6-21-1978

Federal Hill Project: Interview with Camille M. Prattico Charette by Maria C. Iadeluca - June 21, 1978 - TAPE 18

Camille M. Prattico Charette

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Oral History Interview

with

CAMILLE M. PRATTICO CHARETTE

June 21, 1978
108 Ortoleva Drive

By Maria C. Iadeluca

INTERVIEWER: How are you Camille?

INTERVIEWEE: Not too bad, thank you, Maria.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born? Talk to me about your life, your experiences.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly where were you born?

INTERVIEWER: What section of Providence.

INTERVIEWEE: On Federal Hill; on Ring Street.

INTERVIEWER: An Italian community?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, definitely and Italian community.

INTERVIEWER: Were your parents Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: My parents were both born in Italy.

INTERVIEWER: I know you were very close to your mother. When you were young did your mother talk to you about Italy? Did she tell you stories about Italy and her life there? How old was your mother when she came to America?
INTERVIEWEE: She was 17 years old. She used to talk to me about the life in Italy; the way the houses were. The cooking, the vegetables and the fruits especially; she always said that fruits in Italy had more taste, more to it. In America, she used to say, when the fruits are on the table the aroma (the taste) is missing. She used to talk to me about her home. How the houses were laid out; different customs of Italy and she used to teach us all the different customs like at Easter, Good Friday, Holy Thursday, are big holidays in Italy (she used to say) and people did not go to work on those days.

INTERVIEWER: How did they celebrate Easter when she was there?

INTERVIEWEE: They had a Procession (Good Friday night); they celebrated the entire holy week. They would do all their baking, during this week, all the rise pies; different types of cakes: then on Good Friday the priest of the town visits all the houses in the village and blesses them. Everything was done and ready for the arrival of the priest. All the cooked food could not be touched or eaten unless first blessed by the priest. The priest would come and he would bless the house then the bless with the food on it. On Easter day the food could be eaten. (Finally) When I once went to Italy it was Easter time. I noticed that when friends or relatives offer you the Easter pies they make them in all different kinds of flavors
and they encourage you to taste each one of them; you must taste all of them. Now, here in the United States one piece would be enough and people would not expect you to taste all of them. I like it better the way it is done in Italy so that a person gets to try different flavors. Sometimes they cut them for you: three different slices, three different tastes to try. I liked it so much that I brought them and had my sister-in-law try them.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you have been to Italy, do you go often?

INTERVIEWEE: I have been there 10 times.

INTERVIEWER: Where do you go there; what is the first city you visit?

INTERVIEWEE: The first place I go to is San Clemente. That is where my mother comes from. My father came from Galluccio which is only about 4 miles away. It is the province of Caserta. We are about half hour from Cassino and I go there and I visit my relatives. I stay there about 2 weeks then I go to see my relatives in Naples. My father was the only one of 12 children who came here. My father has 5 brothers and 6 sisters. My mother had 1 sister and she stayed in San Clemente but my father's brothers and they children and his sisters scattered since the war and they are all over Italy. So I think I have been very fortunate because I visited almost all of Italy from Merano which is right
near Switzerland right down to Naples. I have seen
Palermo (Sicily) but I have seen it as a tourist.
But the other cities I have relatives in and they
are all in the major cities, like Milano, Varese,
Florence, Venice, Belluno.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first impression when you arrived in
Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: The first time I went to Italy I went on the Andrea
Doria. That was in 1954 and as I said my mother
and father always spoke to us about Italy; we grew
up knowing Italy; Italy was not a strange country
to me, it was just like living in Providence. My
father, who lived in Naples for about 10 years before
he came to this country, used to say that the buildings
there were 5 and 6 stories high and in the morning they
used to have these people that would go by selling
coffee and selling vegetables and pastry and the people
that lived in the 3rd, 4th and 5th story (not being
able to come down just to get a cup of coffee or to
buy some greens) used to have baskets on a rope and they
would send down the rope with the basket and they would
order whatever they wanted; they would send the money
down in the basket and then the basket was pulled up
again with the pastry or the vegetables. However, with
the coffee it was a little different. Every morning
an empty coffee pot would go down in the basket and
the person selling the good would send up a full coffee
pot. Well, when I got off the ship, Maria, believe it or not, the first thing I saw when I left the port was these big "palazzos". (Well, not like New York) In Italy they are beautiful, you have to have money to live near the port; anyways, sure enough don't I see these ropes coming down with these baskets (mind you, Maria, this is 40-50 years after my father came from Italy). The custom is still there "living". I was saying to my cousin "Umberto, look at the baskets", he would reply "what baskets, what are you talking about?" Then he realized. But I could not believe that I was seeing some of these things that my father used to talk to me about.

Then we got to the town and I went into the house where my mother was born and raised, I cannot describe the feeling that came over me—to think that I was actually in the house where my mother was born and grew up in; I was sitting in chairs that she sat in; I slept in her bed; the house wasn't a bit strange to me. I would walk around the rooms and feel at home; I used to ask Dora (my cousin) "Do you still keep the pastry here?" "and, is the bread in this drawer?" Dora was surprised and she'd say "aunt Alfonsina told you everything, you know everything". I went looking for the ovens in the wall (like my mother had described), but they were not there; they now had a stove; but I still asked them "where are the ovens."; but now they were gone.
My father used to talk about his church in Galluccio. Of course, my father used to live right near the church and he used to tell us that there the saints are not colored nor painted like ours; their saints have clothes on them and he used to tell us about the statue of our Blessed Virgin that they had with St. Bernadette kneeling in front of the Blessed Virgin. The custom in the church or in the town was that if anybody forgot their 'rosary beads' on the chair or on the floor and somebody else would see or find them there, they would go up to St. Bernadette (who wore an aprin with a big pocket in the front) and they would put the rosary beads in her pocket. So if you came to church and did not have the rosary beads, you could go up to St. Bernadette put your hand in her pocket and you were bound to find the rosary beads. Then someone who had lost the rosary beads the next time she came to church she could find them in the aprin pocket!

When I went to Italy I went to my father's church in Galluccio with my cousin Vittoria; you know my great-grandfather used to play the organ there, so I spotted the organ then I asked my cousin about the statue of St. Bernadette and she guided me to it—would you believe it, I put my hand in the aprin pocket of St. Bernadette and there were rosary beads?

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that interesting! Today after so many years, the custom is the same.
INTERVIEWER: What did you think of the people in town?

INTERVIEWEE: I think they are beautiful; they are truly beautiful, they are interested in me as much as I am interested in them. I cannot really explain it; they ask me where I am from; they like to talk to me and I enjoy talking with them.

INTERVIEWER: Did you visit "la Murata"?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I visited la murata. I went to the house of the 'coat of arms' of the De Cubellis because my mother was a De Cubellis and they came from there.

INTERVIEWER: You said that your father had brothers and sisters there. What made him decide to come to the United States?

INTERVIEWEE: He came because my mother came.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother came first?

INTERVIEWEE: No, my father left first; this is a big joke in the family; my father followed my mother but my father's ship left Naples first. He came to the United States because my mother was coming to the United States. His ship docked about 4 days after my mother. His boat docked in New York and my mother docked in Boston.

INTERVIEWER: When did your mother come here? During what season?

INTERVIEWEE: Winter, it was December 7th and she said that the snow was knee high—that was the first time she saw snow. In fact where she came from they just had snow flowries every once in a great while and it was no unusual that if they were in school while the snow was falling, the
teacher would let the children out so that they could see the snow then the sun would come out in an hour or so and the snow would naturally melt and that would be all the snow that my mother saw during her 17 years in Italy. When she came here, she arrived in December and they had snow up until April. They had tough winters here.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother, did she have that desire to go back to Italy after she arrived?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, she did. She did not come here to stay. She came here to visit, to work and to make the money for her "treasure", like she said, for when she would get married. But as I said my father docked in New York and he stayed there with his 'compare'; he was 17 years old like my mother was 17 and in those days if they said "you stay", you stayed, they didn't disobey so my father had to stay in New York until he was 21; that was it, of course, he had told his father, he would not get married until he was 21. So he stayed in New York until he was 21 then he came here and married my mother. My mother in those days was a very very innocent woman and I think all women were in those days. One of the stories she used to tell us was that once she wanted to send my father a birthday gift after she was here a couple of years, my father was born in February. So she and a couple of her cousins went into Oneyville where there were quite a few stores;
they had already been down town to a store called 'Diamond' across from the Outlet Company. There she saw some shirts but she did not like them. In those days the men used to wear colored shirts like they wear them today. Her friends and her cousins then took her to Oneyville. So another Saturday when they got out of work (they only worked half a day on Saturdays), they went to the men's store in Oneyville. The man there showed her the shirts that he had and my mother still didn't like any of them. So he said, "What kind of shirts are you looking for?" She was embarrassed. As I said she was very innocent and, I believe, all women at that time were. She was embarrassed to tell him what she didn't like about the shirts. Finally the cousin took her aside and asked her "what is wrong with these shirts you have here a great variety; these are the ones they use in America. You have all colors here, white, pink, blue, gray." My mother replied "in Italy men's shirts are not opened all the way down; there they have buttons from the neck to the waist line; these here are all opened, he would not like them". Of course, her cousin bursted out laughing and the man in the store wanted to know why she was laughing. Her cousin explained that the reason why she had visited several stores and her answer was always "no, no, no". Very calmly they
told her that that was the way the shirts were made in the United States and he was sure that her boy-friend who was here two years from Italy was aware of the shirts they made here in this country.

INTERVIEWER: Your father lived in New York while your mother lived here?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, she lived on Federal Hill, in Providence.

INTERVIEWER: How come she came to Federal Hill?

INTERVIEWEE: My mother was 17 so she could not travel alone. She had to be sponsored and she came with her cousin. He lived at the corner of De Pasquale Avenue and Atwells Avenue. I forget if the name of the building was Cappelli or Capoldi; now it's closed but it's a big apartment building. That's where she lived with her cousin until she got married.

INTERVIEWER: Did she live on Federal Hill all her life?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, then she got married, she went to live on Ridge Street just by where the playground is across street from there near Palmieri's bakery. Then from there she moved to Ring Street. She lived in 3 different houses on Ring Street. Then she moved to Courtland Street. That was it we always lived in that neighborhood. She was married in Holy Ghost Church.

INTERVIEWER: You then grew up in this Section of the City?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, right on Knight Street.

INTERVIEWER: At home how was your "ambiente" Italian or American?

INTERVIEWEE: All Italian.
INTERVIEWER: What about the language?

INTERVIEWEE: Mostly Italian. My parents always spoke Italian, the newspaper was Italian, the radio programs, etc.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to school here? What schools?

INTERVIEWEE: I went to Kenyon Street School; then to Bridgham; then to Central--I graduated from Central. I then took 2 years of business in college.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of the community of Federal Hill? Its people, and the place itself?

INTERVIEWEE: Right now, or before?

INTERVIEWER: Let's say at your time, meaning years ago.

INTERVIEWEE: I think it was beautiful; everybody was proud, in those days it was a ritual for people whether they owned their house or whether they rented it; you would find a landlady or a landlord out sweeping his sidewalk or his yard and you'd also find the people that were renting doing the same. This was every Saturday morning. Today you don't see that, I don't care what the neighborhood is. You don't see anybody going outside sweeping their sidewalk. They complain that the City does not sweep the streets, they themselves don't keep the sidewalk clean.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying that in those days people cared more about doing things for the community?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, as I said, not only the landlords but also the Lady of the House whether she was an owner or whether she rented; it was a ritual every Saturday morning.
Each family had someone out there on a Saturday morning even the houses with 3 families there would be 3 ladies out sweeping sidewalks. No matter where you went on a Saturday everybody swept. Today it is not like that.

INTERVIEWER: What else did you use to do? Do you remember things of your life as a teenager?

INTERVIEWEE: I was brought up a little on the strict side. My father was very strict with me compare to my friends' parents. They had more freedom than I did. As a youngster, when I came home from school in the winter or the fall I should say from September to June (the whole school year) I would have to come home and 3 nights of week I used to go to the Federal Hill house. There was no excuse. I had to go.

INTERVIEWER: What would you go there for?

INTERVIEWEE: To learn to sew and to learn the embroidery. We used to go for one hour and a half.

INTERVIEWER: Was this life a must, a duty?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, it was a must; there was no excuse. That was part of my school. I went to school during the day and when I got back from school I would have a glass of milk or a piece of fruit and then to the Federal Hill house. But it was not only me, there were quite a few girls and they had different grades, one was beginners, one more advanced. You could sew and another night you would go for the embroidery class.

Then when school closed, I went to the nuns. I went
to the Bell Street nuns. I used to go from 9:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon and they taught us embroidery, sawing, and catechism naturally. We had religion in the morning and then they took a break. During the break they had amusements for us: swings and all different games that girls play. Around noon time we would go down the hill and here the girls were divided in different sections: older girls and younger girls; there was 2 nuns with each group of girls and there we would start our embroidery class. Then after that we would have our lunch; then if we wanted to rest for a half hour we would just lay down on the grass and rest. After a while they would ring a little bell and we would go to the amusements again. Then, about 2:30 or 3:00 they would ring the bell again and they would distribute milk. We all had a glass of milk with a donut or a piece of cake. Then we would continue with our embroidery class. At that time I used to have long hair, long banana curls. My father used to make all my clothes, because my father was a tailor. For every dress, I owned a bow to match and I used to wear these clothes to the nuns. I once started to make a dress there; when I brought the dress home, I thought it was beautiful, my mother thought it was beautiful; my father thought it was horrible! I was 12 or 13 years old. This dress was 3 inches below my knees, it had long sleeves and it had a cape.
that went below my elbow. My father said "They're trying to make a nun out of my daughter". He took the sleeves off, he shortened the cape and he said to my mother: "I think I could make a pair of pants for her with the material I cut off the hem", he had made the dress 2 or 3 inches above my knees. I can still remember that he was so furious to think that they had me make a dress that made me look like an old lady. Of course, all us girls didn't want to dress like that!

INTERVIEWER: Who were your friends? Did you associate mostly with Italian girls or other nationalities as well?

INTERVIEWEE: In the summer time I did associate with Italian girls because I used to go to the nuns and the girls were mostly italians, because everybody from Federal Hill used to go there.

In school I had 2 or 3 italian girlfriends, but I also had scotch, jewish, french, english, and a couple of colored girlfriends, too, who were very nice.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get along well? Did you have a good communication with them?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we had no problems; in fact, we used to take our lunch to school and I very seldom would eat my lunch, because one day I would give it to the arminian girl and I would eat her lunch, another day I'd give it to the french girl and would eat hers. This is what we used to do: we used to share our lunch. I would never
eat my lunch and neither would the jewish girl nor
the arminian girl eat their lunch. This is how we
made friends. Before our mothers used to cut the
sandwiches in half; so that I would eat half and
give the other half. My mother used to make many
omelets: egg omelets, potato omelets, pepper omelets,
meatballs omelets, sausage omelets. Of course, my
girlfriends didn't have omelets, they had american
food. Do you know that when we had frankfurters and
beans in my house it was a big thing; it was like
eating turkey where we had turkey 2 or 3 times a year;
we had pork chops every week; but when my mother would
let us have frankfurters and beans, well, we would
celebrate it, we wanted them everynight but, of course,
my father won't go for that.

INTERVIEWER: Your father was strickly for the italian cousine?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, he thought that frankfurters was cheap food
therefore a cheap dinner and he looked down at that.

INTERVIEWER: How did you use to celebrate the festivities? For
example, Holy Ghost Church was in your neighborhood.
Was that your church?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, that was our Parish.
Even today, I still belong to that church, Holy Ghost
Church. In those days when we made our first communion
we could not eat before receiving it. I remember it
was from mid-night on. So you can imagine between that
and the nerves. Well, two weeks after we made the first communion we would go in a procession that lasted 2 hours. (The festivity of: Corpus Dominis) The procession would go to the length of Knight Street and it would take in all the side streets like Glessen Street, Tell, Ring, Grove right down to Ridge Street and the people would be out there on the windows or on the sidewalks--they would be lined up (just like downtown on Columbus day). The women would put out all their beautiful spreads some of them had even beautiful tablecloths and they would hang these from the windows and this was the most beautiful site to see these lace spreads or these tablecloths hang from these windows to show honor to the Blessed Virgin when she was coming by. The men would carry her on a stand and children would be lined among the sidewalk with baskets of flowers and they would toss these flowers as the procession was going by. People used to make the sign of the cross. They did not make just a little cross with their fingers and kind of hide that they were catholics or hide the fact that they were making the sign of the cross. They actually made the sign of the cross; the complete sign from the forehead to their chest to the left side and the right side. Today how many people make the sign of the cross? People would pass by a church and would not care about making the sign of the cross. It's very strange that they can
walk by a church and not make the sign of the cross, not showing that they are catholics. I don't see anything wrong with being catholic. I don't try to hide my religion. I make the sign of the cross when I go by a church. I notice people today, the young people of Today are not doing this. Why aren't they doing it? Well, I blame it on the parents. The parents don't instruct their children to do it, reprimand them when they don't do it; therefore, the children are not going to do it. Today's lament of the parents are that they are forever arguing with their children. At my time my mother and father weren't like that.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother and father then, instructed you for a good behavior?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my parents never got tired of doing so; they reprimanded me if I did something wrong and if I continued to do it they still reprimanded me. I never said "if you don't stop it, I pack up and leave". We just didn't think that way. We just took it, they were our parents and eventhough we would disobey them or go against they wishes, we knew that they were right.

INTERVIEWER: This is very interesting, however, earlier you talked about the procession and your first communion, was there any other festivity when you where younger which you might remember to be held at Holy Ghost Church?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, the weddings, will I ever forget those weddings! Saturday morning, it was a ritual, we would get up, have our breakfast and make a big line for Holy Ghost Church. The weddings would start around 9:00. Every 3 quarters of an hour so that there will be another wedding. In those days, besides rise, they used to throw "confetti" (sugar-covered nut). They has two kinds of confetti, the almonds and those which had liquirish; but then they threw pennies: (pennies in those days bought a lot of candies). So we were there every Saturday, rain or shine we were there to collect all the pennies and the confetti; eventhough they were seldom with a little bit of sand, they still were delicious!!

INTERVIEWER: When you talk and refer to "we" who do you mean?

INTERVIEWEE: Myself, my brothers, the girls and boys from the whole neighborhood, the streets would be empty, they would all be in the church. We loved Holy Ghost because it has many stairs and the bride would have to walk there. People would throw pennies when she went to the church and when she came out of the church. By the time the ceremony was over there would only be rise on the stairs.

INTERVIEWER: According to your opinion, has Federal Hill changed considerably during the past few years, more specifically from your youth to now days?

INTERVIEWEE: The only thing I think to be different is that there
were more people on the streets, more crowds, Friday
nights, Saturdays, I believe now Federal Hill closes
ey early on Saturday nights, but in those days the stores
stayed open late (8-9 o'clock Saturday nights), and
we used to go shopping or the children used to go
and help the parents with the shopping bags.
I think the interest in Federal Hill is coming back
though. The young people today come, because every
time there is a celebration, some affair or carnival
people come from great distances, I have friends where
I work who come from Warwick and they come on Federal
Hill the week they are having a festival and even
on St. Joseph's day in March, they come up here. They
come from Warwick, now these people go home from work,
have dinner and come right back. Some come from Charles
Street, of course, up there there are many italians.
But I have a german girlfriend who lives in Charles
Street and she comes down here for the "zeppole". I
think the interest is coming back to Federal Hill.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the attitude of the people on Federal
Hill is changed?
INTERVIEWEE: No, I think the people who were in business years ago,
are still there. For example, Empire Furniture, I
think those men who run that business are fine men,
they have always been. Of course, I know some business-
men on Federal Hill because when I first started working
at the Telephone Company, I used to work shifts. And of
course, in those days we used to turn our pay in to our parents (that's how much time has changed), and we were given allowances. To have a little extra money I used to work on Federal Hill in a drugstore, Romano drugstore at the corner of Atwells Avenue and DePasquale Avenue. The store was on the first floor of the house my mother lived in when she came from Italy. One of the customers who used to come in the drugstore was Vincent (the owner of Vincent's the children's store which is still on Federal Hill). He is a fine gentleman and 4 or 5 years ago I had an occasion to go into his store. I had gone over the years into Vincent's to buy children's gifts but I had never stopped to talk to this gentleman. This particular day, I did, my husband was with me and it was on a St. Joseph's day, they had zeppole there and he offered us some zeppole. Then I said to him: "Do you remember me". And he said: "Yes, I do, a remember you, I was going to ask you if your name wasn't Camille", "you know" he said, "it's a good many years". It was 20 years. Another businessman I remember is Spirito, the sawing machine store. I think he is a perfect gentleman. Some of the other stores are new. I remember these, they have been there for many years, and of course, I remember Caserta Pizzeria.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think of the pizzeria?
INTERVIEWEE: I think it's delicious. I love Caserta's pizza. Years ago there used to be an ice cream palor. Their name was Modern Ice Cream. We used to go there and have our ice cream. They used to have all these "carretti" along DePasquale Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: Are you talking about "carretti" with fruits and vegetables?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they sold fresh fruits and vegetables daily. Those men were really very charming. As I said I had long banana curls (my father wanted my hair long). I always had bows in my hair. This used to attract some of the older men. My mother would be doing her shopping there and they would say: "Quanto e' carina questa ragazza!" to mean "what a pretty girl". They would hand me a fruit, I would take it. My mother would say "you return it", the man would say "no, you keep it". Then as we walked away, my mother would say: "Didn't I tell you before we left the house not to accept a piece of fruit if a man offered it to you?" I would say: "yes, I remember", then "why did you accept it?" But he offered it to me; she'd say "you were to refuse it". "It's not nice, because someone gives you a compliment, then you have to be paid for the compliment, that's what it looks like!"

INTERVIEWER: This is a typical italian mother attitude. Not to accept anything; if someone plays you a compliment say "thank-you" but stay on the best ladylike behavior.
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, that is very true of the Italian mothers. I understand the "carretti" are coming back to Federal Hill, I'm looking forward to seeing them.

INTERVIEWER: You don't longer live on Federal Hill. Where do you live?

INTERVIEWEE: I live on Mt. Pleasant.

INTERVIEWER: However, you often return to Federal Hill?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I do my shopping and I still go to Holy Ghost Church.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know families and friends who live on Federal Hill?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my mother has friends there and I have friends who live there. I have friends on Sutton Street, I have friends on Vinton Street, friends on Africa Street and some friends of my mother who are old. Then I know Courtland Street and Ring Street where I lived. I can walk by those streets and meet people who I know who I have not seen in years because I don't walk around there now but if I know I'll meet people who know me.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you work at the Telephone Company, during your free time, what do you do?

INTERVIEWEE: I read the paper; I belong to the "Pioneers", a Telephone Company organization. We do charity work: Institute of Mental Health; Meeting Street School; we crochet and knit; we do this for the elderly at the Howard.

INTERVIEWER: I understand you travel often and especially in Italy.
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I go every year.
INTERVIEWER: How long do you stay there?
INTERVIEWEE: I stay as long as I can. I usually arrive home on a Saturday and I go to work on a Monday. I have been very fortunate that I have been to Italy 4 times and I have stayed there 3 months each time. That gave me quite an opportunity to see Italy, to enjoy it.
INTERVIEWER: Do you think there is a difference between the Italians who live in American and the Italians who live in Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: There is no comparison. No comparison at all.
INTERVIEWER: What is the difference which strikes you the most?
INTERVIEWEE: I'm comparing these Italians here with the Italians I meet when I am in Italy. I find the Italians here are just like any other nationality here, French, English, German: we are rude, we are very rude people, I'm sorry I have to say it. But in Italy you don't find this. People there take the time to explain something to you if you are asking them directions. Here you stop and ask someone for directions they'll make it very very brief and you cannot ask them a second question because they have already turned their back and walked away; whether you are asking someone on Federal Hill or whether you are asking someone downtown. You don't know what nationality they are downtown but on Federal Hill you know that they are Italian, by their accent or somebody that you know slightly that he is Italian. In Italy you don't find
this. You find that people would take their time to give you directions. That's one of the things I need quite a bit, directions naturally, when I am in Italy. There more and more people in giving you directions would say: "Did you understand it?" "Do you remember what I said?" and if you say "yes", then they say "repeat it", God help you if you don't because then as soon as you start stumbling they will say "see now, you don't remember, why don't you write it down as I'm giving you the directions". There you are, they are reprimanding you, but they want to take the time for you to write these directions down, whereas here they could care less. They answer your question and then they turn around. You cannot ask them again or "repeat it please, did you say left or right", they're gone.

That's one of the things that really impresses me when I'm there, people would go out of their way to help you.

INTERVIEWER: I would like to ask you if you find a difference each time you go back. Do you think Italy is changing in these last few years?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, everything is changing; the politics are changing, the cost of living.....

INTERVIEWER: It would seem that these changes do not prevent you from going. Regardless of what is happening will you keep on returning to Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, it does not disturb me to the point that I won't return. I will go! People often wonder why I pick September as the month to go.

INTERVIEWER: In fact, I myself am curious. Why do you go in September?

INTERVIEWEE: Most of my trips have been in September. Although we have been there twice for the summer. We've spent July and August there. Now I'll go in September. We have been there in April and May. We have been to Italy in April, May right through November. The only time we have not been in Italy is December, January, February and March. Those are the only 4 months that I have not spent in Italy and I hope to go and spend a Christmas there. I know how they celebrate Easter. (I've been there in April). I would like to enjoy Christmas there. They carry over their Christmas into January. In this country the feast of the Epiphany doesn't mean anything here. Whereas in Italy it is a big holiday; it is a religious day and as I understand it this is the day when people actually give their Christmas gifts; they wait until the 6th of January.

INTERVIEWER: Especially for the children.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, this is the children's day; when all the children receive their gifts, either they are good or bad. And if they are bad, they'll get bad. (This is what I hear from their parents).

INTERVIEWER: In fact a typical gift to a child who had been a bad boy during the year is to give him ashes and coal.
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, coal and ashes is what they give to the bad children. This reminds me of another thing done in this country as opposed to Italy.

As I say I blame it on the parents: (I'm going right back to parents, I don't know why I keep talking about this because unfortunately I don't have any children and I have been told more than once that if you don't have children that's a subject you should never discuss, because you don't know what it is like to have children, well, I don't know what it is like to have children but I see children, I have eyes and I have two ears that have to listen to children when they talk.) As I was saying (above) another thing that is so different from Italy is that if you have a child who is failing in school, who is not doing well (here in America) the parents will cover it up. It's always the teacher who doesn't know how to teach her/his child. In Italy, and with my own relatives, I have been there when a child was failing in a subject and when I got there I was told that this child was failing in the subject and he was to go to school in the summer. (When I'm there in September the schools are not opened yet, they open in October). These children have tutors who come to the house or they go to the tutors' houses; they study, brush up because to go to school in October they'll have to take an exam. When I get there at times strangers, or people in the town or in the city when I am in Naples or Rome they know me, they see me with my relatives, so we have become
friendly and these people tell me: "my boy Renato didn't do so well in school, be sure and remind him when you see, him." So when I meet the child I'm to say "how did you do in school?" "Did you do well, I understand that you did not do well". He is to know, right away, that I know that he did not do well. And here is a woman who tells me this, she is not related to me, comes from a different country, but she wants me to reprimand her boy. How different it is there!

INTERVIEWER: This is very true there; it is a very interesting point, too.

INTERVIEWEE: I thought that in town they would be more on the behind side, may be they are not as modern as the people in the city.
But then I go to Rome. There is a woman there who live 2 houses down from my aunt who I see every year I go there. She comes running out of her yard and says "welcome back, welcome back!" She shakes my hand, she kisses me, then she tells me that her boy didn't do well in school.

INTERVIEWER: According to them those are the values of their families: to always reprimand their children; they never say "you're great", "you did good". In fact, you said that your father, too, was strict with you, he never complimented you, nor did he ever said "you're good".

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INTERVIEWEE: This is one thing that amazes me. I would like to come back here and tell my friends this. This is the big difference, why hide it.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you went to Italy for the first time?

INTERVIEWEE: I was 29.

INTERVIEWER: After 29 years you went to Italy. Did you go alone?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I went alone, I went on the Andrea Doria in 1954; 8 days; I had such a good time on that ship, would you believe that we left New York on a Thursday, (my father and mother came to the port) and there was a girl there sharing the cabin with me, a school teacher from California and with her we still exchange Christmas cards. As I said my parents came there, they saw the cabin, that was on a Thursday. Well, I didn't go to my cabin on the Thursday night, I saw my cabin again on Friday night. I had such a good time. There was a party, this Marie Smith who shared my cabin, we met in the dining room that night and from there we went to the movie on the Andrea Doria, then to the bar and that was 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and everybody was talking they would say "come to my cabin" so we'd go from one cabin to another with these friends and before I knew it the sun came out and we had stayed out all night.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like you had a very nice time, a beautiful experience.
INTERVIEWER: I realize the tape is almost reaching its end, however I would like to ask you "how do you see yourself, an Italian or an American?"

INTERVIEWEE: I am an Italo-American.

INTERVIEWER: What is your husband's nationality?

INTERVIEWEE: My husband is of French descent; he has a french last name. But he is more Irish. His mother was from Ireland but his father was half Irish and half French. My husband considers himself Irish even though he has a french name.

INTERVIEWER: I notice, he has very well adapted to the Italian environment.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I am a very generous wife, as I said my mother-in-law came from Ireland and we have visited Ireland twice and Italy 10 times, I think that's a good average!!! My husband loves Italy, he loves it!

INTERVIEWER: He talks Italian a little bit, doesn't he?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, he understands. My husband can walk around the town without me with no problems. I send him to the stores to buy things for me. He comes back with them.

INTERVIEWER: Does he feel at home there?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we rent a car there, we drive, we have driven from the Northern part of Italy as I said from Merano right down to Bari. My husband drives the car there, I don't drive. No problem.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to add some particular experience to our interview?

INTERVIEWEE: I would like to say that I cannot bear to hear children
of Italian parents say "I have no desire to go to Italy". I think everyone should have a desire to go back to the country where they parents came from or their grandparents came from whatever the case may be. Not only Italy but whatever country their family came from--they should have a desire to go back. They should make every effort, even if it's just for 2 weeks. Everyone should be proud of their ethnic background.

INTERVIEWER: I notice that you are not embarrassed by your ethnicity, on the contrary, you appear to be proud to be an Italian, to have lived in an Italian neighborhood.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I make myself known. If I see someone having a problem like elderly people having problems making themselves understood in a store, I always come forward and ask them if they need any help, I always volunteer to speak for them. I say: "I'm Italian, can I help you?"

INTERVIEWER: That is very generous of you. I think more people should be like you, help those who are in need, and visit, like you said, if possible, the land of their ancestors.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure!

INTERVIEWER: I'm pleased to have talked to you. I'm sorry the tape is reaching its end, otherwise we could talk for many hours as your story is very interesting.
INTERVIEWEE: I enjoyed it too, Maria, I think it's quite an honor to be asked to do this, really I have enjoyed every moment of it.

INTERVIEWER: I hope to see you again, so that we can talk more and I'll be happy to listen about the past (of this community) and what the future might be. Thank you very much, Camille.

INTERVIEWEE: You are very welcome, Maria. Oh, Maria, this is my dog, Sergio, he has been to Italy 4 times. See, I've even given him an Italian name.