

Ethnic Group: Italian
Interview Number: 3
Date: Aug, 1993
Place: Toronto
Language of Interview:

Biographical Details

Sex: male
Age:
Place of Birth: Italy (Friuli region, northern Italy)
Marital Status: unmarried
Religion:
Education:
Occupation: retired letter carrier/ one of the founders of Fogolar Federation of Canada (Cultural Organization)
Children: none

COMMENTS: He works part-time (he has already retired) at the reception desk at a small fitness centre which is located in the basement of a retirement residence, built by Friulan-Canadians. I do aerobics at this location weekly. Prior to my interview with him our conversations were brief, and friendly. "Hello, How are you?" He asks me about work, school, and if I found a boyfriend yet...

I knew him prior to this. Two years ago, I was an associate member of a youth group run by this organization. On one particular occasion, he made a discriminatory comment regarding southern Italians. Since I was dating the person to which this comment was directed (He was part Friulan and part Calabrese) and I am of southern Italian (Calabria) origin, I was upset. I have never confronted him about it directly but through my being friendly and polite to him, I hoped to show him that Southern Italians were not as bad as he believed. I was also very curious as to how he would respond to some of my questions. I was pleased that his answers were not openly discriminatory but I was not surprised to hear him insinuate that he is first and foremost Friulano and secondly he would identify himself as Italian.

I conducted the interview at his reception desk. I arrived early on my aerobics day and we spoke. It was a slow period in the day so interruptions were few, nonetheless, there were some.

He has never been married (rare). He lived in Canada as the male head of his household (only his mother and sister came to Canada). We did not speak of why he did not get married (I hope to ask him about it when we have built up trust). I constantly complain to him that I don't have a man in my life, and he tells me not to worry, and that I will find the right person. I told him one day that I would remain single, and he discouraged it.

BACKGROUND:

I: You are involved with a cultural organization, what is it called, and what do you do?

R: Are you talking about the Famee Furlane or are you talking about The Fogolars in general? I'll explain what Fogolar is. It is a name for a Friuli (a region in northern Italy) Association. It is an association of Friulans outside of Friuli. It is a generic term. There is Fogolar Furlan of Calgary, the Fogolar here, the Famee Furlane [a very well organized social and cultural club]. But the word "Fogolar" itself means fireplace. [Hearth, perhaps, a place to reminisce about the old country].

I: Are you part of the international organization or the national one?

R: Not the international. I've been full-time with the Famee Furlane here. Then, for

different reasons we got involved in different activities, which involve other Fogolars, and we decided that I would be one of the ones who would start a Federation. Along with others, I was responsible for putting the Federation together.

I: When was this?

R: The federation was started in 1972. It took us two years to organize. We organized the Fogolars that were already in existence in Canada into a federation. We organized a newspaper called "La Cisilute." So since '81, I've been secretary of the Federation, until last October.

I: So your goal in the Federation was to unite existing Fogolars?

R: Yes, we were there to help do this, but there is also an umbrella organization in Friuli, like in most regions of Italy with large numbers of emigrants, they have an organization which looks after immigrants. Friuli Nell Mondo (Friuli Around The World) was the first of this type of organization. It was established 42 or 41 years ago. Therefore, being federated would help us communicate with this organization. And, so we can obtain better benefits, cultural help. [e.g. Friuli government sponsors summer courses, "Soggiorno," for youth whose parents were originally from Friuli...]. To protect our inheritance.

I: The organisation is geared towards the preservation of Furlan culture?

R: Yes, to preserve, to strengthen and to pass it on to the new generations. That is the main problem these days. When we started it (the federation) 20 years ago, the youth problem was not so acute as it is now.

I: Do you feel that over time there is a rapid loss of Furlan culture?

R: I don't know but you definitely can't expect the younger generation to feel the same way that the older generation feels. A lot of young people don't feel that they belong to a regional organization. They don't feel any particular ties. They feel Canadian and that is the extent of it. You cannot force them to be interested. But it seems that as a person grows older, 30, 35 years old, they rediscover the importance of this. We hope that, especially with our large numbers in Toronto, we still grow. This is one of the purposes of the Famee Furlane when it was established. It was established in 1932 when we had the Big Depression. The need at the time was to stick together and help each other. Naturally there were other regional groups in existence at the time but it seems that the Famee Furlane had better luck in surviving the war years. It was a mutual benefit society. They had regular meetings every month because of this [being a mutual benefit society] and they were entitled to some benefits [Government funds, mostly from the Italian government]. It was very important that they survived those years. A lot of people gave up everything because they were afraid of going to prison [Italians were on the Enemy Aliens List during the war].

If you study Friulan immigration all over the world you will find that they have always been, I don't want to say better organized, but they have been very organized, the world over. We have almost 200 Fogolars all over the world, even in Russia and China, in place that you would not expect. Maybe only one, but they are organized through Italy.

So, I think a factor in our favour is our language. We have our own language, and when we get together we have our own traditions. [This is one place where Furlan snobbery stands out. Every other region, according to them has Italian dialects - a crude form of Italian - they claim to have their own language, not a dialect.] We enjoy our time together, singing our folk songs.

I: In this way, do you find that you are different from Italians of other regions?

R: Well every region in Italy is different from another. In places like Toronto, the [Italian] community is too big. It is impossible to have an organization that could unite all Italians. But you go to small places across Canada. I've traveled across Canada to visit the Fogolars, most of those members are also members of the [Italian] community at large. In small places, it is easier to stick together. Here, it is a necessity to have organizations on a regional basis. You have more things in

common.

I: If somebody asked you "what do you identify yourself as?" what would you respond? Would you say "Italian" or "Furlan"...?

R: Well it's only natural that the first thing, you belong to a family, then to a small town, then to your area [region of Italy], then... It's where you feel most at home. If I went to Sicily, I would not feel at home, like a fish out of water. If I go just next door to Austria, I would feel more at home, although I don't understand the language, but I have more things in common with them, culturally.

I: Do you feel that there is a difference between an Italian family and a Furlan Family?

R: Again, you cannot say "the Italian family." Yes, we are all Italian because we like spaghetti, but we also like polenta [a popular Furlan food]. In some other places they like better pizza. It is hard to define. We are not a unique [homogeneous] population. We [Italians] have different origins. We have had a lot of invasions from the north in Friuli, and in the south they had different groups invade. We had a great variety of cultures in Italy. We have only one thing that combines us together and that is a language.

I: Who would make the ideal mate for a Furlan youth? Another Furlan? An Italian?

R: To preserve culture, maybe the marriage of two Furlans is good, but you have to be culturally minded first of all, in order to appreciate your culture. I've seen families where a Furlan married ...