Italian Women and Girls: Interview with Anna Zammarelli by Carmela Santoro

Anna Zammarelli

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COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE Anna Zammarelli

INTERVIEWER

DATE OF INTERVIEW November 26, 1976

SUBJECTS COVERED

Life in Italy, family

Trip to America

Citizenship procedure

Education

Recreation

Feelings about politics, religion, heritage
Q: When did you come here?
A: In 1914. I was 4 years old. I think September.
Q: Do you remember the town where you were born?
A: A little. A little stone house. My father was a musician. I remember the Italian celebrations on Sunday. And my mother used to do a lot of cooking for the Church. In his spare time my father was a cobbler. He made shoes for the rich people. Brigano de Chilendo. That's the town we came from. Near Salerno. My mother helped my father a lot in the cobbler shop. I remember we used to go and get water with the pitcher on her head. I remember my grandmother's house not far away. My grandfather was quite a tall man.
Q: How many children were in your family?
A: Five of us in Italy. When we came here my mother was pregnant with me. My father came here because of the war. Because of me he didn't have to go to war. He came in 1910. My mother was about four months pregnant.
Q: Did you go to school there?
A: No. I don't remember much. I don't think my brothers went to formal school. I think the relatives taught them. My grandmother was living with us.
Q: How big a town was it?
A: It was small.
Q: What did you do for playtime?
A: I used to go to my brothers and sisters a lot.

Q: What did the people do for a good time?
A: Most were Church-related.

Q: You came in 1914, now before, you said that your father came when your mother was pregnant before you were born, did he come back?
A: No. I didn't know my father until I came to the United States. My father met us at Staten Island, Alice Island, and I didn't know who he was. And I said to my mother, "Who's that man?". My mother came with five children all by herself. She put all her papers in a dish towel hung on her arm so she wouldn't lose any of them. My older brother got sick on ship, a congested eye, and my mother went through a lot of red tape because they wanted to send him back. They felt he had an eye disease he was bringing to the U.S.

Q: You came by ship, do you remember the trip at all?
A: Yes, I remember my mother holding me very tight and my sister Mary holding her tight. Then I remember the people standing on the boat and bringing up the food. The meals were very small. My mother was very busy on the ship with my brother.

Q: How many days did the trip take?
A: I think fourteen days.

Q: When you came the war had already started in Italy?
A: Yes, my uncle had to rush out here because of the Tripoli war.

Q: Your father sent for you and your mother?
A: Yes
Q: When your father came to the U.S. did he know anybody?
A: Yes, he settled with all my relatives. My mother's two brothers and one of her sisters were already here. They all settled in Brownsville, Pa.

Q: When he met you you all went to Brownsville?
A: Yes, it is a mining town.

Q: Do you remember your first impressions of the U.S.?
A: No, not really, I guess everything just seemed new.

Q: Did you have your own house?
A: Yes, we had relatives all around us.

Q: How did Brownsville strike you?
A: It didn't make much difference, we knew we were coming to America, I was too small to get a real impression.

Q: You people spoke Italian at home?
A: Yes, it was a dialect.

Q: You are a citizen now?
A: Yes. About 25 years ago. We're all citizens through my father's citizenship papers. He just made it in 1922, if you had a citizenship paper then all children became a citizen. After that the law was changed. I took out my own citizenship papers after that.

Q: Why?
A: Because a lot of times you had to show proof and I wanted to have my own. I don't know who has the original paper now.

Q: Did you have to take tests?
A: Yes, at the post office. Then my father had to come down to verify that I was his daughter. The man said to my father how do you know she is your daughter?
I got scared. My father got mad.

Q: What did your father do when he came to Brownsville?
A: He was a cobbler. He continued making shoes, not too many. He had his own shop. At night he played the coronet.

Q: Did your mother stay home?
A: Yes.

Q: You went to school here?
A: Yes, in Revere, Pa. We moved there. The next town to it.

Q: How far did you go?
A: Through high school. Then we came to Providence in 1922. There was a coal strike in Pa. We lived in company homes there. We moved before they put people out of the houses. Most of my education has been in R.I. I'm a physical therapist. I went to the Mayo Clinic in 1943.

Q: So your whole education was in the U.S.
A: We came to Providence when I was ten years old.

Q: What kinds of things do you like to do either professionally or non-professionally?
A: I retired three years ago. I was a registered nurse as well as a physical therapist. I did not belong to a labor union. I make a vegetable garden. I go to concerts and plays. I keep up professionally and socially with nursing and physical therapy. I belong to the senior citizen and participate in all their activities and I enjoy arts and crafts. I enjoy keeping house and cooking. So far, I've enjoyed my retirement very much. I've done a lot of traveling.
Q: You were not unionized as a nurse, do you have any feelings about unions and nursing?
A: To a certain extent sometime the unions do overdo it. At the same time there is the reverse. When you don't have a union people sometimes take advantage of you.

Q: Are you interested in politics?
A: To a certain extent.

Q: Do you consider yourself a member of a political party?
A: No. I guess yes.

Q: Have you ever held any political office?
A: No.

Q: Would you like to?
A: No.

Q: Are you concerned about any political issues?
A: Taxes and what is going to happen to us. Like the pensions in N.Y.C. or the people at Shepherds who lost their pensions. And the government lets them get away with it. You feel helpless.

Q: Do you attend a particular church?
A: A catholic church, St. Ann.

Q: You go to church regularly?
A: Yes.

Q: Have you ever gone back to Italy?
A: No, I've never had time with other traveling. I'm thinking about it this April. I'd like to be there for Easter.

Q: Did your mother or father ever go back?
A: No. I have an aunt and uncle in Italy.
Q: Do you see yourself as an American or an Italian?
A: I see myself as both because I was brought up by Italian parents and spoke Italian.

Q: What do you like best about the U.S.?
A: I like the freedom, even though what I said before.

Q: Is there anything you're disappointed in?
A: Yes, the way politics are played.

Q: Suppose that you had to make the decision to come to the U.S., do you think you would?
A: It would depend on my age, like now I wouldn't go back to Italy, it all depends on where your roots are.

Q: If your parents came with five children, did you find any conflict growing up in American society?
A: No, we always lived in an Italian section.

Q: When you went to school was this the case?
A: Yes, I minded my own business at R.I.C.

Q: How many children are there in your family now?
A: 12. Seven children were born in the U.S.

The large family also helped me to adjust to things.

Q: In what ways do you think you've changed by coming here?
A: I was so small. Not having lived there I don't really know.