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Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Andrew Salvadore by Norma DiLibero

Andrew Salvadore

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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE  Andrew Salvadore
INTERVIEWER    Norma DiLibero
DATE OF INTERVIEW  2/20/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

Parents work in another state

Family life

Roles and obligations of second generation

School vs. a trade

Thoughts on being an Italian-American

Marrying outside of nationality
INTERVIEWER: Today, I am speaking to Mr. Andrew Salvadore, President and founder of Salvadore Tool and Findings Company. Mr. Salvadore, where were you born and was this an Italian settlement?

INTERVIEWEE: I was born in South Barre, Massachusetts, and it was an Italian neighborhood. Businesses and everything were run by Yankees.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents land there?

INTERVIEWEE: No, they landed in Providence.

INTERVIEWER: Why did they migrate to South Barre?

INTERVIEWEE: Relations there, cousins and they worked in the mill.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your father do there?

INTERVIEWEE: My father was a mill hand. He worked on a combing machine, Barre Wool Combing Company. It's still there.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother work outside the home?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my mother also worked in Barre Wool Combing
INTERVIEWEE: Company.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me something about your family.

INTERVIEWEE: We are eight children; five boys and three girls.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about the obligations and roles of second generation children?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, with the bringing up we had in our family, me being the oldest, I was always told by my father and my mother that I had to make the way. And, I had to set a good example. That whatever I did my brothers would follow.

INTERVIEWER: Usually immigrant parents preferred their children to stay in school until the minimum legal age, then go out to work and help support the family, was this true with you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, it was true.

INTERVIEWER: Your father was not that anxious to send you to school?

INTERVIEWEE: No, he was anxious for school, but he could not afford me going to high school, so I left on my own and went on to learn a trade.

INTERVIEWER: Were you in Providence at this time?

INTERVIEWEE: I was in Providence at this time.

INTERVIEWER: So your parents did press you to learn a trade?

INTERVIEWEE: They did.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn this trade?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I was working with my uncle at the beginning. He was a blacksmith and we did all
INTERVIEWEE: repair work. His name was Erminio Costantine, and we did all repair work. We repaired push-carts for the peddlers, we repaired springs and trucks and we built wine presses.

INTERVIEWER: In their jobs, the second generation learned about the disadvantages of being a blue collar worker. Were you determined at any point to see that your children go further than you in school and still be part of family and business?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, every parent wants their children to get an education. Yes, but it doesn't always work out. I have three daughters that went to school. I had a son who who went to Bryant for a year and a half and then he left and came into the business. My daughters went to Bryant, Rhode Island College and Roger Williams.

INTERVIEWER: As a second generation, do you speak Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: I speak Italian, but my children do not speak Italian.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about being an Italian-American, or do you consider yourself an American?

INTERVIEWEE: I consider myself an Itali-American. I was born in this country, but I have a deep feeling for the Italians.

INTERVIEWER: What particular insights/advantages do you have from your Italian background?

INTERVIEWEE: As far as I am concerned, things like great artist that we've had--don't forget, once
INTERVIEWEE: At one time we had the Roman Empire, it was the greatest the world has ever known. We've had some great men. Dr. Fermi was the inventor of the atom bomb. We even have Vince Lombardi who is a great sports football coach, and we had Joe DiMaggio, baseball. I think we've covered a lot of ground, our people did.

INTERVIEWER: Are your ethnic values vital enough to withstand the crunch of modern American life?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, of course they are. Sure. We're strong Italians.

INTERVIEWER: Where are Italian-Americans at today?

INTERVIEWEE: We have made great progress in the last forty-five years. Politics, medicine.

INTERVIEWER: You have a brother that is an attorney and another brother who is retired in Florida?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, My brother Mande who is retired in Florida yes, and was in the automobile business for thirty-five years. He's smart, he quit. My other two brothers are in business with me. We make tools and dies and metal stampings for the jewelry trade.

INTERVIEWER: Have you felt guilty about your Italian differences?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I repeat I am proud to be of Italian descent.
INTERVIEWER: Have you kept the Italian culture alive with children and grandchildren?
INTERVIEWEE: I've tried awful hard to. I mention and talk about the Vatican, about all the cities I have visited in Italy, works of art that I bring home when I do make these trips. One year I sent my wife and three grandsons. Another year four grandsons to Italy. Another year I sent my wife, my daughter-in-law, my daughter and three granddaughters, all throughout Italy.

INTERVIEWER: How have you contributed to the revitalization of Italian traditions?
INTERVIEWEE: As far as food goes, our restaurants are the finest. Here in Providence, the finest restaurants are Italian. And, that goes for New York City and no matter what part of the world you go to.

INTERVIEWER: What discriminations have you encountered with social clubs, banks, with Wasps, Irish, etc? Have you felt excluded as an Italian-American?
INTERVIEWEE: I have felt excluded by banks on certain things, yes. Social clubs, yes. Even on jobs. When I was a young boy, looking for a job as a tool maker, there were certain shops that you could not get to. In fact, I was hired once. They found out I was Italian, when I went to report to my job, I was told that I could not go in.
INTERVIEWEE: This is a true story; Foster Metal Products. This was a Wasp place on Richmond Street. Oh, this is back in 1934.

INTERVIEWER: Is this one of the reasons that the Italians banded together to form their own golf club, the Alpine?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I would have to say that the Alpine was put together because of that, yes, by a group of people that could not get into certain clubs, so they decided to form their own. It's an open charter and outsiders can come in. It is predominately Italian, but the charter is open to all. No discrimination. The Aurora Club on Broadway is an open charter and anyone can join.

INTERVIEWER: Do you go to a national church at all?

INTERVIEWEE: No. I am not too religious. As I was growing up my father was not too religious, but he was a good man. He treated everybody fine, and we got along fine. I am not too religious. I don't know what it is. I send my check every quarter, but I just don't show up.

INTERVIEWER: Did you marry outside your nationality? How does your wife relate to all things Italian?

INTERVIEWEE: Pretty good! Cooks Italian, all of our friends are Italian, and everything we do is Italian. It was kind of difficult in the beginning.
INTERVIEWER: Adjustments. Family, mostly. Seeing that I married an Irish girl, you know their feelings, against the Irish. And it was the other way also, the Irish against the Italians. So, my mother and father thought I was too good for her and her mother thought she was too good for this Italian boy. And, I have been married forty-five years.

INTERVIEWER: What Italian business ties do you enjoy in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I do business with this Nigreni firm, die makers, and really one of the top ones. They do some work for us and we import this hydraulic press from the Renzo Colombo Company in Milan. I do attend the fairs and the shows in Milan. I go to the show in Vicenza. I attend the art shows in Florence.

INTERVIEWER: When are these held?

INTERVIEWEE: They begin April 14th and it ends in Milan and Florence on May 8th, la fiera di Milane and la fiera dei artigianni. They attract thousands from all over the world. It is so difficult to get a hotel, in either Florence or Milane when the shows are on. Very difficult.

INTERVIEWER: Decade after decade Italian-American basic values remain the same. In talking with you, Mr. Salvadore, I gather that you have been
INTERVIEWER: most eloquent about preserving and urging on of these values. For this I, and future generations of Italian Americans will be forever grateful.
Mr. Salvadore's life was not an easy one as a second generation Italian. While his father was an idealist, and desired him to continue high school, young Andrew realized the importance of another pay check coming into the family of eight children. Therefore, he left school after completing junior high school to contribute.

He learned a trade and later formed his own company with two of his brothers. Today they are one of the largest suppliers of tools and dies. He faced many discriminations as an Italian-American with banks, in particular, Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank. There, he does business with Columbus National Bank founded by Italians.

Mr. Salvadore is very proud to be an Italian-American and has imbued his family with this feeling. He has sent his wife, children and grandchildren to Italy. He also has strong business ties with Italy, especially with Milano.

Andrew Salvadore talks about his Irish wife and the pain the marriage brought to his Italian parents. Her parents felt she degraded herself by marrying an Italian boy. However, they have been married forty-five years and both he and his wife, children and grandchildren are proud to be known as Italo-Americans.

While Mr. Salvadore had very little formal education, I would say he is a highly intelligent, self-educated and cosmopolitan man. He has had a "hands-on" education, and is now a self-made millionaire. While his wife is Irish, she speaks Italian and has now purchased a home in Fermia in Italy.
While it has been difficult being a second generation especially in business and also socially, Mr. Salvadore has had the strength to rise above it all and today he is a proud man, proud of his family and all of their accomplishments. Today, his eighty-nine year old mother is a bit senile, however he makes her feel like a queen when he visits her daily, respecting and loving her for all the sacrifices she made for eighth children.