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Italian Women and Girls: Interview with Pauline Guglielmino by Carmela Santoro

Pauline Guglielmino

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SUBJECTS COVERED

Coming to America—had relatives here

Schooling in Italy

Reasons for coming to America

Trip to U.S.

Impressions of Providence on arrival

Life in Georgiaville

Description of Italian feasts

Leisure time activities

Satisfaction of living in America
A: You came from Sicily?
Q: From Pala Tolo to Syracuse to Messina to Naples. Then to Rome, three days. We went to Genoa from Naples. We sailed from Genoa.
Q: You came in 1917 during the war, will you tell me something about that?
A: We were supposed to come one or two years earlier, but the papers were never ready. We got another friend to help and got them right away.
Q: Who came?
A: Me, my father and mother. We left one brother, sixteen years old, because he was a soldier.
Q: Did you have anybody in the U.S.?
A: Yes, two brothers and a sister. They sent for us. My first brother came here after an earthquake. My brother made some money helping clean up Messina and then came to America, I think 1912. My other brother and his wife came to America so my sister went along with them. After a few years they sent for us.
Q: What kind of a town was P.....
A: The school was pretty much the same as American schools. The prayers, etc. I went as far as the fourth grade. I was twelve years old when I quit school. I figured we were coming to America. My mother sent my to help a dressmaker.
Q: Didn't you tell me that you went somewhere before you even started school?
A: Yes, we stayed at the house of these two sisters who taught us things like crochet, embroidery, stitching. Sometimes we would go on picnics. Then we would come home and be all excited about what we have done. My father used to make gold and copper things to cook in. We had a porch and well. Baking the bread.

Q: Were most of the people farmers?
A: There were a lot of tradespeople. The shoemaker, cabinetmaker, toolmaker, some use to make the furniture for the rich, some for the poor. Most were craftsmen.

Q: All the children went to school?
A: The boys and girls were in separate sections.

Q: Did your mother work?
A: In Italy, no.

Q: One of the reasons that your father came to the U.S. was because he couldn't get supplies?
A: Yes with the war with Tripoli, it was hard to get copper. We would have stayed otherwise, because my father made good money there. It was that the war that forced us to come.

Q: What was your trip like?
A: We stayed one month in the boat. It was wooden, it smelled funny. No facilities. It was a mess.

Q: Did you run into any submarines?
A: No, we thought we would. We were scared at the Straight of Gibraltar. We arrived in Portugal on Palm Sunday. We were
there three days. Then we sailed. We reached here safely. I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. We came all to Ellis Island. My brother came and got us. We came to N.Y. by a smaller boat at night. I had never seen a colored lady before, I was scared. Then we came to Providence.

Q: What was your first impression?
A: It was big, lots of people, big walls.

Q: What did you think of Providence?
A: I remember a man on a horse (statue). We went to live in Georgiaville. They had to send me to school because I was only 14. At night I used to go to the mill to learn. I learned English well. I was a good speller.

Q: You worked at a mill in Georgiaville?
A: Yes, as a spinner. Then I got my working papers, I quit school. I made $22/week. That was good pay. I worked like a man. My mother worked in the spool room, my father in the weaving room. There wasn't much need for a coppersmith. It was Vernon mill.

Q: Were there a lot of Italian in Georgiaville?
A: Yes and French. They mostly all worked in the mill. We paid 98¢/week for a four-room house. They belonged to the mill. No electricity. It was the same as in Italy. The only thing different were the wooden structures, not mason work like in Italy. It was hard to cook. Very primitive. One time I found a lizard like in Italy.

Q: When did you come to Providence?
A: My brother got ill and couldn't work in the mill anymore. There was a macaroni store where he got a job in Providence.
My other brother got a job in Pawtucket. Then my mother and I were alone because my father returned to Italy. We had used all the money we had saved. He went to Italy in March and died in November. He said he wanted to die with his friends. He didn't like the U.S. My mother wouldn't go back with him, she didn't want to leave me, I was 16. When my father got sick, the brother who was in the army was sent to take care of him, when he died, he went back into the service. We moved to Providence.

In 1922, this brother came to the U.S. He had an autobody shop.

Q: Why did you become a citizen?
A: In 1934. I had two kids already.

Q: How did you meet your husband?
A: He came from the place that I came from. We always use to get together. I liked him and he liked me, it was no fix up. We had lots of good times for the religious feasts. The fairs. We combined everything together. There was pastries, gelati, lemonade. Spumoni, italian ice cream. Everybody would look at everyone else. The long procession with priests. I was born on St. Paul's day. I was supposed to be Tina. January 25.

Q: Would you have the same kinds of feasts here?
A: Yes. We once chartered a bus to N.Y. for one of these feasts. They are all forgotten. I still remember. They use to block the streets over there for the feast before Lent. Hold carnivals. Everyone was dressed up. The dances were held outside.
I use to love to dance at the feasts; I still like to dance.

Q: What do you do here for a good time?
A: I belong to the senior citizen club. We have a meeting once a month. There are one day trips. All ladies. We only have one man with 45 ladies. I belong to the Democrat club. Now I belong to the Da Vinci. We have a meal for a dollar then a movie, trips, bingo. We went to Montreal, to Washington during cherry blossom. We went to N.Y. after Thanksgiving. Da Vinci had a senior citizen entertainment. We had about 50 people. Eighteen songs. I sang solo and one with a man.

Q: How many children do you have?
A: I have three, two girls and a boy.

Q: How many grandchildren?
A: My daughter has two girls and a boy. My son has one girl, her name is Paula like me. She goes to college. My oldest daughter is a widow and has a ten year old boy.
I'm a widow for 13 years.

Q: You've been keeping busy.
A: I haven't been feeling well for 9 years. I feel better now.

Q: You said you started a store?
A: That was when I was married. Then the law changed that you couldn't make macaroni without packaging it. Then we started a market for 25 years. When the kids were bigger my husband had a heart attack and got rid of the store. It took me a long time to get used to being alone. Now, I'm better, I feel young again.

Q: Do you go to operas?
A: I have no one to go with.

Q:
Q: I noticed you have a lot of books around, do you like to read?
A: Yes.

Q: Do you read in Italian?
A: Both. But I read more English than Italian. Before I used to read more Italian. Every month I get my reader's digest. I like it better in English. I love my country, I won't forget my motherland. I feel American and I'm proud. There's a lot more freedom. I like it better here.

Q: You've never been back.
A: No.

Q: Would you like to go back?
A: Yes, for a trip if I had someone congenial to go with.

Q: How do you feel about labor unions?
A: I never belonged to one. They didn't have them. I don't understand them.

Q: Are you interested in politics?
A: No not really. I'm more friends with those in the Democratic club. I obey whoever is in. I don't feel so strong to kill myself over something. It's like a social thing. Like relatives to me.

Q: Your husband was to same religion as you?
A: Yes.

Q: Do you still go to Church?
A: Since I'm sick I can't walk too well. I haven't gone in 5 years. I go to the chapel downtown when I can.

Q: What do you like best about the U.S.?
A: It's the way you live. You have everything you want.
Over here you can get whatever you want. There is more opportunity.

Q: Is there anything you're disappointed in?
A: No. At least for me. Me being an old lady I'm not disappointed in anything.

Q: Would you still come to the U.S. if you had the decision again?
A: Yes, of course.