Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Etta Oliveri by Paris Ledoux

Etta Oliveri
NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Etta Oliveri
INTERVIEWER: Paris Ledoux
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2/23/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

- Life in Italy
- Emigration
- Early Settlement
- Employment
- Ethnic Identity
Oral History Interview
with
ETTA OLIVERI
February 23, 1979
Cranston, Rhode Island
by Paris Ledoux

LEDoux: Where did you come from, in Italy?
OLIVERI: Boiano.
LEDoux: What was it like in Boiano?
OLIVERI: Well...I remember the houses...they're not like over here...they were made of stone. And I remember...they don't have any screens for windows.
LEDoux: What did your father and mother do in Italy?
OLIVERI: They were retired. (Interviewer's note: In a later conversation it was learned that her father was a barber. Her mother never worked outside the home.)
LEDoux: When did you come to America?
OLIVERI: I came here when I was 11 years old.
LEDoux: Do you remember the year?
OLIVERI: 1935.
LEDoux: Why did you leave Italy?
OLIVERI: Because my parents died in Italy and so I came here with my brother.

LEDoux: What was it like moving to America?

OLIVERI: Big difference. I like it here very much.

LEDoux: Did you come over by plane or by boat?

OLIVERI: By boat.

LEDoux: What was it like? Do you remember anything about the trip over?

OLIVERI: It was very nice. The weather was bad a couple of days but it was nice.

LEDoux: Where there a lot of people on the boat? How long was your trip?

OLIVERI: Yes...a lot of people...nine days...on the boat.

LEDoux: When you came to America, where did you live?

OLIVERI: I lived with my sister on Third Avenue (Cranston).

LEDoux: What was the neighborhood like?

OLIVERI: Nice...very nice people.

LEDoux: Did you know a lot of the people in the neighborhood, or where they strangers to you?

OLIVERI: I didn't know too many....

LEDoux: Were you sorry that you came to America?

OLIVERI: No.

LEDoux: What did you miss the most about Italy?

OLIVERI: Missed my sister...the family.

LEDoux: Did you have a communication problem when you came to America? Could you speak English?

OLIVERI: No. (No English)

LEDoux: Was this a problem for you?
At first...yes... but I tried night school.

I know you were only 11 when you came here, but did you eventually work here in America?

Yes.

What was it like?

I worked in a mill...a foot-press operator.

Do you think of yourself as Italian or American?

I'm an American, but I am proud to be Italian, too.

What were the roles and responsibilities of the family members in your experience?

The father works...takes care of the family...
The mother takes care of the house...the children obey...

How important has the church been to you?

I go to church...it's a comfort...

Have you stayed in touch with your family in Italy?

Yes...with my sister...I visited her in Italy last summer, for six weeks.

Did you notice any major changes?

Everything is different. People left before because they had nothing. Now they have everything there...they have dishwashers, refrigerators, freezers, cars...everything....

What language was spoken in your home, as you were growing up?

Italian.

Did you have any help in learning the English language?
OLIVERI: I went to night school to learn English...

LEDOUX: Did you encounter any prejudice? Did anyone ever make fun of you because you were Italian?

OLIVERI: No.

LEDOUX: Did you carry on any Italian traditions?

OLIVERI: Not really... I try and be modern...

LEDOUX: If you had it to do over again, would you still come to America?

OLIVERI: Oh yes. This is the land of freedom... I'm happy to be here...

LEDOUX: What in life is most important to you?

OLIVERI: To be happy... to see my family happy... that's all....

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