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Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Pasquale Gatta by Kevin P. Gatta

Pasquale Gatta

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

PASQUALE GATTA

DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 1979
PLACE: 121 SIMMONSVILLE AVE.
JOHNSTON, RHODE ISLAND

BY

KEVIN P. GATTA

INTERVIEWER: Tell me how your life was in Italy.

INTERVIEWEE: I was born in 1902 in Rome, Italy. It was tough times in the old country. My father came to this country to see if he could find work and support a family. After 2 years he sent for us to come. My mother, my brother Angelo, myself, my sister Mary and little brother Tony. When we got to New York we looked like beggars. We all had dresses on. Poor, very poor. We settled in Silver Lake. My father worked in a paper mill first then he went to work in Gorhams. We all worked there after a time. He worked there 30 years.

The crossing over on the boat was crowded and the food was bad. I looked out the hole on the ship and all I could see was water, all around water. I thought I saw another ship but it was the ship I was on reflecting in the water.

From New York we came to Providence. We stayed with a family up on Alto Street in Silver Lake for a few days until our house got settled. My father worked in a Paper Mill then. We stayed with my Uncle Ceaser's family. He helped us out a lot in those days. When my father got sick

he helped us. When we got to my Uncle Ceasers house, we were sitting around the kitchen table. His kid was under the table and bit my leg. Fresh kid. We laughed a lot the kids, what did we know.... We went to Laural Hill Ave. school. My cousins took us. We didn't go for to long. We had to go to work. I was 12 years old when I went to work. I first went to work at American Enamel Works, made tea pots, coffee pots, the place was up on Cranston Street. After a long time, I bought a car. After the first world war. I was a happy go lucky kid. I worked fast on piece work and made money. I made \$20.00 when others only made \$12.00. I had a good job, made parts for the war. Made good money. I bought a old limosine from an undertaker. I paid \$400.00 for it.

INTERVIEWER: How did you meet my Grandmother, your wife Mary?

INTERVIEWEE: I was engaged to this girl. Not my wife, before I met my wife, my father arranged this marriage with this girls family. But I met your grandmother and I wanted to break up this engagement. My father arranged the plans so he said I had to go talk with the parish priest. Boy I was afraid but I went and told him I didn't want to marry this girl anymore. So after a lot of arguing and fighting I broke up with this girl. I would take my mother to church. I would see my old girl friend and she would cry and bother me. What a pest. Lots of laughter in the background.

INTERVIEWER: SO now you was going with my grandmother?

INTERVIEWEE: I was playing at a wedding up at Scungo's Hall in Simmonsville

that is where I met your grandmother. I was a good looking fellow and I could tell she liked me. It wasn't to long before we got married. I had to ask her father if I could marry her. My friend came with me. I was scared and nervous.

I had my own orchestra "Golden Gate". My brother Tony played the drums, Mary the piano, Angelo played the slide trumbone. We always liked music in my family. I used to teach violin, and play at weddings. Your grandmother didn't like me going out all the time, she was a little jealous, so she asked her father to give us ~~the~~ land. He gave us the old cider mill and that is where I started the Primrose Laundry. That was hard work but we all worked and got it going good. The boys run it now.

INTERVIEWER: How about organizations, church and clubs.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, Yes, we started the Shoe String Club. All the friends who started out in business together. Started on a shoe string. All old timers now some are dead. Bill Giloni, Delmare, Joe Mancini. We met at an old store front, across from Leone's. House is gone now. After awhile we bought a club from the English people down Pocasset and started the Sons of Italy Club. We put in a Bocci Court. I put a bocci court up in the back of my yard to after some time. We would go up the back, we fixed up an old bus up there, my wife would cook and we would play and eat. All men no women. Jesus, its hard for me to remember.

INTERVIEWER: Where you close to the church?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I was close to the church. I helped build the new church. The one on Atwood Ave. Helped plan it like meetings going to see people, stuff like that. I bought the big stained glass window in the front. I paid \$800.00 in those days that was a lot of money. All the business men did what they could. One dug the foundation, someone else did the landscaping. Gilbane was the contractor. Big beautiful church. We all worked hard to help the church.

INTERVIEWER: My mother told me about the families you sponsored. Can you tell me something about this?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I sponsored families. The Susin's and some others. We did all we could to help in those days. We always helped those who needed it. People don't forget. They come up to see me. They always remember me. Had hard times, good time and some sad times. When the kids come up they make me feel good. I have one regret, I didn't go back to see the old country. I got sick can't get around anymore.
I'm tied now, no more talking.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you Papa.

COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE Pasquale Gatta

INTERVIEWER Kevin Gatta

DATE OF INTERVIEW 2/20/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

Early years, growing up

Silver Lake

Job market

Musical group

Laundry business

Church

Society relationship

Marriages, courting

Reminiscences

COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE PASQUALE GATTA SR.

INTERVIEWER KEVIN P. GATTA

DATE OF INTERVIEW FEB. 19, 1979

SUBJECTS COVERED

EARLY YEARS GROWING UP

SILVER LAKE

JOB MARKET

MUSICAL BAND

LAUNDRY BUSINESS

CHURCH

SOCIETY RELATIONSHIP

MARRIAGES - COURTING

GOOD OLD DAYS
