Three Generations of Italians: Interview with John Butera by Ann Coffey

John Butera
NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: John Butera
INTERVIEWER: Ann Coffey
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2/18/79

SUBJECTS COVERED:

- Parents
- Childhood
- Heritage
- Attitudes
- Family roles
- Identity
Oral History Interview

with

JOHN BUTERA

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

by Ann M. Coffey

INTERVIEWER: How long had your parents been in America before you were born?

INTERVIEWEE: I would say about twenty, twenty-five years in that neighborhood.

INTERVIEWER: Could they speak English?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, enough to get by.

INTERVIEWER: So they spoke both Italian and English when you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: They always spoke English, that's why I can't talk Italian so good.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever try to learn Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I didn't go to school or anything like that but with the neighbors I would try to express myself so in case I should go to the old country then I could get by.

INTERVIEWER: Did you come from a large family?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I would say so.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters?
INTERVIEWEE: about five
INTERVIEWER: How much schooling did you have?
INTERVIEWEE: Not too much because I wanted to go to work so I could wear rubbers, and have a dollar in my pocket. In them days you could finagle around so you could go to work, not that I don't like schooling that isn't mine, no I like schooling but I had to go work so I could have rubbers and dress up like the rest of my friends.
INTERVIEWER: Did you live in a predominantly Italian neighborhood?
INTERVIEWEE: No I would say it was mixed.
INTERVIEWER: How about later on in life as you married and moved away?
INTERVIEWEE: No it was always mixed.
INTERVIEWER: Did you always live in Rhode Island?
INTERVIEWEE: No I was born in Newark, N.J. I lived in New York and then I came to Rhode Island.
INTERVIEWER: Can you define heritage for me?
INTERVIEWEE: I think it's tradition, I like the things they do around the holidays.
INTERVIEWER: What kinds of things did your family do around the holidays?
INTERVIEWEE: Well we all got together, we exchanged gifts, we played games it was really a lot
of fun.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any special kinds of food or decorations at that time?

INTERVIEWEE: Well mostly it was Italian food as most as I can think of.

INTERVIEWER: Do any Italian magazines come into your home?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Do you read any?

INTERVIEWEE: No.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been to Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I was suppose to go but I changed my mind and went to Hawaii instead.

INTERVIEWER: Would you ever like to go if you ever had the chance?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I would like to go but I'm not really crazy about it. You know I would like to go.

INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude toward religion?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I think Catholic religion is wonderful. Although lately I've been a little slack on it, I have my own reasons for it.

INTERVIEWER: Did your family follow Italian marriage traditions?

INTERVIEWEE: No they could marry whoever they thought was, I figure if the person was allright God Bless them, marry them.
INTERVIEWER: So in other words you didn't have to get any approval from your parents?

INTERVIEWEE: No none at all.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any attitude toward labor and unions?

INTERVIEWEE: Very much so, I think the unions are spoiling this country. That's my idea because I went through it, I know what union is, it's wonderful but sometimes they go too far, they're really spoiling this country. That's my opinion.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think women should work?

INTERVIEWEE: If they want to yes, sure to help their husband out.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know if anybody in your family ever had anything against women working?

INTERVIEWEE: No if they was willing to work God Bless them, they'd go to work.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about education?

INTERVIEWEE: It's the best thing in the world but I didn't get much of it. You can't beat it.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about politics?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I wish we could get somebody in there that we could trust. Seems to me they sell us down the river, we're going through it now. We haven't got nothing. We haven't
got oil, we haven't got coffee, we haven't got gas, the richest country in the world. We're still fighting for it, I think there's something wrong with politics.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to see somebody Italian get a high office?

INTERVIEWEE: If he's qualified, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Family was very important to the Italian immigrant. Do you consider it very important to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes very important, especially my family.

Yes sure.

INTERVIEWER: Why? What do you do with your family?

INTERVIEWEE: Well I see that everything goes alright, they're on the right track, I keep close to them. I see my son and daughter every Sunday. I have dinner with my daughter when she doesn't go on a trip. But I'm here mostly every Sunday with my son and daughter.

INTERVIEWER: What do you consider are the roles of the father in a family?

INTERVIEWEE: They work hard, they're very good to their family, they support them and I think they're doing a very good job of it.

INTERVIEWER: How about the roles of a mother in a family?

INTERVIEWEE: Very good. They help out their husbands.
INTERVIEWER: If they can get a part-time job to help their husbands out they go to work and I'm proud of them.

INTERVIEWEE: How about godparents do you feel they have a role in the family?

INTERVIEWER: No I don't think it's very important to me.

INTERVIEWEE: What does being Italian mean to you?

INTERVIEWER: Well I'm proud of it. But I'm an American born here but I like the Italian people. I think that we've got some smart people in this country that are Italian, and but still I'm an American born. The Italian people have got some wonderful singers, we got the best singers there is in the country, the best crooks, we've got everything, they're Italian.

INTERVIEWER: What does being American mean to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh I'm proud of it. Yes I was born here and I'm very proud of it. I'm proud to be an American.

INTERVIEWER: So if you had to pick one, would you consider yourself Italian or American?

INTERVIEWEE: American, because I was born here.

INTERVIEWER: Thank-you.