Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Ann Aiello by Ann Coffey

Ann Aiello

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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Ann Aiello

INTERVIEWER: Ann Coffey

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2/18/79

SUBJECTS COVERED:

- Grandparents, parents
- Childhood
- Heritage
- Traditions (marriage, holidays)
- Attitudes
- Family roles
- Identity
GS-361  THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

ORAL HISTORY INFORMATION

Name of interviewee  Ann   Aiello
Address  Swan Road  Esmond, R.I.
Date of interview  2/18/79  Location of interview  home
Name of researcher  Ann M. Coffey
Others present  

Sequence listing of subjects covered in this interview:
Grandparents - Parents
Childhood
Heritage
Attitudes
Identity

INFORMATION ON INTERVIEWEE

Age  44  Sex  Female  Religion  Catholic
Occupation  housewife
Education  12 years
Date of arrival in U.S.  Where?
From Where? (name town in Italy)
Date of arrival in R. I.  Where?
Moves  
Reasons for moves  
If second or third generation, indicate generation  third
Oral History Interview

with

ANN AIELLO

February 18, 1979
Swan Road Esmond, R.I.

by Ann M. Coffey

INTERVIEWER: Were your grandparents alive when you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, one was.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find yourself with two sets of parents: your grandparent trying to put Italian traditions on you and your parents trying to introduce the new American traditions?

INTERVIEWEE: Definitely not, my grandmother didn't interfere, didn't have any say in the matter at all.

INTERVIEWER: Can you speak Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to learn to?

INTERVIEWEE: Love to, I'd love to learn.

INTERVIEWER: What does heritage mean to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Well for me it has just been an American tradition.
INTERVIEWER: Did your family pass any kinds of Italian traditions onto you?

INTERVIEWEE: My family didn't, but my husband's family did.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways did your husbands?

INTERVIEWEE: For instance, on Christmas Eve we have seven different kinds of fish being served for dinner and we have an open house, and when I was growing up we didn't have to have seven different kinds of fish, one fish meal would have been sufficient but he's really in the Italian tradition, moreso than we were brought up with.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever have any special food preparations or house decorations for any other kinds of holidays?

INTERVIEWEE: Nothing any different than what everybody would have like in America, other than the fish and for Easter the rice pies that I don't make but my mother-in-law sends down.

INTERVIEWER: How about your regular weekly dinners?

INTERVIEWEE: No, none whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER: Do any Italian magazines come into your home?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, there is one that comes in, it's the Italian Echo.

INTERVIEWER: Do you read it?
INTERVIEWEE: No, I don't.
INTERVIEWER: Have you ever visited Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: No, I have never visited Italy, I don't have much desire to visit Italy right now, maybe as I grow older I will.
INTERVIEWER: How many years did you go to school?
INTERVIEWEE: I graduated high school, and then I took a business course in business machines.
INTERVIEWER: Did you grow up in a predominantly Italian neighborhood?
INTERVIEWEE: No, it wasn't, it was mixed. It really, the town where we were growing up was predominantly French.
INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude toward religion?
INTERVIEWEE: I'm a practicing Catholic, but I'm not prejudice against other religions. In other words if one of my children were to come home with a Jewish girl or a Baptist, that would not phase me at all, because as long as they're morally good that's all that matters, that's all that concerns me.
INTERVIEWER: Did your family follow Italian marriage traditions?
INTERVIEWEE: My immediate family?
INTERVIEWER: Both families
INTERVIEWEE: You mean matchmaking or anything like that? No.
INTERVIEWER: Or did you have to bring your husband-to-be home for approval?
INTERVIEWEE: No, there was no approval, I would have been set straight from the beginning if my parents didn't approve, but they approved.
INTERVIEWER: Did your husband's family have any wedding traditions?
INTERVIEWEE: My husband's parents, when we had to deliver invitations, we had to deliver the invitations to the godparents, they couldn't be mailed, but on my side they were mailed. Also, the day of the wedding, after the ceremony we had to go back to my mother-in-law's home and she had arranged from the florist a plate and they call it a palm, and she handed me the plate and I had to drop it and it had to break and if it broke that means it was good luck and you were accepted into the family, by her offering that palm she accepted me into the family.
INTERVIEWER: Do you have any attitude toward labor and unions?
INTERVIEWEE: Not really that involved I have never really had any dealing with any labor or unions.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think women should work?

INTERVIEWEE: If they want, if they so desire, I leave it entirely up to the woman.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about education?

INTERVIEWEE: I'm all for education, I think that you can never get enough education. In fact at my age now I'm going back to take certain courses and I believe that if a child of mine wants to go, I'd do anything to raise funds so that they could go.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about politics?

INTERVIEWEE: I think there are good politicians and bad politicians. It's hard to just, that's too general a question for me to answer in just a short time.

INTERVIEWER: Would you ever get involved in them? and to what extent would you get involved?

INTERVIEWEE: I don't think I'd be that interested to get involved, I would definitely vote though.

INTERVIEWER: What is your opinion on abortion?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I believe that I can't say I'm pro-abortion or anti-abortion. I believe that I think the woman should have the right to
INTERVIEWER: decide and I don't think that by outlawing abortion, I think it's terrible because it should be allowed and the woman should make her own choice whether she wants to have it or not. Personally I would never have one.

INTERVIEWEE: Family was very important to Italian immigrants. Do you still consider it a very important part of your life?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, very definitely, I think that a family should be very close, especially my children. I think that if your family strays away I think you're losing part of yourself.

INTERVIEWER: What role do you feel the father plays in a family?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh I think he plays a very important role as far as bringing up children, I think that a mother can bring up a child until the age of maybe ten with no problems and after that, especially a boy needs a father.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel the responsibilities of the children are in a family?

INTERVIEWEE: I think to more or less, I think a child, if the parents set a good example I think the child will automatically be a good
child generally, they should try to obey and if they don't, that's when the father should come in and straighten them out.

INTERVIEWER: How about outside relatives, do you consider them a part of your immediate family?

INTERVIEWEE: You mean aunts and uncles? On occasion, like for instance Christmas Eve they are and really people are so busy with their own lives, sometimes you'd like to be closer than what you actually can be.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about godparents?

INTERVIEWEE: I have eight godchildren and some I am very close to and others I haven't seen for years so I think that all depends on the godchildren themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Do you call them that special name in Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: Padine, jokingly I will but not to say that I don't even really know what it means.

INTERVIEWER: What does being Italian mean to you?

INTERVIEWEE: I wasn't really brought up on my side of the family Italian as far as my mother never spoke Italian, my father never did. So really being Italian is just I consider myself American first. It would never make
me prejudice, I'm not that much into it
maybe I should be, but it's just the way
I've been brought up.

INTERVIEWER: So then if you had to consider yourself
Italian or American which would you choose?

INTERVIEWEE: American.

INTERVIEWER: Thank-you.