Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Anna DeMarco by Rose Coffey

Anna DeMarco

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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Anna DeMarco

INTERVIEWER: Rose Coffey

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2/15/79

SUBJECTS COVERED:

- Description of home in Italy
- Family, occupations of father, mother, husband
- Departure from Italy and reasons
- Expectations about America and length of stay
- Adjustments to money and language in U.S.
- Traditions brought from Italy
- Importance of family, ethnic identity
- Desire for return visit to Italy, would she come here again?
- Church affiliation
SUMMARY

The three generations that I interviewed were from the same family; the mother, daughter, and daughter's son. While conducting these interviews I learned a lot about how close their family ties are along with the different family traditions that have been ressurected over the years from generation to generation. One of the most fascinating high points that I came across while interviewing was that in the first and second generations they both felt that the center of the family was divided equally between themselves and their husbands. Whereas in the third generation he felt that it was his wife who was the center of the family since it was she that took care of the whole households needs. A final highpoint that I was very interested in was the traditions that were used in their family. One of the most fascinating family traditions was the marriage tradition of the in-laws breaking the dish which signified accepting the daughter-in-law into the family. The third generation interviewee commented that he will try and pass on these Italian family traditions through future generations as much as he can, since they have lingered on this far.

In conclusion I feel that all three interviews came out as well as could be expected since in the first generation interview the mother seemed to be a little reserved because of the tape recorder. I feel that I could have gotten better results if I had used a different method of recording her comments. Finally if I had, had more practice in conducting interviews, I would have brushed up on the areas of interviewing that I needed more practice. All in all I had a very good experience while conducting these interviews, and have become enlightened about the traditions, and family ways of the Italian nationality.
Oral History Interview #1

with

Anna DeMarco

2/15/79

North Providence R.I.

by Rose E. Coffey

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live in Italy? What was the name of the town and the size of it?

INTERVIEWEE: Cabriato Volturno

INTERVIEWER: Was it a very big town?

INTERVIEWEE: NO

INTERVIEWER: What was it like? Were the houses close together?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, the houses were close together, not too big.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?

INTERVIEWEE: One brother

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: He worked on a farm.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother work?

INTERVIEWEE: YES, oh my mother, I had a step-mother. My mother died when I was four years old, I don't remember my mother. My step-mother worked on a farm.

INTERVIEWER: When did you leave Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I left Italy in 1911.

INTERVIEWER: What were the reasons you left Italy? Did you know anyone in America when you came here?

INTERVIEWEE: I came here because my husband wanted to come here.
INTERVIEWER: Did you get married before you left Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I was married before I came to America.
INTERVIEWER: Did you plan to stay in America for the rest of your life?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, because my husband liked it here, me like Italy, but he wanted to stay here.
INTERVIEWER: Was America what you expected from what you had heard about it?
INTERVIEWEE: I was alittle dissappointed when I first came here. I didn't like it here for one year because I felt lost here, after the year Lena came, my daughter Lena. Then I like here because I had a daughter, and another daughter, and another daughter.
INTERVIEWER: Did you work while you were here in America?
INTERVIEWEE: No
INTERVIEWER: Did your husband? What did he do?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, he worked in a mill when he first came, then he later worked as a landscape gardener in Roger Williams Park after the war.
INTERVIEWER: Were their many opportunities available in America at that time?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes
INTERVIEWER: Was it hard for you to adjust to the money?
INTERVIEWEE: Well yes it was hard to get used to the money in the U.S.
INTERVIEWER: Was it easy for you to understand Americans and could you talk to them?
INTERVIEWEE: It took alot of time because I can't talk English that good anyway because I don't work. I don't work in a shop and I talk Italian to my daughter. I understand alittle bit but not much.
INTERVIEWER: Did you pick it up from just listening to people?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Did you bring traditions back from Italy when you left? When you were living in your home did you do certain things that you learned from your parents?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I brought from my parents over to here.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of traditions did you bring back with you? Traditions like on Christmas Eve you may have fish?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we did.

INTERVIEWER: Did you try and pass on these traditions to your family?

INTERVIEWEE: I tried to keep these traditions in the family.

INTERVIEWER: When you were married did you have any traditions that you followed? Like bringing your boyfriend to meet your parents.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Who do you consider to be the center of the family? You or your husband?

INTERVIEWEE: It was equal.

INTERVIEWER: Is the family important to you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Why did you say it was important to you? What meaning does it have for you to be a close family?

INTERVIEWEE: Because of my family and I wanted to be a close family like mine in Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider yourself as a real Italian or an American?

INTERVIEWEE: Partly because I am an Italian and I have also adjusted to a lot of the American ways.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever gone back to Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: No

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to go back to see everyone?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, but I have my family here.
INTERVIEWER: Did you have relatives there when you left?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes
INTERVIEWER: If you had to do it all over again would you have stayed in Italy or come to America?
INTERVIEWEE: I wouldn't stay over there, I would stay here because my daughter is here and my family. I like it now.
INTERVIEWER: Did you belong to a national church in Italy or a small parish church?
INTERVIEWEE: I belonged to a small parish church.
INTERVIEWER: Thank-You
Oral History Interview #2
with
Elena Aiello
2/15/79
North Providence R.I.
by Rose E. Coffey

INTERVIEWER: Can you define what heritage means for you? Is it being passed on to the generations?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, some of it is being passed on.
INTERVIEWER: What kind of traditions do you still use, that your parents brought from Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: One of the traditions is our Christmas Eve, and our Easter Sunday tradition, Palm Sunday.
INTERVIEWER: What kind of things do you do?
INTERVIEWEE: Well on Christmas Eve we have special food, seafood that we eat, we visit each other and sing Christmas songs. On Palm Sunday we visit each other and give Palm, and kiss each other. Then on Easter Sunday we have our traditional lamb or ham but mostly lamb dinner.

INTERVIEWER: What does it mean to give Palm to each other?
INTERVIEWEE: Well that means peace.
INTERVIEWER: Is family important to you?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes it is, well there is nothing closer than a family.
INTERVIEWER: In Italy families are supposed to be really close do you have any information on this?
INTERVIEWEE: Well I wasn't born in Italy, I was born in America.
INTERVIEWER: Did your parents bring that closeness feeling to you?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they have we have very close relations.
INTERVIEWER: Do you consider yourself as an Italian or an American?
INTERVIEWEE: Well both, semi, in that I am, my heritage is Italian and I am proud of it, but I am glad to be an American.
INTERVIEWER: Did you attend school? How many years?
INTERVIEWEE: I went until the eighth grade of school.
INTERVIEWER: Was that in Providence?
INTERVIEWEE: Providence, yes
INTERVIEWER: Did you speak Italian?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I spoke Italian at home when I was a little girl.
INTERVIEWER: What reason was that?
INTERVIEWEE: My parents didn't speak English so they talked to us in Italian and we answered in Italian.
INTERVIEWER: Have you ever visited Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes I did.
INTERVIEWER: Was it like what your parents had told you it was like?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes exactly
INTERVIEWER: How would describe Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: Well they haven't got the sanitary conditions and the conveniences that we have in America. They are way behind, I would say that the way we lived sixty years ago. This is now in the village that I'm talking about, they lived sixty years ago, but in the cities they have improved a lot, but they are still way behind.
INTERVIEWER: How would you describe the housing they lived in?
INTERVIEWEE: Well in the city I stayed in the hotel and in the village I went to visit my relatives and I stayed in their houses, and they
aren't as modern as ours. They are made of stone there all stone, and the houses are like one complex like a little village of houses. Then they all go out to work in the morning in the country where they have their livestock and their farm. They go home every night to their house and go out every morning to the country.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about when you were married? Did you have like a tradition the Italian way of doing things?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes my husband came in, my boy friend at the time, came in to meet my family and when I first started going out with him before we got serious. They approved of him and then he took his mother and father up to meet my parents and his parents approved of me, and they liked me and so we made plans to get married.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a job here?

INTERVIEWEE: I was working up till the time I got married.

INTERVIEWER: Does your husband have a job? Did he work when he met you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, he was working for his father.

INTERVIEWER: Did he continue working in that business?

INTERVIEWEE: He continued to work in his fathers business until, well right when we got married then the depression came along and there was no work. His father wasn't taking any more work because there was no work to bid on so he had to go like everyone else, he went on relief, and stayed on relief for a couple of years. Then he got a job with the public works department in the city of Providence,
and then went off relief and things kept getting better. Then in 1939 he went into business himself.

INTERVIEWER: Did he find it hard getting started?
INTERVIEWEE: No, he didn't.
INTERVIEWER: Do you get any Italian media in your home?
INTERVIEWEE: Well I get the Echo the Italian paper but that's not printed in Italian it is printed in English. It is all Italian news.
INTERVIEWER: Who do you consider to be the center of the family? Your husband or yourself?
INTERVIEWEE: Well it's equal I think.
INTERVIEWER: Who was responsible for the children?
INTERVIEWEE: Well I took care of the children in the home, and he earned the money for us, he was the bread winner all the time.
INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude on religion? Do you belong to a parish or a national church?
INTERVIEWEE: I belong to a parish.
INTERVIEWER: When your children were married did they or did you follow any Italian traditions with them like the way you were married?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they took their girl home, and had us meet them, and we also met their parents.
INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about education? Do you think it is important to have it?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I think it is very important to have an education.
INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it is so important? Need it to get a job?
INTERVIEWEE: Well I think it is important for a job and important for associating with other people, can't get very far without an education.
INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude on labor and unions?
INTERVIEWEE: Well unions aren't bad but are going a little bit too far I think, getting to strong and demanding too much.

INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude about the government? Has it changed much since you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes it has changed.

INTERVIEWER: How would you say it has changed?

INTERVIEWEE: Well they have a lot of restrictions on things and they have a lot of committees they didn't have before. People seemed to have had more privileges then, than they have now. Some of them are to an advantage and some are of a disadvantage.

INTERVIEWER: Of job, family and money which do you think is more valuable to have?

INTERVIEWEE: Well if you have a job you have money so I think that if you have a family and don't have money it's hard. So I think you need the money because your family will suffer if you can't give them what they need.

INTERVIEWER: Thank-You
INTERVIEWER: Can you define what heritage means for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Well in the best of my terminology heritage means a tradition carried on from the past into the present.

INTERVIEWER: Do you see this heritage being passed on from generation to generation?

INTERVIEWEE: In my own personal family I certainly will try and pass it on.

INTERVIEWER: Is family important to you?

INTERVIEWEE: YES, very important.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

INTERVIEWEE: It's my whole life, I work for their benefit and their wellbeing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider yourself Italian or American?

INTERVIEWEE: I consider myself an American - Italian.

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you attend school?

INTERVIEWEE: Twelve years.

INTERVIEWER: Do you speak Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I speak Italian Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you learn Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: Both my grandparents spoke Italian when I was a youngster, and I took one year of it in highschool.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever visited Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: No I haven't.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to?

INTERVIEWEE: I intend to by the end of next year.
INTerviewer: When you were married did you follow any Italian traditions?

Interviewee: My wife and I did yes, we had the veal and peas on the table, wine, the anoca biscuits and all the Italian traditions that follow. Along with the family tradition of the in-laws passing the dish on and breaking it to accepting the daughter-in-law into the family.

Interviewer: What is your occupation and what was the reason you went into that business?

Interviewee: I am an owner of a construction company, and my dad was the former owner of the same company.

Interviewer: Was it hard getting started in that business?

Interviewee: No, I had the name and the hand me down accounts so it was quite easy.

Interviewer: Do you get any Italian media in the home?

Interviewee: Yes, we get the Italian Echo.

Interviewer: Who do you consider to be the center of the family?

Interviewee: My wife because she spends the money, buys the clothes, and runs the house.

Interviewer: What is your attitude on labor and unions?

Interviewee: What is my attitude on labor and unions, personally I believe that unions are becoming a thing of the past. As for labor if they don't reduce their wages somewhat there is not going to be much labor involved in the future.

Interviewer: What is your attitude on marriage? Will you want your children to follow the same traditions you did?
INTERVIEWEE: Most definitely
INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about education? Do you think it is important to have a college degree?
INTERVIEWEE: I think it is important if they intend to make use of it, but if they intend to go out and become an ordinary laborer then it is just a waste of time and money.
INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude about the government today? Has it changed much since you were growing up?
INTERVIEWEE: No, they still have their hands in our pocket and taking our money that we work so hard for.
INTERVIEWER: On the issues being brought up now how do you feel about abortion? Do you feel it is right or wrong?
INTERVIEWEE: I think abortions are right.
INTERVIEWER: Why do you feel that way?
INTERVIEWEE: For the simple reason, that if a person cannot support the child or take care of the child properly there is no sense bringing the child into this environment having him suffer.
INTERVIEWER: Of job and family which do you feel is most valuable?
INTERVIEWEE: At the present time I will say job simply to earn enough money to take care of my family.
INTERVIEWER: What is your attitude toward religion?
INTERVIEWEE: To each his own , to me the Catholic religion and Catholic Church is the only one that I recognize and the only one that I will abide by.
INTERVIEWER: Thank-You