Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Rose Marinucci by Joan O'Brien

Rose Marinucci

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COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE Rose Marinucci

INTERVIEWER Joan O'Brien

DATE OF INTERVIEW 4/3/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

Life in Italy

Coming to America

Transition to American life

Marriage and dating

General beliefs: education, woman's role, divorce

Looking back
Oral History Interview

with

Rose Marinucci

April 2, 1979
Rhode Island College

by Jean C. O’Brien

INTERVIEWER: Where in Italy did you come from?
INTERVIEWEE: I came from Abruzzi. It’s in the central part of Italy. Between Rome and Naples.

INTERVIEWER: How do you spell that?
INTERVIEWEE: Abruzzi. That’s the region. The town itself is -- --.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a little town?
INTERVIEWEE: It was little. Maybe 4000, a population of 4000, 4500 something around there.

INTERVIEWER: How big is your family?
INTERVIEWEE: There are five children. Three girls and two boys.

INTERVIEWER: You lived on a farm, right?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes. My father owned a very large farm with much land around it, as far as you could see.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a crop did he grow?
INTERVIEWEE: He mostly grew vegetables and any kind of fruit, pears, cherries, apples, almonds, you name it and it was there. Vegetables of all kinds. Wheat, a lot of wheat. He also had vineyards.

INTERVIEWER: Did he hire anyone to work on the farm?
INTERVIEWEE: He did, yes. Especially during the summer time which is the busiest time. He did hire men a few days a week to come and help. It is almost impossible to really do all that on one's own.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother work at all?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes she did. While we were there, yes she did. She helped a lot with the farm. Also tried to bring up five kids.

INTERVIEWER: You had said before that some of your brothers and sisters were much older than you were.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. My oldest sister is 22 years older than I am. She is the first.

INTERVIEWER: Did you all attend school?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we did. I went up to the fifth grade and they went up to high school.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to church?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we did. We followed the same Catholic religious way of attending church.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of customs did you follow?

INTERVIEWEE: The typical Italian customs that were brought to us by my parents.

INTERVIEWER: You were telling me before about Christmas time the differences between ...

INTERVIEWEE: The difference is that we don't trade gifts at Christmas time as your custom is here. We usually give gifts at the Epiphany which is January 6. It is mostly to the children rather than to the grown-ups. Christmas time is more of a religious type of ceremony. We have the big dinner, we go to church, and we have a lot of religious cel-
INTERVIEWER: Celebrations. Christmas time is a big thing.

INTERVIEWEE: When did you come to the U.S.?


INTERVIEWEE: Why did you come?

INTERVIEWER: My oldest brother was here. He had married someone who had been here. When she came back they married and he came here. That year, 1966, they came back for a visit and they convinced my father to come to the United States. Since my brother and I were still young and at home there would be much more job opportunities here than there would have been there. That is very very true. He finally did convince him and he did come and so we settled.

INTERVIEWER: So your whole family except for one sister was here, right?

INTERVIEWEE: At that time there were just three of us because my oldest sister was in Australia. She moved here after we had been here four years. She and her family came here.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about your whole family being split up?

INTERVIEWEE: At that time I really didn't realize the difference it makes as I do now. Like now, my sister is coming here for my wedding. It makes a difference of having everyone here than to know that someone is so many miles away.

INTERVIEWER: Were you close to your brothers and sisters while you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: My brother was because he was the closest one
You came here by plane, right?

Yes, we did. We flew in from Rome to Boston.

What possessions did you bring with you?

It was mainly clothes. There wasn't too much that you could bring because you were limited to weight on the plane. It was mainly your most essential things that you had to bring with you. Personal possessions.

Why did you come to Rhode Island?

Well, my brother had settled here with his family and since we were coming here to him, we just settled in Providence where they were.

Which part of Providence do you live in?

Right in Providence on Federal Hill.

You said your father had come here six months ahead of you.

Right. He had to come six months ahead so that he could call for us. He had an apartment ready for us.

Did he have a job?

Yes he did. He started to work right after he came. He worked in a knife company and he worked there right along.

Did you like the community when you first arrived?

Yes I did because there were many Italian people there. It made you feel a little more at home to
INTERVIEWER: Did you attend school when you got here?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I did. I attended elementary school and I skipped grades as I went along and I finished. I went right up to the twelfth grade. I finished high school in 1974.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any language problems in school?

INTERVIEWEE: At the beginning yes. I really didn't like it. It was like "How am I going to get through this?" It made it very difficult because there was no bilingual program. So it was just, what they would call then, an ungraded room. So we were there for reading, how I don't know, and looking at pictures. You had to kind of make your own judgement as to how you ... It was a must. You had to learn no matter how. And I did.

INTERVIEWER: Your brother too?

INTERVIEWEE: He didn't go to school since he started to work right after he came. But he learned just as much as I did by making his own way too. If you put in your mind that you have to learn this is what your here for, you will. If you expect people to work miracles for you, it's not going to happen.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any problems making friends?

INTERVIEWEE: Not really. People were really really great. Even in school, the students who went there accepted me well. They really did. I felt somewhat, you know, I didn't know what to say to those people. But
INTERVIEWER: They were probably fascinated by the fact that you...

INTERVIEWEE: I think that's it. Right. They were just "Oh, this is a new kid in the class." But they were great, even the teachers were just fantastic. They really were. They couldn't do much for us because they didn't know how to help us in the language but they were so understanding. It was just something else. They accepted us so well.

INTERVIEWER: Did you attend church?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we did. We attended an Italian parish. Everybody went there. But it doesn't really make that much of a difference because their way of carrying out your Catholic religion is basically the same. It didn't make that much of a difference. Although at the beginning we didn't know exactly what was going on. But we went.

INTERVIEWER: You said that your parents don't speak English, did they have problems adjusting?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they did. Because they came much older. If you come, say about 35 even 40, I would say, it kind of makes it a little easier for you to get adjusted. But when your older and you've lived your whole life in a totally different country, it makes it very difficult just to get adjusted. They did and now they're adjusted so much more. Some people have been here 20 years and they still condemn this place which is so terrible. I think if people don't like to stay why don't they just go. If they think they have it so much better there, why stay
INTERVIEWER: Did your mother work when she arrived?
INTERVIEWEE: She did for awhile but then she took sick. She was ill from time to time. It didn't work out for her to be working so it was just good enough for her to be home.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a lot of financial problems because of that?
INTERVIEWEE: Well, at first because you run into so much difficulty because there is so much that you're trying to do. You establish your whole lifestyle here and then illness strikes. That makes it kind of difficult, especially with one person working and four people living with him. But you know, you just keep your hopes up and things did work out. When you hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up. And we did and things worked out well.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about leaving Italy?
INTERVIEWEE: Well, I really didn't want to at first but I really had no saying in it. We're going and that is it. I really didn't want to. I really missed it when we first came and it was like, "I want to go back." But then once ... The first time we went back after we had been here was after three years and you find
so much of a big difference about what you leave and what you find. Three years time doesn't seem like much but it is.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see your old friends when you went back?
INTERVIEWEE: I did some. Yes, I did. The kids I went to school with.

INTERVIEWER: How did they react to you?
INTERVIEWEE: They were pleased to see me but you know you lose that closeness that you have with your friends, especially if you don't keep in touch which I did with a couple. I have a few cousins there, those were the closest and I kept in touch with them. But there is a little difference. If you don't see someone for so long and it's like, "Oh, your home!" It's nice, they're glad to see you but you feel a little bit different towards them too.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make friends with both Americans and Italians?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I did. In fact mostly were Americans rather than Italians. Not because I had anything against them but it helped me in an away to learn the English language much quicker.

INTERVIEWER: Did you encounter any prejudice when you got here?
INTERVIEWEE: No, I didn't. Like I said, people welcomed me. I guess being Italian just didn't make a difference. And to today, it still doesn't. I feel the same way towards other nationalities, or any kind of religious, or race. To me it doesn't make a difference. There is good and bad in no matter
INTERVIEWEE: someday. It is not a vital thing but it's nice to know.

INTERVIEWEE: They will probably appreciate it too.

INTERVIEWEE: I think so, in some ways later on in life. Like my little nephew is two or three years old, he speaks Italian too. You start them from when their little, and carry it right out. Which makes it nice, not because it's Italian, if it were another language I would feel the same way. But it is good that they know something else.

INTERVIEWEE: These are some questions on general beliefs which you might hold. Do you believe in the importance of a good education?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I do. I think that an education is one of the important things. I think it is, yes.

INTERVIEWEE: For both men and women?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I think so. I think women should be treated almost as equally as men, not in everything because I don't believe in everything but as far as education, yes, I think so.

INTERVIEWEE: What do you think the woman's role is today?

INTERVIEWEE: In what way?

INTERVIEWEE: I'm thinking more or less of Italy, maybe not now, but several years ago, the woman was in the home taking care of the family and that was that.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, yes! That is exactly what they thought of, yes. Typical male chauvinists. In the smaller towns, I would say, the less liberal towns, the older people who are there now, to this day, they still feel that way. The woman should belong in
the house. She should work but as far as having outside social affairs or just being sociable, I'm talking about the real older ones now or the uncivilized towns that are still cooped up somewhere, a lot of them still do feel that way. We didn't have that problem, my parents don't feel that way. It is equal for both. A man always has the right of way all the time, that's still, you know. But they don't feel that a woman should be just there, "Don't you put your head out the window because that's not your duty to do." No. Although there are still some people who feel that way, yes. But it's not that much nowadays as it used to be years ago. Things are changing all over.

INTERVIEWER: You personally, do you want to work once you get married?

INTERVIEWEE: I will. I don't mind working. Yes, I will.

INTERVIEWER: For financial support, yes I think it would make things a lot easier both ways.

INTERVIEWER: What about when you have kids?

INTERVIEWEE: Well then I won't because I don't believe in leaving your children to everyone. Although my mother, if they are still here at that time,* she would probably like to take them but until they're older. The first few years of their life, I think the mother belongs with her kids.

INTERVIEWER: Do you believe in divorce?

*The interviewee was referring to the fact that her parents were considering returning to Italy since they still own land there. Once Rose is married, they will have seen all of their children settled.
INTERVIEWEE: In some respects I do, yes. Why should a woman or man be stuck with their partner if it's going to ruin their whole life. Why should it? If it happened to me, something that I don't see now, I mean if I see something now that I don't like about my fiancee, I would just put it down, like cards on the table, and say am I willing to do this for the rest of my life or am I not. If I am not, I'd just as soon not get married. Because nobody forces you to do it. If your happy to do what your doing, it's fine but then should something come up later on, if it's something I really can't tolerate, or this person is just making a total fool out of you because you, then it's look honey there's the door or I go too. So I do believe in it someways. Some people just take it as well if things don't work out that's it, there's the divorce court. Well I don't believe in that because you should think of things before you do what you're doing. But not that a woman has to be sacrificed because a divorce is something so terrible. For some people I agree with them 100 per cent. Some people, no I don't agree with them at all. Some people just aren't meant for each other.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Well their just nbt. A person should be with them for the rest of their life and living in misery, why should that person, I mean what did you do to deserve that? Unless that's what you really want then that's your problem. If there is another alternative, to work things out, that's fine,
INTERVIEWER: Interfere with them, their not going to interfere with you. They couldn't care less. They are very nice people. They just don't go around shooting people for nothing, believe me they don't. They have a reason when they do something.

INTERVIEWEE: But there are some people who hold prejudices against Italians because they think that everyone who is Italian is Mafia.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's exactly right. Yes, they do. You know that is something aggravates me to a point because it's like saying, "Hey, your not Italian, your no good." That's wrong. I mean I might be just as bad as whoever. That's really not the way it should be looked at. But you know how people are, they just judge people by the overall information that they know. Which is wrong. It really is. A lot of people feel that way about different religions, different nationalities. They know one person who does something wrong and that's it. It's too bad that people feel that way but they do.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about anti-Italian jokes?

INTERVIEWEE: You mean towards Italians? Well some of them I can tolerate, some of them I can't. Some of them are just aimed and you know that whoever is saying them is just the total opposite. Some I can tolerate. I'm the type of person who can take any kind of joke but some go a little bit too far. Like I hate the word "Whop". Oh I hate that with a passion. When I hear that it's just like, whoa I already don't like this person because I don't
INTERVIEWER: have to do this? Being young I guess everyone goes through it. Sometimes what I think would have made a difference, being Italian because of my background. But seeing other kids, it may not have made that much of a difference.

INTERVIEWEE: Do you think of yourself as more of an Italian or more of an American or a little of both?

INTERVIEWER: Well it is hard to say, I think that I am right in the middle of both. I've grown up here so I've picked up a lot of the Americans way of growing up. Not that I knock down my other half - the Italian half - but I really don't feel it to either one of the sides, to be honest with you. I take them both as part of everyday. I come to work everyday and most of the people are American. It's fine. I feel just as welcome to them and as comfortable to them as I do when I go home and they're all Italian. It is not that hard for me to switch over like, "Oh I've got to go to work and I have to be this way, now I'm going home and I have to be that way." No it really isn't. It kind of floats right in. It doesn't make that much of a difference.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.