Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Lori Rocchio by Debbie Rocchio

Lori Rocchio

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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE  Anna Rocchio
INTerviewER  Debbie Rocchio
DATE OF INTERVIEW  2/23/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

Heritage

Values

Language

Visiting Italy

Roles (male vs. female)

Religious attitudes

Dating/Courting

Education

Definition of an Italian

Ethnic identity
SUMMARY

The most interesting point about Anna’s interview was the fact that no matter what question was asked, she always related it to her family. Anna believes very strongly in a close family relationship. When Anna speaks of her family, she is referring to her husband, her two children, and herself. She feels that a strong family bondage is held by honesty, understanding, love, and concern for one another. She also feels that a child should have the right to speak and become a part of a family matter. Anna also feels that the children should make their own decisions (as they get older) on matters concerning their future such as school, careers, etc. Anna also feels that the parents should do their best in guiding their children without mapping out their entire life.

Anna’s interview was quite interesting despite the fact that the majority of the answers she gave were not really related to the questions. Anna had a tendency to digress quite a bit and elaborate on her digression. In questioning the diversion, it was reasoned that Anna was trying to make a point, that point being family bondage is the most important factor of life. If the family is not close, the family is not worth having. This belief seems to be quite "Italian". (in regards to the stereotype).
Oral History Interview

with

Anna M. Rocchio Interviewee

February 23, 1979
Home of Interviewee

by Debbie A. Rocchio Interviewer

INTERVIEWER: In regards to heritage, can you tell me some of the traditions that your mother has passed down to you?

INTERVIEWEE: As far as holidays are concerned, on Christmas Eve, it is an Italian tradition to have different kinds of fish, spaghettini aglia-e-olio, and it is really a gettogether to celebrate the birth of Christ. There is also a big feast on Christmas, but I remember Christmas Eve the most because it seems to mean a lot to me.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still practice this tradition?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I try to keep it up with my own family. We do this by having a few friends and some family that I invite over on Christmas Eve. We usually have about 15 people all together. It has been like this for the past six years that I've been doing this on my own and I hope to continue to do so.
Are there any special traditions that you would like your children to carry on?

Well, I suppose that if they remember things that we do now, that I remember when I was a child, and they want to continue to do this, it would be very nice. Some other traditions we carry on is bringing Palm to relatives and friends on Palm Sunday, getting ready for Easter. These things that I carry on are things that I remember as a child. If my children remember them, then they will probably do the same.

You mentioned Easter Sunday. What are some of the things you do for Easter?

In preparing for Easter, following the church, you start with Ash Wednesday and during Lent you either fast or give something up. What I mean by this is, as an example, when I was a child going to the movies was very important, so during lent you would give up going to the movies as a sacrifice. As you got older, you would fast, like one meal a day. Something that you suffer doing, even though you will never suffer like Christ did. Usually, we did this by only eating one meal a day, or giving up eating in between meals. I brought up my children to give up candy. This was in order for them to learn discipline and sacrifice in itself. As far as the Catholic Religion is concerned, one who is fasting during lent is allowed to obstain from fasting on Sunday. My husband felt we should also hold to our fast on Sundays which made it
more of a sacrifice, and I'm glad we did.

INTERVIEWEE: Are there any traditions which you consider to be old fashioned or not worth carrying on?

INTERVIEWER: No, not really. I try to do everything the way I was brought up. I try to do things the way I remember them being done, but to tell you the truth, I don't remember that much. We were a big family and the main things I remember are the things we did for holidays.

INTERVIEWER: What in life, do you value the most?

INTERVIEWEE: I value a closeness in family relationship. What I like to do is have my entire family, even though I have a small family, all together at meal time. I feel being together at meal time is very important for you are together to share talking times and be able to discuss things that are happening. I don't feel it all to be one sided such as only the parents should speak. I feel that the children also should speak about what is going on. Also, if I at one point make a mistake in disciplining my children, I feel I should apologize to them. Another thing I firmly believe in is for my children to always tell me the truth. I hate lying. If my children break something, I want them to come to me and tell me what happened. Maybe I feel this way because when I was young, no matter how honest you were, my mother always doubted what we were saying. This is the reason I brought my children up not to lie, and my
children are 21 and 16 yrs. old and so far so good, no lies. It has been a great relationship and I feel it helps in the family bondage.

INTERVIEWER: Are you bi-lingual?

INTERVIEWEE: I speak a little Italian, especially to my mother who is 92 yrs. old, but I tend to chop it up a little because I've been away from it for so long. I used to be able to speak better Italian when I was younger.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn to speak Italian through school or your family?

INTERVIEWEE: Through my family, for my mother always spoke Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Do you speak the Roman Italian or a dialect?

INTERVIEWEE: A dialect. It is different from the Italian learned in school. When I did take up the language in school, I thought my mother would be a great help to me. When I brought the language home, my mother was quite bewildered.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any Italian newspapers or literature entering the house?

INTERVIEWEE: No we do not.

INTERVIEWER: Do any of your children speak Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I have a younger daughter who is studying Italian at Classical High School. I suppose she could speak it if I could speak it with her. She has the Roman Italian and I have some difficulty.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever gone to Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I've never been.
INTERVIEWER: Would you ever like to visit Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Really deep down inside I would have to say no. There is so much here in America to see before heading out to Europe.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any relatives living out in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I think my mother has some cousins out there living in Rome. Most of her relatives have passed away.

INTERVIEWER: What do feel a man's role is in the family?

INTERVIEWEE: He should have the final word on big family decisions. He should be the bread winner, completely! He should stand as a very important figure where the children should go to for final decisions on their questions. I do not feel all decisions should be made by the mother.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel a woman's role is in the family?

INTERVIEWEE: I feel a woman's place is in the home, bringing up a family, cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and family. This was the woman's job in the home. My mother was always home and when I was first married I felt this same way—always to be home for the children. Now I am seeing things differently. I think it is wonderful that a woman can go out and have a career as well as get married and have children. I think it is fine. But for me to change now after being married for 25 yrs. it is rather difficult. I do have a weekend job which gets me out of the
house, but I feel my most important job, which I enjoy very much is my home and preparing meals as well as being home when my children walk through the door. When the mother is not home, the child walks into an empty house and has no one to relate his/her day to. If you are home, the mother is closer to the children and communication is greater. My mother was always there and a part of my life just as my children are a part of mine.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that if the mother is home that there will be less problems with the children?

INTERVIEWEE: I think that if a child is going to go wrong it is because they want to. For example, there are children who have nothing, yet they grow and make something of themselves. Then again, there are some children who have everything and they have gone wrong. You really can’t base facts of how a child will turn out due to their up-bringing. It is all individualized.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel is the role of the children in a family?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, speaking from my own experience and family, I feel that the children should respect their parents. I also feel that they should at least hear their parents out. If the children feel that their parents are being unreasonable, I think the children should give their parent’s suggestions a try before disagreeing with them completely. I also feel they should go out and
make a career for themselves without too much influence from their parents. They should try to make decisions on their own. They should also learn responsibility as well as how to handle money. They should have self respect and self-discipline.

INTERVIEWER: To you feel that brothers and sisters have an responsibility to each other?

INTERVIEWEE: Respect for each other's feelings and privacy is important. The older brothers or sisters should be there to help the younger ones if they need them and I feel the younger ones should look up to the older ones. They should have a need for each other for they still are family. I feel they owe a little to each other just because they are brought up together.

INTERVIEWER: Was it that way when you were growing up with your brothers and sisters?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, we were a family of eight; 5 girls and 3 boys. I was the baby, and as far as being close to my brother (who was 6 yrs. older than me), my mother pushed me on him as far as going places with him. I can't really say we were close because the age difference was too far apart. I was closer to my nieces and nephews than my brothers and sisters. I was growing up with my nieces and nephews which made the relationship closer.

INTERVIEWER: Earlier in the interview you mentioned religion.
Would you consider yourself to be very religious?

INTERVIEWEE: No. I believe in God, go to Church on Sundays, and try to follow the church laws, but I do not consider myself over religious or very religious. I just do the best I can.

INTERVIEWER: Do you attend an Italian Regional Church?

INTERVIEWEE: No. We attend a neighborhood church. As a matter of fact, the church is Irish. The church is Catholic and that is old that matters. The ethnic portion does not matter. I go there because it is closer to home.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel a Priest's obligation is to the people of his parish?

INTERVIEWEE: When I was growing up, I was afraid to even say hello to a priest. I felt them to be so important. They were right next to God. Now I feel that the Priests have become more friendly to the parishioners. They now seem to be more human. You can talk to them at ease, invite them over for dinner and a drink and they accept. When I was young, I never knew you could be friendly with a Priest. I do think that by the Priests getting friendly with the parishioners this will make the people feel closer to the church.

INTERVIEWER: In getting into the subject of dating and courtship, how old were you when you began to date?

INTERVIEWEE: I was 16yrs. old on my first date.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother require meeting the boy before you went out on your date?
INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes! The boy had to come in the house. I also was not allowed to go in a car.

INTERVIEWER: What was the reason for not allowing you to go in a car on a date?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh no! We were never allowed to ask questions. If we asked why, "because I said so!" was the only answer. So we did not question any further. We would get places by bus or by walking.

INTERVIEWER: If the boy you were dating did not meet your mother's approval, did she forbid you to see the boy?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes, she did.

INTERVIEWER: When you did go out on a date, did you have a curfew?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, we had to be home by 10:00pm. My mother was very strict.

INTERVIEWER: At what age did you allow your children to date?

INTERVIEWEE: My oldest daughter dated at 16yrs. old. It was not that I set that age, it just so happened that that was the age she dated. My youngest daughter was 15yrs. old. That was only because it was a boy that she happened to like at the time. At first I was not going to allow her to go, but realizing that times have changed, I gave her the O.K. I really feel that 16yrs. old is the best age to begin dating for a girl, no younger.

INTERVIEWER: Do you require meeting the boy before your girls go out on a date with them?
INTERVIEWEE: I do feel that when the boy picks up my daughter, I hope they have enough courtesy to ring the bell and come in for them. I really do not like a boy who stays in the car and sounds the horn for them. I feel a boy who comes in shows respect.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel the boy needs to meet your approval?

INTERVIEWEE: No, not really. There are times when you don't care for the person. I do state how I feel about the boy, but I do not forbid my girls to go out with those I do not care for. I try to influence them indirectly by telling my girls the things I don't like about the boy, but sometimes it doesn't always work.

INTERVIEWER: When you were getting married, was it required for your husband to propose to you in front of your family?

INTERVIEWEE: No. If that is what they expected, he did not do it. As a matter of fact, I was 25 yrs. old when I got married. My mother had an influence on who I dated all through my growing up until I met my husband. She did not quite like him, but I felt I really cared for him so I made up my mind to do what I wanted.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that there is a difference between the way in which your mother, first generation, and you and your brothers and sisters, second generation, have brought up their children?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I do! I also have a few sisters who still have the old ways. They are just as strict as my mother was.
I don't feel they have grown with the times. It is not easy to go along with the times. There are a lot of things happening today that I do not approve of, but I try to understand them. An example of changing times is a young girl wanting to get her own apartment. I really don't see why a girl would want to leave her home if there is nothing wrong, but then again I guess that is their way of breaking free and becoming independent. I suppose if that is what they really want to do, I should not hold them back. My sister experienced her daughter, who is 30 yrs. old, leaving home and my sister could not accept this. I tried very hard to talk to her and tried to help her accept this, but it did not work. I would think it better to help your daughter out instead of fighting her. By fighting her, she would hurt the relationship between her and her daughter. I find myself to be strict in many ways, but I do try very hard to try and understand what the young people are going through now, in these times.

**INTERVIEWER:** Earlier in the interview you mentioned having your children receive a good education. Did you go to school?

**INTERVIEWEE:** Yes, I went up to the eleventh grade. My mother was quite strict, and though she did not have a good understanding of what education was all about, she did expect us to have good grades. The reason why I quit school in the eleventh grade was because
my history teacher threatened to fail me the next semester. I was scared. Since I had just turned 16 yrs. old, I told my mother I wanted to quit school because I would rather work. I did not tell her the true reason. My mother was heartbroken for she wanted me to get a good education.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother want you to go on the college and higher education:

INTERVIEWEE: My mother always said that she wanted me to be something. I did not amount to much only going up to the eleventh grade, but later in life I went to hair-dressing school. This was something I always wanted to do, but couldn't when I was younger because we could not afford the cost.

INTERVIEWER: Do you encourage your children to further their education:

INTERVIEWEE: Oh definitely. As a matter of fact, they can make a career of going to school. I think it is wonderful. I think getting an education is very important.

INTERVIEWER: If you had both a son and a daughter, would you encourage them equally to further their education?

INTERVIEWEE: Both equally because as the boy would get older and married, he would have to support a family. A woman needs an education the same as a man does because times have changed and a woman has to support herself.
INTERVIEWER: What is your definition of an Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I really don't know, I guess maybe an Italian is someone who talks with their hands. You can't really distinguish an Italian from other nationalities other than the language.

INTERVIEWER: What do you consider yourself to be; Italian or American?

INTERVIEWEE: An American. When people ask what nationality I am, I say Italian, because they are really asking my heritage. I was born here, so I'm really an American. I feel that we are all American here in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: I enjoyed this interview very much. Thank you.