3-1-1979

Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Angela Spirito by Cheryl Babiec

Angela Spirito

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COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Angela Spatrio (5)

INTERVIEWER: Cheryl Babiec

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 3/79

SUBJECTS COVERED

Traditions observed

Family

Community

Return to Italy

Federal Hill neighborhood
Oral History Interview
with
Angela Spirito
MARCH '79
Cranston Residence
by Cheryl Babiec

INTERVIEWEE: I'm Angela Spirito. (fourth generation)
INTERVIEWER: Disregarding your last name as something to identify with as being Italian, can you think of things that you would associate — that you would practice — or something within your family that helps you identify yourself as being Italian or of Italian descent?

INTERVIEWEE: Disregarding my last name ... being Italian...
INTERVIEWER: What are some of the things that your family does?

INTERVIEWEE: I would say we're very (definitely) religious. Ever since I was small, we would have to go to church. And I went a few weeks ago, I sort of was going through something and somebody stressed that I didn't go and ever since then I've been going and I feel better within myself. I can identify with another custom we have. On a Sunday we have a big Italian meal. Macaroni and the whole works. It's just not a Sunday if you don't have the macaroni meal.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of other things, maybe, that don't take place on a day to day basis, but at some particular times of the year that you identify with as being Italian oriented?
INTERVIEWEE: I would say on Saint Joseph's Day we usually have a celebration and we have a drink to Saint Joseph and have Italian pastries. And my father, usually at his place of business, celebrates this and his customers and anybody else are welcome to come to the store for a drink or a *galèto*-cream puff with a cherry on top.

INTERVIEWER: Is that supposed to be traditional?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. As a matter of fact we just had some a few weeks ago. I had brought some to work.

INTERVIEWER: Spread a bit of tradition around....

INTERVIEWEE: I don't know if this would be Italian, around Easter. Easter we usually do a lot of baking - rice pie is a biggie. I usually do a lot of baking - make sweet bread, rice pies.....

INTERVIEWER: Before your mother mentioned something about what you do on Christmas Eve.

INTERVIEWEE: On Christmas Eve it's usually a fish dinner. But since my grandfather passed away, we sort of cut down on that. But we still observe it.

INTERVIEWER: Is that something that's been passed along? Is it a traditional type of meal?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, yes. All types of fish.

INTERVIEWER: Is this something within your family or does it involve others as well?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes it does-cousins .......

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe your family? I had been under the notion that the typical Italian family was very orientated within the home - a very tight unit.

INTERVIEWEE: Extremely close.

INTERVIEWER: Is that being the family as the main focus?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they spoil their children.

INTERVIEWER: In what ways do they spoil their children?

INTERVIEWEE: They give their children everything. Buy them, I don't know if it's... but I have seen this in mostly Italian families, cars, expensive clothes,
INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that is? Do you have any idea? Do you think it may come from their efforts to compensate for what they didn't have?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. They give their kids the best – they really do.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the things that were, you feel, priorities set for you by your parents? For instance, they had wanted you to marry someone with an Italian background. Did they want to prep you with the basics in school and try to persuade you that family life is the type of thing you should pursue as opposed to the career route?

INTERVIEWEE: I would say it does. My father believes in education and never stressed that I should marry an Italian man. But he believes I should get a good education and find myself a good job.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any things that you can see, say, that your mother had practiced in regards to, for example, language or anything outside of language, that you yourself don't practice and probably wish you would in order to maintain some of those thing passed on from your grandparents – (great grandparents)?

INTERVIEWEE: Passed on to my mother?

INTERVIEWER: Something that's been upholding the Italian tradition or something that's been identified as being Italian within the family that you're now starting to lose?

INTERVIEWEE: Like we said before, we're a modern family. The Italian language isn't spoken in this house at all.

INTERVIEWER: When you say you're of a modern Italian family, how would you say you differ? Why would you label it as being modern? What is different from the old Italian family?

INTERVIEWEE: I think that in the old, the language would be spoken there. And being modern, it just isn't
spoken. I really don't know. Back to my grandparents, they lived in the same house, even in a tenement, it's different than living in this community. Even living in Providence, on the Hill, definitely old fashion people. The language is spoken more so there than around here. Around here there aren't any Italians. That has a lot to do with it.

INTERVIEWER: Location had an influence?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I think so. Yes. If I had all Italian neighbors surrounding me, I know it would be different.

INTERVIEWEE: Why would you say it would be different? Because you would be interacting with people who have something in common or that you can identify with?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. Like learning words that you didn't know about. And like a girl I work with, she's Italian, where she comes from they all talk Italian constantly. She lives on Charles Street. And that's strictly Italian there.

INTERVIEWER: Some of the people you had associated with in Providence, do you do so today?
INTERVIEWEE: I had been younger then. I've been here for seventeen years - I was a young girl - no. I don't keep in touch or see them anymore.

INTERVIEWER: Your friends now, are they mostly of Italian descent or even the people you come into contact with, maybe through church or school - are mostly of Italian descent?
INTERVIEWEE: No. Because my church is not an Italian parish either. I would say most of my friends are not Italian.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any other church ( aside from the one you go to) that is more Italian orientated?
INTERVIEWEE: Yes. Saint Ann's and Saint Mary's.

INTERVIEWER: Why had you chosen something different? Not predominantly Italian?
INTERVIEWEE: That's our area - because of location.

INTERVIEWER: Do you at any time have a desire to someday
INTERVIEWER:

go to Italy and maybe get a little bit of
cultural background that your mother probably
had more access to because she had lived with
her grandparents?

INTERVIEWEE:

Yes. I would someday like to take a trip to
Italy. Have any influence?

INTERVIEWER:

But it's not a strong desire?

INTERVIEWEE:

No. Just to see it.

INTERVIEWER:

You mother mentioned before that her grandparents
with whom she had lived with were very home
orientated, but she doesn't feel that heavily
influenced her. As her family now is very
independent, everyone goes their own way -
they're not home centered. They're more
individualistic. How will you approach your
family life? What are some of your projections
or goals?

INTERVIEWEE:

I somehow feel I had inherited my great grandmother's
characteristics somehow. I enjoy being home,
enjoy cleaning the house, cooking, sewing. I
would be very content. This would be my way
of living.

INTERVIEWER:

Why have you decided upon this way when here's
there's the career orientation?

INTERVIEWEE:

I'm saying this, I've gone to college, I've been
out in the world, I've been exposed to many
people and everything. I'm definitely not
liberated. This is the way I would be most
comfortable doing.

INTERVIEWER:

Some of the things... like, you said it wasn't
very important that you married a man of Italian
descent. Seeing you had been exposed to
different Italian customs, holidays, food
preparation, would you feel you would want to
maintain those things for your children? Even
though you may marry someone with a different
type of background.

INTERVIEWEE:

If they wanted it and enjoyed it. And also I
would try to practice his too.
INTERVIEWEE: Yes. The women around here are so modern probably wouldn't know what it is to bake or sew a dress. I'm the only one that would cut the grass, they all have gardeners. The women on Federal Hill - stay home, get fat, have babies.

INTERVIEWER: Is that something that's been carried over? That they're accustomed to?
INTERVIEWEE: I would say they're spoiled.
INTERVIEWER: They consider it to be spoiled doing housework?
INTERVIEWEE: Not going to work and staying home.
INTERVIEWER: They don't consider what they do a job? Or they don't think about it?
INTERVIEWEE: It varies.....