported and sold in Pittsburgh's Strip District, some 50 miles away.

In 1913, W. Bryan's grandfather, Fiorendo Antonio (Frank Anthony) Pizzi, a native of Palumbra, Chieti, Abruzzo,

emigrated to Connellsville after a brief period in London. Fiorendo was a master tailor who apprenticed in Rome beginning at the age of 11.

The Pizzi and Gattone families knew each other in Abruzzo and there had been some intermarriage between the families. Now in close proximity to the Gattones in Connellsville, the outgoing Fiorendo married the more reserved (and slightly older) Elvira. Fiorendo established himself as a tailor in Connellsville and later in Lakeland, Florida, where the couple retired.

Fiorendo and Elvira raised five children in a home that combined Italian and American customs. Intent on ensuring the success of their American-born children,



the couple stressed the importance of higher education. They urged their oldest child, Wilson (Bryan's father) to become a doctor, and all four of their daughters to become nurses.

Although Fiorendo and Elvira hoped their son Wilson would marry an Italian American woman, Wilson broke with tradition and eloped with a Connellsville girl, Merne Haggart, while he was a student at the University of Pittsburgh.

Upon graduation from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Wilson set up a practice as a general practitioner in Washington. Despite his professional credentials, Wilson—as an Italian American—encountered discrimination among the doctors at Washington Hospital. Wilson faced this discrimination with a strong will to fulfill his destiny as a physician and to raise his family with pride in their Italian heritage. Over his decades-long career in Washington, Dr. Wilson Pizzi was beloved among patients of many nationalities and backgrounds.

“He was very compassionate. He never turned anyone away. It didn't matter if they could pay or not pay,” recalled his son.

May 2017



Fiorenzo Pizzi was a master tailor who apprenticed in Rome beginning at age 11.

## Family Tree of W. Bryan Pizzi II, Esq.

### **W. Bryan Pizzi II's Father:**

- Wilson B. Pizzi, b. 2-18-1918, Connellsville, PA; d. 2-1-2003, Washington

### **W. Bryan Pizzi II's Mother:**

- Merne Elizabeth Haggart, b. 3-8-1919, Connellsville, PA; d. 9-26-1998, Washington

### **Wilson and Merne's date and place of marriage:**

- 7-16-1938, Oakland, MD

### **Wilson and Merne's Children:**

- Janet Pizzi, b. 11-3-1939, Connellsville, PA; d. 6-27-2010; m. — McConnell
- Wilson Bryan Pizzi II, b. 7-13-1944, Washington; m. Mary Sue Keirs (b. 9-29-1944, Gridley, CA) on 11-10-1962
- John Preston Pizzi, b. 12-3-1950, Washington; d. 2-2-2015
- Deborah Pizzi, b. 10-7-1952, Washington; m. Edward Campbell

### **Paternal Grandparents:**

- Fiorendo Antonio (Frank Anthony) Pizzi, b. 12-3-1894, Palumbo, Chieti, Abruzzo; d. 2-29-1976, Lakeland, FL. Emigrated to U.S. 10-28-1913. Became U.S. citizen 3-5-1920. Occupation: Master Tailor.
- Elvira Serafina Josephine Gattone, b. 8-4-1883, San Martino, Chieti, Abruzzo; d. 12-11-1965, Lakeland, FL. Emigrated to U.S. 1886.

### **Fiorendo and Elvira's Date and Place of Marriage:**

- 4-25-1917, Elkton, MD

### **Fiorendo and Elvira's Children:**

- Wilson Bryan Pizzi, b. 2-18-1918, Connellsville, PA; d. 2-1-2003, Washington; m. Merne Elizabeth Haggart (b. 3-8-1919, Connellsville, PA; d. 9-26-1998, Washington) on 7-16-1938
- Geneva Maria Pizzi, b. 3-28-1919, Connellsville, PA; m. Robert Seifert; Geneva's occupation: Nurse
- Ardita Livia Christina Pizzi, b. 8-20-1921, Connellsville, PA; m. Vincent Gattone; Ardita's occupation: Nurse
- Norma June Pizzi, b. 6-6-1927, Connellsville, PA; occupation: Nurse
- Yvonne Pizzi, b. Connellsville, PA; occupation: Nurse



**Fiorendo's parents:**

- Pasquale Pizzi and Livia D'Urbano

**Fiorendo's siblings:**

- Atria Pizzi
- Eugenio Pizzi
- Elba Pizzi

**Elvira's parents:**

- Pietro Gattone and Christine Pizzi

**Elivira's siblings:**

- Anthony (Tony) Gattone
- Henry Gattone

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

June 19, 2019; 3:00 pm; office of W. Bryan Pizzi II, Esq., Washington

**Interviewers:** Tina Calabro and Dyane Troiano

**Transcriber:** Caroline Deluliis

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** Tell me about your Italian grandparents.

**W. Bryan Pizzi:** My grandfather was Fiorenzo Antonio Pizzi. My grandma [laughs]—this is a mouthful—Elvira Serafina Josephine. Her maiden name was Gattone. Big cat, the gattone.

**TC:** And what was their village?

**WBP:** She was from San Martino ... a small village.

**Dyane Troiano:** What part of Italy?

**WBP:** It's Abruzzi, Chieti Region.

**TC:** You're an attorney. Did you have any previous occupations?

**WBP:** Worked in the mill in college. That's it. [laughs]. We all did then.

**TC:** Any military service?

**WBP:** No, I was an army brat.

**TC:** What about your dad's siblings?

**WBP:** He had four sisters. They were all younger. There was Geneva, Yvonne, Norma, and Ardita. Like the Ardita Fighters, have you ever heard of them? That's a rebel group in Northern Italy.

**TC:** And were they all born in Connellsville?

**WBP:** Yeah, including my dad. They were all nurses and he was a doctor. Because that's what Grandma Pizzi said you were going to be. [My dad] got into the Naval Academy and she said, "No, you are going to be a doctor." [laughs] You listened to your mama then.

**TC:** And what about your grandfather, Fiorenzo?

**WBP:** He went by Frank Anthony, but Fiorenzo was his real name. Fiorenzo Antonio.

**TC:** Where did your parents meet?

**WBP:** My mom lived on the Youghiogheny River because her father ran the pump house, what they called it, where the water went from the river to the city. There was a beach on the river. My grandfather went to City Hall. I told you he was a character. He leased the beach. He wouldn't let people on the beach. He charged them to use the beach for years. He put a fence up. So after people had a thinning supply of food, then he would sell food. My mom lived across the river. That is how my dad met her. My dad was like a lifeguard and he would stay at the beach all summer.

[My grandparents] were cousins, third cousins, I think. I think [their marriage] was arranged cause he was a playboy and she was like matronly. And he was ten years younger. When he came here, she was already here. She was three years old when she came to this country. He was 18 [when they met].

**TC:** What brought [your grandmother's family] here?

**WBP:** I think her parents just wanted to come for opportunity. They bought a lot of land in South Connellsville. They grew flowers and that kind of stuff. And [my grandfather], he thought the streets were paved with gold. That's why he came.

**TC:** Were they married in Italy?

**WBP:** No. They were married here. My [great-] grandma Gattone, my grandma Pizzi's mother, was a Pizzi, maiden name. I didn't know that until I saw the graveyard up in Connellsville.

**TC:** So your grandparents [Gattone] were the first immigrants. They came to the Connellsville area.

**WBP:** I don't know why.

**TC:** You said they grew flowers.

**WBP:** [My grandmother] had two brothers, Tony and Henry, who I know and were never married. They grew gladiolas, which they harvested and took to the Strip District. So my dad would go with them. He would pick the flowers and

drive over two, three in the morning to the Strip District.

**TC:** What year would this be?

**WBP:** My dad was born in 1918. He was probably 12. Probably 1930-ish, probably the Depression.

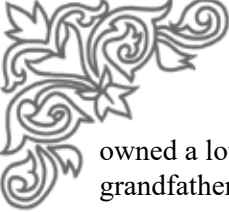
**TC:** How did they get from Connellsville to Pittsburgh?

**WBP:** They had trucks, pickup trucks.

**WBP:** [My grandfather Pizzi] came [to Connellsville] when he was 18, but he got stuck in New York for a while. He didn't have any money. Actually, he got stuck in London.

[The two families, Pizzi and Gattone,] were related. I think the families knew each other in Italy. That region of Italy is known for music. Each village had a little band. They wore uniforms. I saw [that my grandparents] had all this stuff in the attic. And he couldn't play, but he pretended he could play because he got girls that way. He liked women. He liked the girls. So he would go to villages [in his area in Italy] and he would pretend. [laughs]

And that's how he met the Gattone family [in Italy]. He was nuts. He was crazy. And he said one time at the village, kids were listening and they said, "He's not playing." He said, "I smack them. I smack them. I smack them." [laughs] So that's how the families met. Well, they were related somehow. And I think he thought [the Gattones] had money here 'cause they



---

owned a lot of land. And knowing my grandfather, he was going to come over.

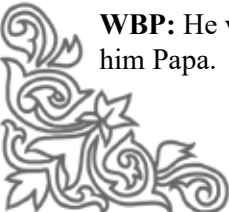
**TC:** So your grandfather got held up in New York?

**WBP:** Well, he got held up in London for a while. He said two months. He got to London and ran out of money. He said, "They don't know how to cook." He said the Italians in London live near Piccadilly Circus. He said, "I finally found an Italian section." They put him up to work as a tailor for a while. [He] ended up wanting to go to New York. Same thing, he had to work there in sweatshops—that's what he called them—and he modeled. [Gestures] That's that picture in New York. And then he got to Philly. Same thing, work, [then] went to Connellsville.

**TC:** So he came to Connellsville. Did he meet your grandmother there?

**WBP:** They [Gattones] picked him up at the train station. That's what he told me. I said, "How did they know who you were?" He said, "They told me to wear a white flower." But he was too cool to do that. He said, "They think I'm stupid because I have a flower on, so I take the flower off." [laughs] I said, "How did they know you, Papa?" and he said, "I was the last one there." Ah, he was a piece of work. I can tell you many stories about him.

**DT:** He was smart.



**WBP:** He was something ... We called him Papa.

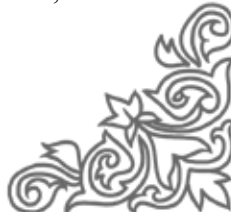
**TC:** And you said you thought their marriage was arranged.

**WBP:** I don't know. No one ever said that. Knowing my grandfather, I'm just thinking 'cause she was getting older. And no husband. He was a good looking guy. He was real handsome. That's just my theory. No one ever told me that. They tried to arrange my father's marriage. They brought a lady in, but my mom and dad were secretly married. 'Cause she wasn't Italian. They were Scots-Irish. So there was an issue there, families.

**TC:** What was your grandfather's occupation?

**WBP:** He was a master tailor. He went to Rome at age 11 and he lived with a tailor for seven years. They were the tailor to the royal family. Have you seen that castle where the king lived, Emmanuel? He would go there and measure, take clothes, measure, go back to the tailor, and King Emmanuel's. But he would go home [to Abruzzo] a couple of weeks per year. He could make suits. He could make sport coats. He could make top coats. He could make a top coat in a day from the cloth. He was amazing to watch. I would watch him sew. Amazing. He would talk to you and thread a needle [just] so. Amazing. So that's what he did when he and my grandmother moved to Florida when I was young. And that's what he did in Florida, made suits.

**TC:** When he came to Connellsville, did he work as a tailor?



**WBP:** Yeah, he opened up a little shop.

**TC:** So he continued to work as a tailor after they moved to Florida?

**WBP:** Yes, he did that all his life until he died. In fact, he died in his shop in Florida. He was 85. My dad said if someone would have found [my grandfather], he could have lived. But he drank his Cribari. He drank Cribari all day. He liked his wine. If someone offered him water, he would say, "Water is to bathe in. You do not drinka the water, you drinka the wine."

**TC:** Now, you said that your grandparents wanted to arrange your father's marriage.

**WBP:** My dad said he was just a freshman in college or a sophomore. He and my mother had run away the year before. [My grandparents] liked her, but she wasn't Italian. [My mother's] mom and dad were more tolerant of that. They liked my dad because he was a very bright guy and all that. But the Italian family wanted Italian. So they told my dad that they were going to bring a wife over [for him]. And he told my mom, "We've got to tell them." [My grandparents] had a fit, of course. "You have to finish school," which he was going to do anyway. He was on scholarships to Pitt. So they had to fess up. Well, once my mom started having children, that changed everything.

**TC:** Your father, Wilson, was the oldest of their children.

**WBP:** There's a story behind my father's name. My grandparents wanted to be Americans. So they wouldn't speak Italian in front of my dad or any of their children, and they didn't go to a Catholic church. They wanted to be Americans. So Wilson was for Woodrow Wilson, who might have been president when my dad was born, and William Jennings Bryan, who ran for president four times. My grandmother was real into all that stuff. So I got the same name. My son and my grandson all have the name.

**TC:** I know there was the intention on a lot of people's part to become American, but also try to pave their way a little more easily by assimilating and adapting.

**WBP:** Oh yeah, that was true. My dad said they would have spaghetti on Thursdays and Sundays, but they would eat steak, potatoes like the Americans did. But they really loved their heritage because my grandfather made wine and did all the Italian things. So it was like a mixture. So I got to see a lot of that growing up. You know as a child, going to their home for big meals and all that.

**TC:** Did your grandfather's family ever come here?

**WBP:** His father came. It would be my great-grandfather. Pasquale, Patsy. I never knew him, but my dad said he came and

stayed ten years. Without his wife. And he helped him. My grandfather got busy with the tailor shop. And he was a tailor; they were all tailors. So he came to help his son, my grandfather.

**TC:** And did any of your grandfather's siblings come over?

[Note from WBP: Yes, his brother Eugenio.]

**TC:** And what about your grandmother?

**WBP:** She never went back.

**TC:** So your father married his sweetheart.

**WBP:** Yeah, and they lived separately. He was in college. She lived with her mom and dad.

**TC:** Where did he go to college?

**WBP:** Pitt undergrad and then Pitt Medical.

**TC:** You said his mother wanted him to be a doctor. What was his path to that? Was he also motivated to be a doctor?

**WBP:** He was, but he wanted to go to the Naval Academy. He liked science, he liked metallurgy. I guess in the Naval Academy that was one of the majors. So he was accepted and got the appointment, but my grandmother, she nixed that. So he got a scholarship to Pitt. And he worked in the summers in J&L Steel for spending money.

**TC:** So his medical practice brought him him to Washington when he graduated?

**WBP:** Well, he got an internship at Washington Hospital, 1942, during the war.

**TC:** He came to Washington and what did he encounter here?

**WBP:** He encountered some discrimination at the hospital from other doctors because he was Italian. He said they kind of shunned him. There were a couple that didn't. Dr. McCullough was helpful and Dr. Crumrine. He said they were both very nice to him. They would give him patients. Then his practice was developed around African Americans, Italian Americans, Polish Americans. He did general surgeries, appendectomies, gall bladders. He delivered babies, and had a general practice. Then in the mid to late 50s, he owed the army two years from medical school. That's when I was an army brat. He became a major in the U.S. Army so we had to move to New York City for two years. Then he was discharged. And then specialties were starting in the late 50s. So he became a specialist. He went to Georgetown, for neurology, that's a three-year residency to become a neurologist, but he kept his old patients. But any new patients, he only took in neurology, his specialty.

**TC:** Now when you said he "owed" his military service, was that when he was at Pitt? Was he in ROTC?

**WBP:** That's what it was. In '42, when he

graduated they didn't need doctors in the army. They had all kind of doctors. They didn't have any here. So they said, "We will get you after the war." They kind of forgot about him until after the Korean War. They needed doctors. That's when he went. But we came back after two years.

**TC:** And what was the history of Italian doctors in this town?

**WBP:** There weren't very many. I think it was just Dr. Sposato and Dr. Badiali. There were two and my dad. And of course later there was Salvitti and Tripoli and all those came along. But in the 40s and the early to mid 50s, there was just him and maybe two others. My dad was one of the youngest.

**TC:** How did your dad deal with the discrimination or process that?

**WBP:** He seemed a little bitter about it, but he developed a very big practice. And the one thing was, I always asked my dad why didn't we live in East Washington because all the other doctors lived there. And he said, "I won't live there, not the way they treated me." He said, "I want my kids to grow up in a regular neighborhood." So we lived on West Prospect, which was a nice neighborhood. The Tucci family lived there. The Nicolella family lived on Prospect. Most people in that area worked in the glass house [Hazel Atlas]. They could walk to work.

**TC:** So he made a decision to live in a mixed neighborhood and he was not going to subject himself to discrimination in East

Washington when he was already facing it in the hospital.

**WBP:** Correct. When you tell people that now they say that's not true. But I'll tell you what, we didn't make it up. I mean, it was true unfortunately.

**TC:** What words would you use to describe your father?

**WBP:** He was something. Very compassionate-like, he never turned anyone away. People came to our house bleeding or whatever. He made house calls actually until he retired. He would stop in on his way home and I would go with him. We would go into the country.

**DT:** When did he retire?

**WBP:** Oh, he was 75. He didn't want to retire. My mom got kinda sick. He had to retire to take care of her, but he was on staff for 60 years over here in Washington Hospital. 1942 to 2002—that's when he retired, 2002.

**TC:** And you said that he cared for Italian Americans, African Americans, Polish Americans. Did you think that his background led him to want to serve underserved people?

**WBP:** I think. He always was for the downtrodden. He identified with them. I think he grew up kinda not poor, but not rich. He never turned anyone away. It didn't matter if they could pay or not pay. He was probably kind to a fault almost. People would take advantage.

**TC:** Did he also enjoy some kind of status, though, because of his being a doctor?

**WBP:** Yeah, he did. He was proud. And his parents were real proud. "Our son's a doctor." Oh my God, yeah. They thought he walked on water. And of course he kind of supported them too. He sent them money and, you know, whatever they needed. His sisters, he helped them through school and his one sister actually had a master's degree in nursing. That was unusual back then. Actually, my grandma went to college for two years.

**TC:** Your grandma went to college?

**WBP:** That was unheard of back then. She went to Oberlin. They must of had family over there [in Ohio]. That was kinda sketchy whether she went for a year or a couple of summers, but she went. She was very bright. She was a real smart lady.

**WBP:** She kinda ran the household. My grandfather was kinda a playboy, a party guy.

**TC:** You said he was very good looking.

**WBP:** He was a handsome guy, yeah.

**TC:** And other words to describe your grandfather?

**WBP:** If he were here, you would be laughing. We would go to a restaurant in Pittsburgh and the whole restaurant would be laughing. He'd be in the kitchen

helping, telling them how to cook. He'd be holding court. He had that accent and he was nice looking. So women kinda liked him. And guys liked him. He liked to bowl, shoot pool. He was a character. He was a real character.

**TC:** Your grandmother, you called her matronly.

**WBP:** She was very tough. She had to be because of the way he was. For instance, he would drink wine all day. He would have a glass like this at the tailor shop. She was against all alcohol. So he couldn't drink in the house. He always drank outside. [laughter]

**WBP:** I mean it was really weird. Like at dinner, no he didn't drink. He had to go outside and drink. Remember she was a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. A charter member. Oh, this is a funny story. They had pins they wore, the women. So, she gave him the pin to wear. He didn't know what it was. He was wearing it down at the Elks or wherever he was drinking. And they say, "Hey Frank, you got an anti-drinking pin." He would go, "No, one moment." He used to wear it out. [laughter] He had a great sense of humor. But no matter what the situation, he could make it funny.

**TC:** Now, the last name Pizzi, the Italian pronunciation, you would say "Pete-Zee."

**WBP:** Correct.

**TC:** Now, can you tell me how that changed?

**WBP:** I don't know. We always went by Pizzi. Now in Connellsville, they called him [pronounces "Pete-Zee"]. Oh you know what, I forgot about [my uncle Gene]. My grandfather's brother came here, Gene. And he was like movie star handsome. He was carabinieri in Italy.

**TC:** A police officer?

**WBP:** And my grandfather talked him into coming over here.

**TC:** Your grandparents gave their children American names, but they didn't change their last name. In the wording of their names, they kept the mixture.

**WBP:** Yes.

**TC:** Did they ever talk about that, about pride in doing that?

**WBP:** They did [have pride]. Through the food, that was a big deal, dinners. Like [my grandfather] grew his own grapes to make wine. And they had the big barrels in the basement, which I remember. And the sugar on top. The kind of sugar that comes up at the top. He would take me down to scrape it off.

**DT:** Did you get the top?

**WBP:** Yeah, It was good. [laughter]

**WBP:** He would sell, you're not supposed to sell it, but he sold it. It was during the Prohibition.

**TC:** And did your father carry that nice

combination of the American part and the Italian part?

**WBP:** He was proud of his ethnicity, but [when people talked] about Italians drinking too much, he would have statistics about the French being the alcoholics not the Italians. He would get upset if they were degrading Italians.

**TC:** And he would use facts.

**WBP:** Oh, he would have facts ready. He was well read. He was a bright guy, a smart guy.

**DT:** Did he belong to any Italian clubs or organizations?

**WBP:** Yeah, he belonged to Sons of Italy here. He loaned them money when they built [the building] on Maiden. Then they built the Alpine Club. He was one of the ones who helped lend them money.

**TC:** And once again he was in the professional class, but the majority of everyone else was working class, working in factories.

**WBP:** Like his friends, our friends, like the Andy family, others were his best friends, Patsy, Margaret. The Comfort family, do you remember the Comfort Cleaners? They were their close friends. The West family, they were Italians. They had a shoe store.

**WBP:** And the policeman. He was Italian. [Cornetta.] When they had a party, they were mostly 90% Italian American,

but they weren't professionals. They were policemen, firemen, factory workers.

**TC:** Speaks so well of your father.

**WBP:** Yeah, he was a good guy.

**TC:** Let's talk about you growing up.

**WBP:** Well, I'll tell you how lucky I was. When I got this [Italian American] award [gestures], you had to have someone introduce you. So I had Franny [Francis King]. And when he got up to introduce me, he said, "Bryan and I were lucky. We grew up in *Happy Days*." You ever see that TV show, *Happy Days*? That's what it was. We grew up in *Happy Days*. Not a care in the world. We leave at five in the morning, we were gone all day.

**WBP:** I had two good friends. Franny King was out this door and Billy Flessiner was out this door. Bill is a school teacher, retired. Francis and I remained close. We have been together every holiday probably since we were kids.

**TC:** Where did you go to school?

**WBP:** I went to First Ward Grade School. It's not there anymore. There is an electrical store there now.

**TC:** And high school?

**WBP:** Washington High School.

**TC:** Where did you go to college?

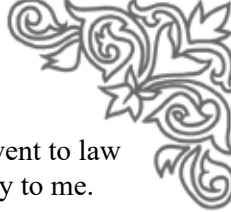
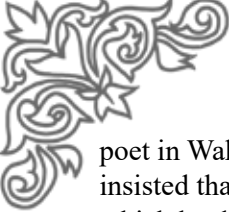
**WBP:** I went to Waynesburg College and Duquesne Law School. Washington High School was the bigger school back then. And the town, we would walk uptown and go to the movies or whatever. It was just like in *Happy Days*: simple, safe.

**TC:** How did your Italian American father and grandfather influence your profession or the way you conduct yourself in your profession?

**WBP:** Well, I don't turn anyone away. If somebody calls me, I try to help. If I don't do it, I get someone in to do it. And my dad always said a couple of things: "It is free to be nice to people," and "It doesn't cost anything to smile at people." So it is kinda what I do. Like if a salesman would come to his office, he would see them, where now doctors don't do that. He would say, "They have to make a living." It didn't matter what kind of salesman they were, he would talk to them. So I kinda grew up like that. If somebody came to our door, he would see them. He didn't turn any of them away. So, when I was growing up, I was supposed to be a doctor. You could be a doctor, or you could be a lawyer, or an accountant, or engineer. Something where you could work for yourself or you couldn't be fired. You were encouraged to go into one of those professions. Well, [laughs] you didn't have much of a choice. I mean that was kinda the way that it was.

**DT:** Education was important.

**WBP:** Yeah, like my brother, Preston, was a gifted writer. He was a published



poet in Wake Forest, but my father insisted that he go to law school, which he didn't like. He wanted to be a teacher. He had a law degree and was a public defender. Now [for my sisters] it didn't matter as much because my father thought they took up space in professional schools. He said he had one girl in his medical school, one female. She graduated, got married and never practiced. He said a man could have done that and supported a family. So that was how he thought.

**TC:** That was the thinking of the time.

**WBP:** Actually, my law school, out of my class of 120, there were two. Now it is more like half are women. But it is a different world now.

**TC:** So your choice of law was because you knew you would go into a profession?

**WBP:** Well, he discouraged everything else. I was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, which was a pretty prestigious fellowship to Pitt for political science. It was a Master's-Ph.D. three-year program. I didn't pay a dime, plus they paid me. It was right next to a Fulbright. Fulbright, Rhodes and this is like third. It was worth a lot of money. So I told my dad, "I won this thing and I'd like to write and maybe be a professor." He said, "Well, you won't be happy because you like nice things. 'Cause you won't make a lot of money. But if you want to, why don't you go to law school for a year? If you don't like it after one year, I'll match the fellowship." So I thought,

"That's not a bad deal." So, I went to law school and liked it. It came easy to me.

**TC:** He really wanted you to have security.

**WBP:** Yeah I guess, but that wasn't a bad deal. If I didn't like law school, I would get a free master's and Ph.D. through him. And he took care of my wife and me. In other words, we were 18. He didn't say, "Get out of here." They paid for us to have a place, got an allowance. He didn't want me to struggle. Then he paid for Sue to go to school and bought her whatever she needed.


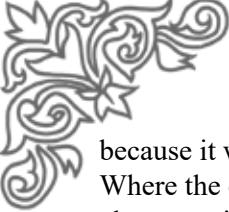
**DT:** That's awesome.

**WBP:** Yeah, they were good to us.

**TC:** Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

**WBP:** No, except I loved growing up Italian American. And I loved both of my grandparents, but my Italian American grandparents were really more emotional. We would go to dinner at my mom's grandma, my other Grandma and Papa Haggart, and have a good American meal, chicken, fried chicken ... and I loved being there because it was on the river and my Grandpa Haggart was the nicest man in the world. My Grandma Haggart was too.

Then we would go to the Italians and they were yelling, carrying on. Killing the chickens, then eating them. You know, I kinda liked going to the non-Italians



because it was kinda quiet sometimes. Where the other ones, man, there was always action. They're fighting and arguing and carrying on. People would get up from the table.

When Sue first saw it, she couldn't believe it. 'Cause when we first got married, we went to Florida for a while. So she was exposed to some of that. She'd say, "They are going to kill each other." I'd say, "No, they are not. It is kinda fun. Just enjoy it." I feel bad my kids didn't get to see any of that.

**DT:** Do your children feel the Italian heritage?

**WBP:** My one grandson loves being Italian. Marcus, my son's son. He wrestled at Waynesburg High School. My wife hates tattoos. I could see [Marcus had a tattoo]—an Italian flag with Pizzi. So she didn't notice. Well, he almost beat this kid who was a state champion. The kid pinned him right at the end and he was really upset. So I went over and said, "Marcus, first of all, I think you beat the kid. And number two, you should be happy Grandma did not see the tattoo."

## **Dr. Charles Tripoli and Rita Gabrielli Tripoli**

**Descendants of Italian Immigrants**





Dr. Charles Tripoli and Rita Gabrielli Tripoli are the children of immigrants from Sicily and Marche, respectively. Dr. Tripoli was one of the first Italian American medical doctors in Washington.

Charles was the eldest son of immigrants who settled in Derry, Westmoreland County. Rita, a nurse, was the youngest child of immigrants who settled in Slickville, Westmoreland County. Both of their families placed a high value on education and encouraged their children to seek college educations. The couple met while working at St. Francis Hospital

in Pittsburgh. Charles graduated from St. Vincent College and the University of Pittsburgh Medical School. Rita graduated from St. Francis Nursing School. Two of Rita's sisters were nurses.

Charles joined the medical practice of Dr. John McGinnis in Washington in 1959. He was one of the few Italian American doctors in the city. Like the others, Charles was able to speak Italian with his patients, many of whom spoke Italian as a first language. In general practice, family practice, and as a mission doctor, Dr.



Tripoli treated hundreds of thousands of patients in his 46-year career, including delivering 2,000 babies (back in the day when General Practitioners delivered babies). He retired in 2016.

Charles and Rita raised a large family—eight biological children, four adopted children, and one foster child. They are renowned in the Washington community for their religious faith and humanitarian values.

August 2017

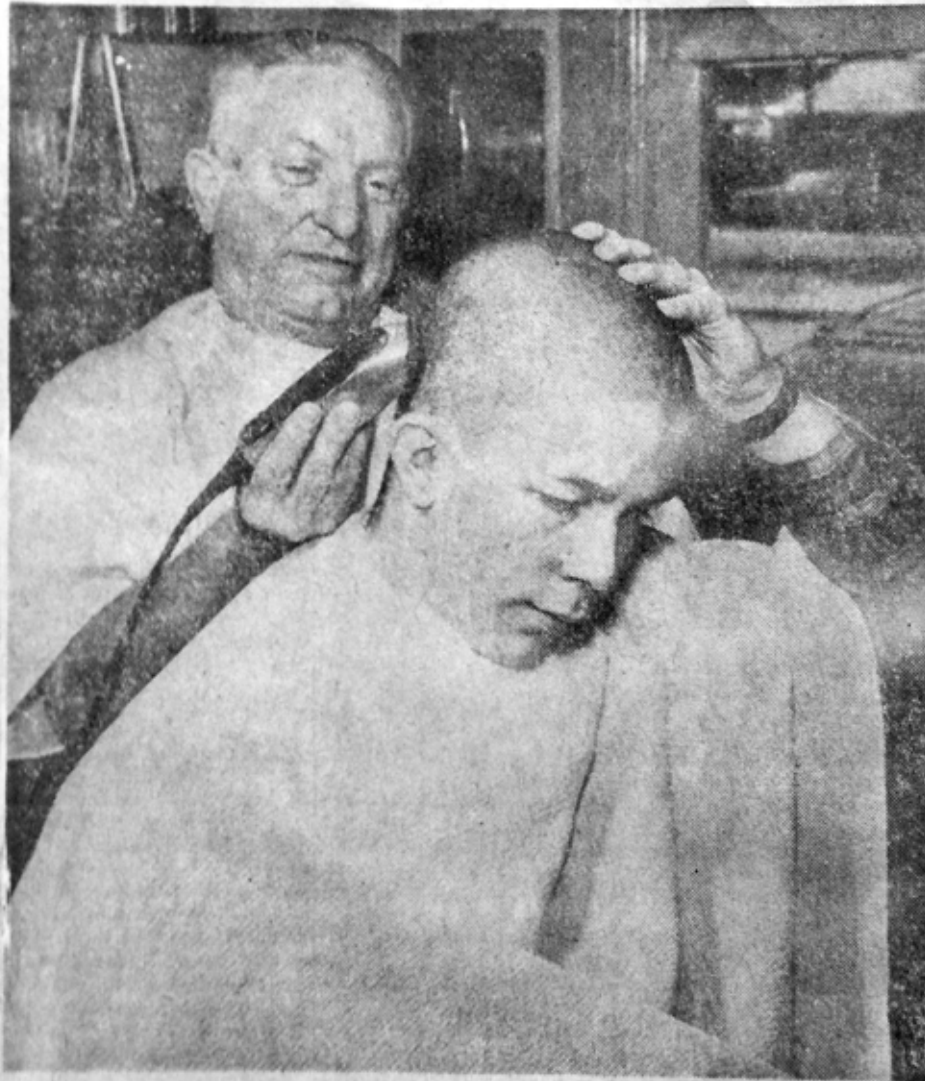


Charles and Rita Tripoli gathered their children for a portrait in the 1980s.



Wedding of Charles' parents, Vincenzo (James) Tripoli and Mary Elizabeth Gelfo, September 1, 1926, Church of the Ascension, Jeannette, PA.

Wednesday, March 12, 1969



**'HAIR' TODAY, GONE TOMORROW** — Derry barber James Tripoli gives the "bald look" to Mike Keough, a Derry Area High School junior who chose to sacrifice his locks to lend authenticity to his role in the student musical "The King And I." (Bulletin)

Charles Tripoli's father, James, was a popular barber in Derry, Westmoreland County.

## Family Tree of Charles Tripoli

### **Charles' Father:**

- Vincenzo (James) Tripoli, b. 4-6-1904, Villarosà, Sicily; d. 1-30-1973, Derry, PA; occupation: barber

### **Charles' Mother:**

- Mary Elizabeth Gelfo, b. 10-26-1908, Villarosà, Sicily; d. 5-3-1950, Derry, PA

### **Vincenzo (James) and Mary Elizabeth's date and place of marriage:**

- 9-1-1926, Church of the Ascension, Jeannette, PA

### **Vincenzo (James) and Mary Elizabeth's Children:**

- Charles Tripoli, b. 4-17-1930, Derry, PA; m. Rita Gabrielli ( b. 10-16-1934, Slickville, PA) on 9-1-1956
- Joseph Tripoli, b. 4-8-1936, Derry, PA

### **Vincenzo's (James) Second Marriage:**

- Angela DiSaverio in 1951

### **Vincenzo (James) and Angela's Child:**

- Julia Tripoli, b. 5-10-1952, m. — Morrow

### **Charles' Paternal Grandparents:**

- Calogero (Charles) Tripoli, b. Villarosà, Sicily
- Concetta Bellomo, b. Villarosà, Sicily

### **Calogero and Concetta's Children:**

- Vincenzo (James) Tripoli, b. 4-6-1904, Villarosà, Sicily; d. 1-30-1973, Derry, PA; m. Mary Elizabeth Gelfo (b. 10-26-1908, Villarosà, Sicily; d. 5-3-1950, Derry, PA) on 9-1-1926; m. 2nd Angela DiSaverio in 1951
- Mary
- Four sisters, b. U.S.
- Samuel, b. U.S.; died at age 4 or 5

### **Charles' Maternal Grandparents:**

- Joseph Gelfo
- Josephine DiGiugno

### **Joseph and Josephine's Children:**

- Mary Gelfo, b. Villarosà, Sicily
- Carmella Gelfo, m. — Bellomo
- Domenic Gelfo, b. Villarosà, Sicily
- Samuel Gelfo, b. U.S.



## Family Tree of Rita Gabrielli Tripoli

### **Rita's Father:**

- Louis Rainari Gabrielli, b. 6-16-1887, Ascoli Piceno, Marche, Italy; d. 4-18-1981, Slickville, PA; occupation: coal miner

### **Rita's Mother:**

- Adalagesia (Ada) Tardini, b. 9-25-1900, Modena, Italy; d. 5-14-1967, Slickville, PA

### **Louis and Ada's Children:**

- Albertina Edna Gabrielli, b. 7-25-1921, Detroit, MI; d. 5-31-2014; m. — Yurko
- Robert Victor Gabrielli, b. 8-25-1922, Detroit, MI; d. 11-11-1980
- Blanche Mae Gabrielli, b. 3-4-1928, Detroit, MI; 2-25-2007; m. — Thorson
- Lucia Martha Gabrielli, b. 12-13-1932, Slickville, PA; d. 1-9-2015; m. — Stinson
- Rita Gabrielli, b. 10-16-1934, Slickville, PA; m. Charles Tripoli (b. 4-17-1930, Derry, PA) on 9-1-1956

## Interview

### Date, Time and Place of Interview:

August 7, 2017; 1:00 pm; home of Charles and Rita Tripoli, Washington

**Interviewers:** Tina Calabro and Dyane Troiano

**Transcriber:** Liz Terek

**Editor:** Tina Calabro

**Tina Calabro:** I am interviewing Charlie and Rita Tripoli about their experiences growing up as Italian Americans. Also, we'll address their work and community involvement in Washington, PA.

**TC:** Charlie, let's start with you: What was your father's name?

**Charles Tripoli:** Vincenzo James Tripoli. Nearly all Vincenzos turned out to be "Jimmys." He always went by James in this country. Vincenzo was his baptismal name.

**TC:** What was your father's birth date?

**CT:** April the 6th, 1904.

**TC:** Where was he born?

**CT:** Villarosa in Sicily.

**TC:** Your mother's name?

**CT:** Mary Elizabeth Gelfo.

**TC:** What was her birth date?

**CT:** October 26, 1908.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**CT:** Villarosa.

**TC:** Rita, what was your father's name?

**Rita Tripoli:** Louis Rainari Gabrielli.

**TC:** What was his birth date?

**RT:** June 16, 1887.

**TC:** Where was he born?

**RT:** Ascoli Piceno, Marche, Italy

**TC:** Your mother?

**RT:** My mother's name was Adalagesia (Ada) Tardini.

**TC:** When was she born?

**RT:** September 25, 1900.

**TC:** Where was she born?

**RT:** She was born in Modena, Italy.

**TC:** [To Charlie] Your brothers and sisters ...

**CT:** I'm the eldest. My brother, Joseph, he was born April 8, 1936. My mother died young, so I have a half-sister, Julia Morrow. She was born in 1952.

**RT:** May 10th.

**TC:** Your dad remarried?

**CT:** Yes.

**TC:** Rita, your brothers and sisters, in order ...

**RT:** Okay, Albertina Edna Gabrielli, that's one person. My brother was Robert Victor. Then next one is Blanche Mae. The next one is Lucia Martha Stinson. Then, me.

**TC:** You're the youngest?

**RT:** The youngest and the only living, which is sad, too. The rest are all deceased.

**TC:** What date were you married?

**CT:** September 1, 1956.

**RT:** Correct. That long, wow!

**TC:** Where did you get married?

**CT:** Saint Sylvester's Church, Slickville. The celebrant was Father Edmund Cuneo. He was the Dean of St. Vincent College.

**TC:** Your children?

**CT:** OK, you need a whole page [laughter]. James, June the 6th, 1957. He was 60 this year. Louis, June the 26th, 1958. Peter, February 4, 1960. Paul, March 1, 1961. John, November 29, 1962. Philip, April 2, 1964. Anthony is November 20, 1966. Mary is June 13, 1973. Ada Marie and Angela Marie,

June 6, 1974. They're twins. Jennie Ann is January 22, 1977. Sara, September 2, 1972.

**RT:** We have 19 grandchildren. Two greats and one on the way.

**Dyane Troiano:** Who's having one?

**RT:** Jim, our oldest son. He has two grandsons. Paul will have a grandson in October.

**CT:** We followed the Italian tradition. Mary's named after my mother, Ada after her mother, and Angie for my stepmother. Jennie was for one of my favorite aunts.

**TC:** [To Charlie] Your stepmother's name was Angela. What was her maiden name?

**CT:** DiSaverio. Italian the whole way through.

**TC:** Vincenzo and Mary Elizabeth, where did they meet? In Villarosa?

**CT:** No, they were infants. My dad was four. My mother was two. When they were brought over.

**TC:** Vincenzo and Mary Elizabeth came to the U.S ...

**CT:** As very young children. My dad went by James or Jim, so that's what I'll refer to him as.

**TC:** Both their families settled in Derry?

**CT:** Well, it was typical Italian. My

grandfather said to him, "Son, it's time you settled down and get married." He'd only gone to fourth grade. He had to help support the family. By 16, he had his own barber shop. By the time he was in his twenties, my grandfather said, "It's time you settled down and got married. My friend has a beautiful daughter. I want you to meet her." So, that's how it was arranged. It was a beautiful marriage. They were getting ready to celebrate their 25th anniversary when my mother got leukemia and she died. They were married September 1, 1926. My mother had just graduated from high school at that time. She was 18. My dad was 22.

**TC:** Your grandparents, they brought over your father, James ...

**CT:** He had a sister, Mary. He was four and Mary was two. Actually, my grandfather came here first. His name was Calogero. He came over first because he had an older brother here. Then, he had to work for two years to get enough money to send for my grandmother and my dad and my Aunt Mary. [My grandfather] never met [his daughter] Mary until she got to the United States. My grandmother was pregnant when he left.

**TC:** Your grandfather came here first and to what city?

**CT:** I'm not sure. They settled in different areas. Eventually, they ended up in Derry. That's where they spent most of their lives. [My grandfather] went by Charles. That's how I got my name.

**TC:** He sent for his wife and kids. She was pregnant. Do you know what kind of work your grandfather did?

**CT:** Eventually, he had a grocery store.

**TC:** That was in Derry?

**CT:** Yes.

**TC:** What was your [paternal] grandmother's name?

**CT:** Concetta Bellomo.

**TC:** What were your [maternal grandparents'] names?

**CT:** Joseph and Josephine Gelfo. My [maternal] grandmother's maiden name was DiGiugno. It means June, the month of June.

**TC:** Rita, how did your parents meet?

**RT:** I haven't the vaguest idea. My father came to this country when he was 19 and he traveled back to Italy, brought his mother and sisters over. (Two sisters stayed, two sisters and their mother went back.) When he was thirty, he went back to Italy and somehow met my mother. They got married and she came here. She was the only one from her family that came here and never got a chance to go back.

**CT:** They had their honeymoon in Paris and came back to the United States.

**TC:** [To Rita] When your father came here, where did he settle?

**RT:** Actually, he spent some time in Detroit, Michigan. But in Pennsylvania, Hill Station. That's where I think my oldest sister and brother were born. Then they moved to Detroit around 1924 to 1928. My sister, Blanche, was born there. Then the Great Depression. They moved to Slickville. He became a coal miner.

**DT:** Do you know what he did in Detroit?

**RT:** He had a grocery store. Somebody burned it down, as I understand, during the Depression. There was a lot of messing with Italians.

**TC:** Your mother came here and that must have been ...

**RT:** A terrible experience. She was heart-broken. We were very poor. Nobody had the money to send her back [to visit her family]. When we finally had some, she had Parkinson's and diabetes and heart problems. She died at 66. We promised her we'd go back and meet her brothers, which we did. We took six little boys, ages 9 to 3. [laughs] I left the baby at home with my sister in Greensburg. We met my mother's brothers. Her sister had already died.

**CT:** We met [the sister's] husband. We still keep in touch.

**CT:** It was 50 years ago that we went.

**TC:** How many times have you gone back to see the family?

**RT:** I went, maybe, three times total.

Charlie went more often.

**CT:** I've been there about a dozen times. The last time was 2011. At that time, Rita had two first cousins. One passed away.

**TC:** [To Charlie] Do you also go back to see your family in Sicily?

**CT:** Yes. I have cousins in Sicily.

**RT:** My mother's niece still lives there. She came here to visit. She's a professional physician. She came once to do some studying. My father's nephew came to visit twice. Alfredo. He brought his grandson with him.

**CT:** Once we got there, fifty years ago, we made contact.

**TC:** Let's go back in time. You're growing up with your Italian immigrant parents. We'll start with you, Charlie. What was life like growing up in an Italian family?

**CT:** It was a very happy time, actually, except for the death of one uncle who died at the age of 36. My grandparents had seven children. I had a typical Italian family. There was a grocery store. My grandparents lived behind the grocery store. We lived in an apartment, to the left, on the first floor. My dad's brother and his family lived on the second floor. We kind of all grew up together. Two of my dad's sisters lived in Derry also.

Sunday, we got together for the usual spaghetti dinner. The women and the kids

went to church. The men stayed home except for one uncle, Patsy. He went to Mass regularly. My Uncle Sam went to Mass pretty regularly, too. Most of the time the men didn't go except for special occasions—weddings and funerals. [laughs]

My dad was a barber. My mother helped out at Grandpap's grocery store. She actually took over the store when they retired and had it until she passed away.

**TC:** How did your dad get his training as a barber?

**CT:** Apprentice. There were no barber schools in those days. He started at age 12, standing on a wooden soap box, shaving necks. By the time he was 16, he had his own shop. He kept his shop for 50 years. He retired at 66.

**TC:** Your name—Tripoli—does it have a meaning?

**CT:** It's Greek. Three cities. It means three cities. The family originated in Constantinople.

**TC:** Before your mom got sick, she was a homemaker? What do you remember about your mom?

**CT:** I remember some of the religious songs she sang to me. "Look Down, O Mother Mary." "Jesus: My Lord, My God, My All." I don't know if they're still in the hymn books or not. She was a very faith-filled person. They didn't socialize much. There wasn't much to do in Derry.

We didn't have a car. We walked everywhere. When we went to Pittsburgh or Latrobe, we'd take the train by the house. I remember she made most of our clothes, with the help of my grandmother. Nonna would have us lie down on newspaper. She'd trace it out. I think I was in high school before I got my first store-bought suit.

**TC:** Your parents grew up here so they spoke English.

**CT:** Yes. But the grandparents only spoke Sicilian. So I still can speak Sicilian. I actually had to take classes to learn Italian.

**TC:** Did you hear frequent speaking of Italian in the house when the grandparents were there?

**CT:** Yeah. My mother's mother, when she got to be in her eighties, said, "If I'd have known I was gonna live so long, I'd have learned to speak English!"

**RT:** Hate to rush into things. [laughter]

**CT:** Of course, they were uneducated. My grandmother could sign her name. Grandfather never went to school. He started working in the sulfur mines when he was about six or seven years old in Villarosa. That's why they came to this country. No chance to get ahead.

**TC:** He could not read or write?

**CT:** No.

**TC:** What other Italian traditions besides food, cooking, singing, did your family carry out?

**CT:** Of course, baking bread. They always baked their own bread. Baking cookies. I remember cookies that had coffee and wine in them.

**TC:** Rita, your dad came over when he was 19. Your mother came when she was 20. So, they grew up in Italy for the most part and then they came here. What was it like growing up?

**RT:** Actually, my father did not want us to speak Italian because the Italians were looked down upon. He'd left Italy because in those days, I guess, it was a papal state. He wanted to go to school but he said the priest told him he didn't need to go to school. He needed to stay home and feed the pigs. So, he was very sincere about us getting an education. My oldest sister could understand Italian, but she couldn't speak it. My parents always spoke in English except if they didn't want us to know what they were saying. My two aunts—one lived five miles away and one was maybe 14 miles away—so we weren't close and we didn't have a lot of Italian neighbors. We had a whole mix. In fact, one Polish fellow wanted to marry my oldest sister and he offered my father \$500. But my father said no [Polish person] ever had \$500.

We were very poor. In fact, when my father worked in the mines, he was for the union. So he was blackballed two years. He sold his truck for two pigs. We raised

pigs in the backyard. He made his own prosciutto, cappicola and, of course, the sausage. He'd hang it upstairs.

**CT:** They didn't have a basement in the house.

**RT:** We didn't have indoor plumbing until I was a junior in high school. We had an outhouse. Our sons wanted to bring it here and put it in our turnaround. [laughter] My father used to hang the sausage upstairs in the bedrooms to dry. When I brought Charlie home to meet my parents, my father took him upstairs to see the sausage drying and Charlie said, "That's the girl for me!"

Actually, we met at St. Francis Hospital. My oldest sister went to secretarial school. My brother was in the service with the G.I. Bill. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. He was a school teacher. My two other sisters and I are all nurses from St. Francis Hospital in Pittsburgh.

I remember my mother working very hard. We had to pull weeds in the garden, can stuff, and did a lot of work.

**CT:** She made her own pasta. I remember she'd set a big table.

**RT:** She was an excellent cook.

**TC:** Your father wanted the family to speak English so you'd be better prepared at school and move up in the world. Your mother must have learned English pretty quickly.

**RT:** Very quickly! She couldn't write in English, 'cause I remember writing letters to Italy in English, but some of her relatives could translate them. So that was strange, but that's the way it worked.

**TC:** Charlie, your grandparents, your dad, and his sister came to the U.S.

**CT:** The two eldest, my dad and my Aunt Mary, were born in Villarosa. The rest were all born in the United States. Four sisters. There were seven. There were miscarriages too. Babies died young. They had one son, Sammy, who lived to be about 4 or 5 years old and he passed away.

**TC:** Rita, what brought your father here?

**RT:** An education and better life.

**TC:** In Italy, what was he doing?

**RT:** I have no idea. We never talked like you do now. We just did what we were told and that was it. [laughs]

**TC:** What kind of education did your father seek here in the U.S.?

**RT:** Very little. He taught himself, I guess. I don't recall that he had any formal education.

**CT:** But he could read and write. Her mother learned also.

**RT:** He was a coal miner.

**CT:** 30-some years.

**TC:** Traditions in your Italian home?

**RT:** We did visit the aunts, now and then, and cousins. We had a lot of cousins. My one aunt had eight children and the other one had four. I'm the youngest of that generation. There are only two of us living. They were all older than me. My mother went to church. We went to church. My father only went to church to walk us down the aisle. [laughter]

**CT:** They made sure all the children went to church.

**TC:** Rita, you said your parents encouraged you to get a good education. That was really important to them.

**RT:** Absolutely. It was most important to them.

**TC:** What did they tell you about getting an education?

**RT:** That you needed one to get along in life.

**TC:** [To Charlie] What about your father and mother? Did they promote education?

**CT:** Oh, yes. My brother and I both graduated from St. Vincent College. He was in business. I went on to medical school. My sister got her Ph.D. in speech pathology and she just retired last year from one of the universities in North Carolina. So, yeah, we all got educated. My mother graduated from high school. But she didn't go on to college. My grandfather didn't feel that women needed

to be educated.

**TC:** That was a common belief.

**CT:** But my uncle, [my mother's] brother, went to school. He actually went to school with my dad's brother. They were classmates at Indiana Normal School. It's now IUP. Both got teaching degrees. Neither one could get jobs because of the prejudice against Italians. My uncle [father's brother] worked at Westinghouse. My mother's brother went into business. Eventually, he became a beer distributor. Before [WWII] in Derry, no Italians were allowed in the Fire Department.

**RT:** That's something!

**CT:** The family that lived right next door to the fire hall, they used to come around once a year to collect for the Fire Company. There were a lot of Italians in Derry. They weren't the only ones—the Polish people, too. None of the immigrant families gave them any money. They boycotted them. So they opened it up, finally. After [WWII], it all changed, of course. After all, the guys were fighting side-by-side and dying. But before the war, I can remember the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross on Mossholder Hill in Derry.

**RT:** They even did that in Slickville.

**TC:** Against African Americans? Or, are you saying, Italians?

**CT:** No. We didn't have any African Americans in Derry.

**DT:** Just immigrants.

**RT:** I don't know what they were burning it for.

**CT:** They were anti-Catholic. The Irish. The Polish. The Italians. Anybody who was Catholic, the Ku Klux Klan was opposed. The South was mostly the African American. Up north, those were the immigrants.

**TC:** What was your family's philosophy about dealing with discrimination?

**CT:** There were enough of us around that we didn't really need [other people] for anything. We had the Italian Club and the bocce yards. We had the church.

**TC:** Rita, what about your family? What was their philosophy about dealing with discrimination?

**RT:** They didn't, except my father didn't like the English after [WWI]. He said that the Red Cross and the English treated them poorly during World War I. But he drove to work in a truck and there were other workers who were African American. He'd save the heads and intestines of the pigs for them. He didn't charge them, you know. He shared it with them.

**CT:** My dad had his barber shop and he had a lot of clientele. The bankers came. The business people came.

**RT:** My father had a building which housed Slickville's Sportsman's Club.

He was a hunter and so, it was like a bar in a basement. They had a nice association. They had a bocce court in our yard and a lot of guys—Italian—would come and play bocce in the summer. My father made wine, too. People would come and help us.

**CT:** We never complained that there was any discrimination. We just offered it up and eventually, it disappeared.

**TC:** Now, let's talk about you two getting together. Charlie, what did you major in at St. Vincent's?

**CT:** Biology. Pre-Med.

**TC:** What was your interest in biology and medicine?

**CT:** I really hadn't decided until my mother became ill. I was already in college when she died, so I must have made up my mind. I guess I'd decided in high school. I'd thought of maybe going into business and taking over the store. But then, I got a full tuition scholarship to college. My college was free except my books. I was a biology major from the beginning. Looking back quite a few years now, I must have been interested in medicine to begin with. But it was cemented after my mother got sick and I spent a lot of time in hospitals while she was sick. I went to college for three years, then applied to medical school, just to see what it was like. I got accepted after three years to Pitt. I asked them if I could graduate with my class then go into medical school the following year. They

said, "No, you'd have to re-apply all over again." This was after [WWII] and there were 30-some applicants for every spot, so I couldn't pass it up. I took it.

**TC:** So you went right in after three years of college?

**CT:** They granted my college degree so I went to medical school at Pitt. I interned at St. Francis and that's where I met Rita.

**TC:** [To Rita] What high school did you go to?

**RT:** Saltsburg High School. It was in Indiana County.

**TC:** [To Charlie] You went to Derry High School?

**CT:** Yes.

**TC:** [To Rita] You went right to St. Francis Hospital Nursing School after high school?

**RT:** I think I started nursing school something like 17 days after I graduated high school. I got a scholarship because I was the third person from the same family. If you kept your grades up, you got a little more off. I don't think my parents paid more than \$100 in three years. Maybe even less. I don't know. I loved nursing. It was just great. I'm a hands-on person, so I needed to do stuff like that. [laughs].

**TC:** Is that a two-year program?

**RT:** It was three years and year-round. I think we got two weeks off.

**CT:** It was very intensive then. When we met, she was working in the emergency room during my first rotation. We had a one-year internship in those days to get your license in Pennsylvania. So, that was 1955-56. We started in June.

**RT:** Then you had to go into the Navy.

**CT:** We met in 1955 and then we got married September 1, 1956. Then, very quickly, we had our first son. Nine months and ten days after our wedding. [laughter] He was born at St. Francis. The nuns always kept track! [laughter] Rita was being wheeled down to the delivery room and Sister Mary says, "Little early, Miss Gabrielli." [laughter]

**RT:** Made it by six days!

**CT:** Actually, he was two weeks early. [laughter] But they kept track.

**RT:** We drove to Oklahoma.

**CT:** Jimmy was only six weeks old.

**RT:** They had disposable diapers in those days for traveling. They were big squares. That was great for traveling.

**TC:** You went to Oklahoma because of the Navy?

**CT:** Yes. I was at a Naval Air Station. I never saw the ocean when I was in the Navy.

**RT:** One of the doctors was from Atlantic City, New Jersey. He was being discharged. He said he was so glad that he was getting out of the Navy so he could go home and see the ocean!

**CT:** We spent two years there. '57 to '59. Our second son, Louis, was born in Oklahoma.

**TC:** Military service: 1957 to 1959 ...

**CT:** Active duty. Then Reserves until '68. I was discharged as a Lieutenant Commander.

**TC:** I look at what both of you have done and I think, "How did you do all that?" [laughter]

**RT:** I think that myself.

**DT:** And have all these children!

**TC:** So when you first met each other, what was that like?

**DT:** What did you think of one another?

**RT:** We had a lot in common, ethnic-wise, religion-wise. He was a very nice person to everyone. He was never angry, never rude. I thought, "That's the guy for me." [laughter] But I didn't tell him that. I let him think it was all his idea. [laughter]

**CT:** When I saw those sausages, I said, "That's the girl for me!" [laughter]

**TC:** Your Italian heritage was a part of

understanding each other.

**CT:** Oh, yes. I wasn't necessarily looking for an Italian girl. I was looking for a Catholic girl. For a lot of us, that's why we interned at Catholic hospitals. Dr. Stinely went to a Pittsburgh hospital. He was a classmate. He wanted to meet a Catholic girl. The fact that Rita was Italian—I saw the name Gabrielli and thought she may be Lebanese at first. So I asked her and she said, "No. Italian. Gabrielli." We just kind of hit it off. That was it.

I knew I was going into the Navy, but that they didn't need me for an additional year. So I spent an extra year at St. Francis. I didn't go into the Navy until '57. I remember saying to her, "Rita, I'm going to be going away to the service and I don't want to go by myself." She said, "I don't want you to go by yourself, either." That was it.

**TC:** Let me ask you one thing about those days. You got married in Slickville. You came back to Pittsburgh to work at the hospital. You [Rita] were pregnant. Were you working the first year of your marriage or did you stay home?

**RT:** I worked at the V.A. for a while when I was pregnant because, as a nurse, I made twice the amount of money he made as a doctor.

**TC:** The V.A. up on Highland Drive, above Washington Boulevard?

**CT:** Yeah. Right. She made \$300 a month

and I made \$150.

**TC:** Where did you live in Pittsburgh?

**CT:** Highland Avenue. We lived in a third story loft. Near the zoo. When she got further along in her pregnancy, we moved to Slickville and I would commute back and forth to St. Francis.

**DT:** You stayed with your parents?

**RT:** Yes.

**TC:** Now, let's talk about how you got to Washington.

**CT:** It goes back to Derry. A classmate of mine, Dr. Tom McGinnis, he had been in the Army during [WWII]. He was six years older than I. But he'd still go back to Derry to get his hair cut. He got married. I was actually the best man at his wedding before I went into the service.

He kept in touch with my dad. He was in practice for about three years and the practice was growing. He started on 90 East Maiden Street. He was ready for a partner. He invited us to come down to Washington and we liked what we saw. We've been here ever since.

**DT:** What year was that?

**CT:** 1959. We bought a house up in Pancake. Then, after three years, [John] went into specialty. He went into Physical Medicine/Rehab. Dr. Salvitti was my partner then. [Dr. Salvitti] graduated from Temple University and interned at

Washington. We were together seven years—'63 to '70. Then he went into ophthalmology after that.

I had several partners over the years. Then, from '88 to '93, our son, Louis, and I were in practice together. But he opted to teach. In '93, he went to Buffalo General Hospital. From there, to St. Louis.

In '95, I sold my practice to Allegheny General Hospital. Then they went bankrupt. In the year 2000, I went to Centerville Clinic. We opened the first Centerville Clinic office in Washington. Ken and Shirley Yablonsky were good friends; in fact, they were patients. Shirley was. So I was with them until 2005. I finally retired at age 75.

In the meantime, the family grew and grew. We outgrew the house in Pancake, even after adding two bedrooms on the third floor. We had a chance to buy some property here and we built this house in '71.

**TC:** About your practice. Was it General Practice?

**CT:** It started out as General Practice. Then, in the '70s, they had the family practice boards. So I took my exam, and became a Family Practitioner. We had to take an exam every seven years. I did mine every six years 'cause if you failed, you could always take it the seventh year. Fortunately, I didn't fail. I took it '72, '78, '84, and '90. By that time, it lasted until '97 so I didn't take it after '90. I

took my boards four times and passed every time.

**TC:** Have you ever estimated how many patients you've seen in your career?

**CT:** I couldn't even imagine. It'd have to be in the hundreds of thousands. It was 46 years in practice.

**DT:** You've also done a lot of mission work.

**CT:** Yes. General Practitioners did O.B. in those days—delivered babies. I know we did it for 20 years and we did about eight a month or a hundred a year. In twenty years, my partners and I delivered 2,000 babies. That's one figure I do know. When I sold my practice, we had over 6,000 active patients. It was a very busy practice.

**TC:** When you came to Washington, you said you liked what you saw here. What did you like about the city?

**CT:** We grew up in small towns so I didn't want to be in the center of a big city. Mostly looked like a nice place. It had a college and a lot of nice buildings. Mainly, I came here because I was invited by Dr. McGinnis.

**TC:** So your son Louis is also a physician.

**CT:** Yes. He was just promoted to Admiral in the Navy Reserves. We were just up in Washington, D.C. in October. When he went to St. Louis, they needed

a medical officer at the Navy base in St. Louis, so he joined the Navy there. He spent a year in Fallujah in Iraq and a year in Germany in a medical hospital there. He came up through the ranks and he's a One-Star Admiral now.

**TC:** [To Rita] What about nursing? Did you continue to do nursing?

**RT:** I did nursing for a short while. Then I did [Charlie's] bookwork at home for a long time. I did the payroll and all that stuff. I worked at the office just for a short time.

**CT:** When Dr. McGinnis was on-call, she'd work at the office in the evening and I'd be home with the kids. So, it got her out a little bit.

**TC:** You had your hands full with all your children. Talk about hands-on!

**CT:** She didn't drive at that time and I was gone sometimes for a whole day between deliveries and evening hours. So she'd take the bus from Pancake down to Bartolotta's at the bottom of Pancake Hill, buy the groceries, take the bus back up.

**RT:** Dragging some kids. I finally learned to drive when I was pregnant with number five.

**CT:** Must have been four of the kids then.

**RT:** Yeah. I remember when I went to take my driver's test, I had a young, rookie cop. I was quite pregnant and he

was so nervous. He could hardly talk. He said, "Just drive down the hill." So I drove down the hill. I said, "I don't think the engine started." They were using jackhammers. He said, "Oh, that's okay." [laughter] He'd have passed me if I'd have run over him! [laughter] So I did pass my test.

**CT:** The State Police were doing the driver's exams at that time. They have civilians now.

**RT:** That was fun.

**TC:** [To Charlie] When you first came to practice here in the mid-to-late '50s, there were still a lot of Italian immigrants here. Did you find that older Italian immigrants gravitated toward you?

**CT:** I spoke Italian. I had quite a few Italian families [as patients].

**RT:** Charlie's grandmother came and lived us for a while. She didn't speak English. We had a good time. We'd talk. [Rita acts out how their conversations went.]

**CT:** We got to be real good friends with Dr. Sposato. He'd never take a vacation. When Dr. Salvitti and I were in practice together, we told him, "We'll take care of your patients and they'll come back to you. Just take some time off." He finally took some time off. But he worked every day.

We were invited one time to his farm, and our kids started chasing the sheep. He

said the sheep were going to fall over and die. Then Peter got on his tractor and it moved a little bit. We were never invited back.

**DT:** I don't know why.

**CT:** But we were good friends with him and Grace. He was glad to have some other Italian doctors around. He said it was tough on him when he'd first came. Being the only Italian man.

**TC:** He came first, then Dr. Pizzi. You were close to the old country and the people.

**CT:** We opened an office on West Chestnut Street. Our practice really took off then. There were a lot of Italians and Polish people in the West End [of Washington]. We had that office for two years until Dr. McGinnis left and I went back to East Maiden Street. We had a satellite office. We got a ton of patients from the West End. The Nicorellas were patients.

**TC:** I would think that your parents would be very proud of your accomplishments. Would you say that that's true?

**CT:** Oh, yes. When we built this house, my dad said, "I never thought I'd be in a house like this, much less have my son and daughter-in-law own it." When they first came from Italy, the front of the house was practically wide open. They had a rough winter the first year. They had a coal stove.

**TC:** The ability to get ahead when their beginnings were very humble.

**CT:** Rita and I have remained humble. We never forgot our upbringing. We don't put on any airs. Like when we got to town here, we were invited to one of the swimming pools. They'd said, "No Blacks were allowed." We said, "The city pool's good enough for us." We had a lot of very good Black patients.

**TC:** You said you remained humble and refused to become an elite member of the community just on the basis of your credentials.

**CT:** We didn't join any country clubs.

**RT:** The Country Club wanted us to join one time but Jewish people weren't allowed. We didn't join.

**TC:** That was the Washington Club?

**CT:** Yeah.

**CT:** Italians can be prejudiced, too. I had an Italian patient, I won't give his name, but he said to me one time, "Doctor, why do you let all these [derogatory term for African Americans] in here?" I said, "Siamo tutti creati dallo stesso Dio." We're all created by the same God. [Everyone says it together.]

**RT:** Our son lives with us. He has two cats—Charlie and Rita.

**CT:** He brought them from Pittsburgh. When we couldn't sell the house, he

moved in to help us.

**RT:** It's too big. Nobody wants it. It's so much work. There's snow plowing, grass cutting.

**CT:** Our son Philip and his friend, Obed, help take care of it.

**TC:** It's so beautiful. That's an important point that you're making. When you're thinking about what you absorb from your Italian culture, the roots, when you know where you came from and how humble the people had to be to do menial work or really struggle.

**CT:** One of our best friends was Juanita Cochrane and her family. They're African Americans. Josh Cochrane. We used to go to Washington Park and have picnics together. I had one African American classmate in Derry. Of course, we invited him to my graduation party. My high school graduation. Some of the people were kind of astonished at that. Even worse though, in Oklahoma ...

**RT:** The American Indians! The people in Oklahoma really shunned the American Indians.

**CT:** And African Americans.

**RT:** One African American doctor wasn't allowed to live in Norman [Oklahoma]. He had to live outside that little town.

**CT:** In the bases in Norman, he had to live in Oklahoma City. There was no base housing for officers. We rented a place.

Of course, we invited him to dinner. He was playing out in the yard with our son, Jimmy. Some of the neighbors wouldn't speak to us after that.

**RT:** I said it was their loss because this was a doctor.

**DT:** Absolutely.

**RT:** The doctor's wife was ill. The people across the street had a child with birth defects and they shunned a doctor just because he was African American.

**TC:** It sounds like your upbringing, as Italian Americans, instilled in you an appreciation of other citizens' rights to live here and be accepted.

**CT:** It comes from our Catholic background too. Jesus loves everybody.

**TC:** I wanted to ask you about that, too. There's also that thread of Catholicism through your marriage and your education. Can you talk a little bit more about how that thread of Catholic faith has transformed your lives?

**CT:** I'd say for both of us it's been a very great influence. Like I told one of our neighbors one time, "Catholicism and Catholic religion isn't going to church on Sundays. It's a way of life."

**RT:** When we were young, teenage girls, our big time was being with the Ladies' Sodality in church. Our girlfriends were all into church stuff. We didn't run around to bars or bowling alleys. It was mostly

church. Now that I think of it, that's what we did.

**CT:** Like I mentioned, I interned at a Catholic hospital to meet a potential, Catholic bride. Because of the Catholic upbringing, we knew they wouldn't be girls that ran around.

**DT:** It was very important.

**TC:** You adopted four daughters from Asia. How do they regard your Italian heritage?

**CT:** They consider themselves Italian. They know they're not but they love all the Italian stuff.

**RT:** Right. When they were little, some of the neighborhood boys said to our boys, "Oh, you have [derogatory term for Asians]." Our boys said, "I don't think you want to say that again around us." So they never again said anything like that.

**TC:** Your male children were a gang of their own.

**CT:** They took to the girls.

**RT:** Oh, they loved those girls. They still do. They're like their own children. They were little and the boys were bigger.

**CT:** They'd compete over who would carry the girls up at Communion.

**RT:** That didn't last though.

**TC:** What inspired you, when you had so

many of your own children, to adopt?

**RT:** I read a book called *Give Joy to My Youth* written by Dr. Tom Dooley. He dedicated his life to the orphans in Vietnam. He died at age 34. So we decided it'd be nice to have some girls. So we called his secretary, Betty Tisdale. She lived in Pittsburgh. We wrote her a letter and asked her if we could adopt one of the orphans from Vietnam. She wrote back and said, "You have to go through proper channels." We had asked at Catholic Charities. But I was already 40. He was in his forties. We had seven kids and it was not likely we were going to get a child. We did all that. We thought we weren't going to get any. So about six weeks later, she called us on the phone and said, "I have an orphan for you. From Vietnam. Get your home study done." So we were all excited. Then Catholic Charities calls and says, "I have triplets for you."

The mother, who was supposed to get them, became ill and she couldn't take them. "Will you take them?" We said, "Certainly, if we can still have the one from Vietnam." In the meantime, one of the triplets died. But [our daughter] Mary came to Pittsburgh. She was 14 months old.

**DT:** So she was transported to Pittsburgh and that's where you initially met Mary?

**CT:** Yes.

**RT:** We went to Pittsburgh to pick her up. She had no hair. No teeth. She couldn't

sit up. She had dysentery.

**CT:** Scabies.

**RT:** Scabies. OK, that was in August. In October, [our daughter] Ada came. She came to New York. She was four months old. She had pneumonia and whooping cough and was in heart failure. So we brought her home. They cured all that at Washington Hospital.

[Her twin] Angie didn't come until a month later because she had a skin rash. They wouldn't let her leave, so she was in the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Seoul. By the time she came the next month, she was in pretty good shape. She was in much better shape than Ada. But we had to feed them and get them medicine, every two or three hours, round the clock for about three months.

People wanted to come and help, but we couldn't do that because we were afraid they were contagious. But the boys helped. Betty Tisdale said that was the most important thing—holding them and loving them. They did really well. [Our daughter] Jennie was born when Ada and Angie were three.

Another agency used to call. We used to send [unused] drugs—Tylenol and stuff—to one of the agencies in New York and she'd send it to the orphanages. That was when they had the Tylenol scare. I called and said, "Don't send that Tylenol!" She said, "Oh, while you're on the phone, we have these two girls. They're 10 and 12. They're from Korea. Nobody wants



them." She said, ask around, so I did. I asked him [looks at Charlie]. [laughter] Two girls came. Sara was 10. Her sister was 12, but the sister didn't want to have anything to do with us. We already had an orphanage. We didn't need another one, so she was adopted by family in York, PA.

But her life didn't turn out too well. I'm not aware of where she is. She ran off. Sara tried to help her for the longest time, but it didn't work. So that's how it all came about.

**TC:** As we're coming to the end, is there anything else you wanted to add?

**CT:** Well, about the missions work. I was admitted to the Catholic Medical Association in Pittsburgh in 1999. A sister from Catholic Charities was looking for doctors to go to a mission in Mexico for a week. A bunch of us signed up. I made three trips to Mexico. Our son Louis, in the meantime, was in St. Louis. He met a doctor who was in the Catholic mission field. They had a mission in Honduras. From 2000 to 2008, I made about eight trips to Honduras, sometimes staying up to six weeks. They had a permanent clinic there. Rita and I went to Haiti one time. I went to Mexico two other times and Guatemala one time.

After I retired, I wasn't doing anything for a while. Then I went to Catholic Charities in Pittsburgh to their free clinic for five years. I finally retired at the end of 2013. So I've had three retirements—practice, missions, and Catholic Charities.



**TC:** [To Rita] Is there anything else you wanted to add?

**RT:** We forgot Hang—our foster daughter. Catholic Charities called and asked if we would take Hang. She said, “You need a mother’s helper.” This was a year after the girls came. Hang was 15. They had just escaped Vietnam. She and her brother and cousins, but her parents and older sister couldn’t leave. So she came and she lived with us for six years.

**CT:** She went to Immaculate Conception High School. Graduated from I.C.

**RT:** She went to Point Park College. Met a fellow from Iran and married him. They live in Columbus, Ohio. We went to a high school graduation of Charlie’s in Derry. One of his teachers had a son who worked for the United Nations. Through him, they were able to get Hang’s parents here—after all those years of separation.

**TC:** Were they able to stay?

**CT:** Yes. They live in Columbus.

**RT:** That’s been many years now. My goodness! Forty-some years.

**CT:** Hang’s 57.

**RT:** She’s as old as Peter. Her mother died a couple years ago. They didn’t tell us. We used to keep real close. Now they have their own family, their own children and their own grandchildren. Everybody gets separated.





ISBN 978-1-7359435-0-3 \$30.00  
53000>

