

Ethnic Group: Italian
Interview Number: 7
Date: Aug 19, 1993
Place: Toronto
Language of Interview: Italian

Biographical Details (Respondent)

Sex: male
Age: early 60s
Place of Birth: Lazio region, Italy
Marital Status: married
Religion:
Education: elementary
Occupation: Bricklayer
Children: three daughters

Biographical Details (Spouse)

Sex: female
Age: early 60s
Place of Birth: Lazio region, Italy
Marital Status: married
Religion:
Education: elementary
Occupation:
Children: three daughters

COMMENTS: The interview was set up by my grandmother. They are her neighbours (live two doors down the street). I went to their home. We sat in a dining room that seemed to seldom get used. It was bare compared to the hallway and their living room, which were full of pictures of their children and grandchildren in various stages of play, having their first communion, or graduating from some level of schooling. This couple seemed formal and colder than the others at first, as did their dining room. Later, he appeared to relax while she continued to seem uptight. She really did not relax until we got up to see some pictures of their grandchildren which were on and over the fire place in their solarium/living room, away from the tape recorder. They offered me some juice or coffee near the end of the interview. I noticed that most of the people I interviewed waited about 45 minutes before offering me coffee or a drink, none the less, they all offered. It seemed like the people I interviewed ask me if I would like something to drink at a point where they felt most comfortable with me, (which was often when we talked about their children). At that point, I know I cannot refuse their offer of coffee or juice. If I refuse the coffee or juice, it is as though I am saying "let's just get on with the interview." Instead, by accepting, I turn off the tape recorded, and everyone relaxes. This was usually the point when they began to ask me questions. I always answered. At that point everyone present seemed comfortable, including me.

I. BACKGROUND

I: When did you first come to Canada?

R: 1956

I: The both of you came at the same time?

R: Yes, yes we came together. We were married in Italy and we brought our daughter with us. The other two were born here.

I: How old was your daughter when you came here?

R: 18 months?

S: No, 2 months.

I: Place of origin?

R: From Lazio, near Rome.

I: Did you migrate directly to Toronto?

R: No we lived in Windsor first. For two years. Then when there was absolutely no work around, we moved to Toronto, in 1958.

I: What did you do in Windsor?

R: I was a bricklayer. When I came to Toronto I worked in a factory. I worked there for 32 years. I repaired machines and did the general maintenance work.

I: What did you do before you came to Canada?

R: I was a bricklayer.

I (turning to the wife): And you?

Both answered at the same time: The farm.

I: Did you work in Canada?

S: Yes. I worked in a factory. But once the grandchildren came, I looked after them. I have not worked for 15 years now.

R: When you retire it is nice to have the young one's around. It helps the day go by.

I: Did you have any relatives here in Canada?

R: Her father.

I: How long before you did he arrive?

R: Two years.

I: Did you leave behind many relatives in Italy?

R: I did.

S: No. Well, uncles and aunt.

R: I left my parents.

I: Are they all still in Italy?

R: One of my brothers is in Venezuela. Another brother is here, and another is in Italy. We are all over the world.

I: How much contact do you have with other Italians? Non-Italians?

R: Yes, I have many Italian friends and some English friends [non-Italian]. But for me, Italians are easier to communicate with. We speak the same language. I hope it continues and you young people keep the language alive, and keep speaking Italian. You speak it very well. I like to speak Italian. I'm afraid that I speak it less and less often so I forget it. I noticed that all Italians here try to speak Italian and get their Italian citizenship. Like with my children. They got Italian citizenship. Dual citizenship anyway. You just never know, with the way things are going there and here. It is always good to have. The bureaucracy there is really bad though. To get documents from there, like birth certificates to use here, it is very difficult, especially if you don't have relatives there.

S: Even if you call the City Hall there directly, it takes so long. Life there is so laid back and relaxed.

R: Especially those who work in offices. I found that many young Italians do not want to move here today because of the rapid pace of our lives. It was different when we came to Canada, but today, life in Italy is better than it is here. What I like about Italy today is that they speak perfect Italian everywhere. The dialects don't alienate people of different regions. It's all united in one language.

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE:

I: When did you get married?

R: 1952

I: How old were you at the time?

R: I was 22. She was 19. (She started laughing, embarrassed.)

S: Young, eh?

R: I noticed that today, everyone gets married after the age of 25, especially the man. But even for women. It depends on how much education they have. Like you. It is better to stay in school than to marry young. First you have to think about school, because what is happening now is that people go to school to get good jobs, and then they find a husband. If you like school, the best thing is to stay in school. It is better to wait and find somebody you care for than to get married and find that you do not get along. Then you get divorced, and that is worse, especially if there are children involved.

S: The children suffer more than the parents.

I: How well did you know each other when you got married?

R: Us, know each other? We lived in the same area, we were neighbours, maybe 500 meters apart (laughter). Today it is very different, people travel. Back then, we did not have the means of transportation that we have today. You young people have cars. Whoever had a bike was lucky in our days.

S: Now you have fax, too.

I: How much education did you have before married?

R: I went to the fifth grade [end of elementary school]. Her too. But by the third grade we studied history and other stuff. You barely do that in high school here. It was very different back then.

I: Is your marriage like that of your parents? How?

S: It was just like theirs. We had a reception in our home.

R: We had a big meal but only with the family. Not like today. It's too much.

I: Would your marriage be different if you still lived in Italy?

R: No, I don't think so. For us there would not be much of a difference. For the youth of today, they may find that there would be a difference.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Do you have children?

R: We have three daughters. Two born here and one in Italy.

I: Are your children married?

R: Yes all of them.

I: How many guests did they have at their weddings?

S: Many. The weddings were beautiful. Today the weddings are a little smaller.

R: They are too expensive today.

S: My daughter, the last to get married, told me that she did not want to invite people that she did not know [like "paesani," people from the same town in Italy]. But I told her that they are people who invited us to their weddings so we don't want to act snobby and not invite them.

R: Long ago, we used to invite "friends" (he said this in English) who we worked with. That's what we did at my first daughter's wedding. With the last one, we cut out a few people.

I: How old were your children when they got married?

S: The first daughter was 18 years old. The second daughter was 21. And the third

daughter was 22.

I: How many grandchildren do you have?

Both answer at the same time: Seven.

S: Our first daughter had two boys and a girl. The second has two boys and the third had two boys. The oldest is 19.

I: What are the main things you want for your children?

R: Good health first of all.

S: Peace.

R: Peace in their family. And a job. That would be good. And that they learn Italian. And that they go back to visit Italy some day.

I: Have they ever visited Italy?

R: Oh, yes.

I: Do your grandchildren speak Italian?

Both answered together: Not really.

S: The first few grandchildren, my eldest daughter's children, speak a great deal more Italian than the others. The others understand us but they do not speak Italian.

R: After they start going to school they speak English all the time.

I: Do your children follow traditional Italian customs?

R: They speak Italian, and cook Italian food, almost, not exactly, but almost like us. Each generation seems to hold onto less and less.

I: How would you feel if your grandchildren marry somebody who is not Italian?

S: They have to like the person. But it would be easier for us to communicate with Italians.

R: Long ago, it was more important that kids married Italians but now a days, they have to get along. If they marry Italians they still may not get along. As long as the person is not black.

I: Did your daughters marry Italian men?

Both answer together: Yes.

R: The oldest married somebody from the same region as us [Lazio], the second married a man from Calabria, and the third married a guy from Sicily.

IV. RELATION TO PARENTS

I: Are your parents living?

S: Mine are alive.

R: Mine are dead.

I: Where do they live?

S: Here.

I: In your home?

S: No, here in Toronto.

I: Do you see them often?

R: We just came from their place.

S: We see them every day. They live on a few blocks away from our home.

I: I interviewed somebody from the Famee Furlane, they have a retirement residence there.

R: Yes, that's the one on Islington. It's a nice place but the old folks have done a lot for us. We have done a great deal for our children. I hope that our children realize how much we have done.

I: Are you obligated to take care of your parents in old age? Do you expect to be taken care of by your children in your old age?
[no answer]

V. RELATIONS TO OTHER RELATIVES

I: Do you have other relatives in Toronto? How often do you see them?

Both answer at the same time: Often.

R: My brother lives in Toronto, and we have nieces and nephews here.

S: Cousins too.

R: We see each other often. We live in the same general area.

S: My sisters live in this area.

R: My brother does not. He lives in Downsview. Others in Woodbridge and Etobicoke. We are all over Toronto. We used to see each other often, but as the family grows [more grandchildren], people see each other less often. We see each other but not like before. Life changes. Kids get married, grandchildren come.

VI. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ETHNIC GROUP NORMS

I: What do you feel is the most important thing to the Italian family? S (jumps in with a quick answer, no hesitation): To stay united.

R: Yes, to stay united. To have a good family, with good health. If you have your health then you could go to work. For those who like to go to work. There are those who do not like to work.

S: You need "L'accordo." [Meaning: You need to get along well with one another.]

R: Having a lot of money without having "l'accordo" means nothing. An old Italian man said, "you can buy everything but you can't buy good health".

I: How many children would the ideal Italian family have?

S: Two girls and two boys, that would be perfect. The girl would have the company of a sister and the boy would have company of a brother.

R: Two. Three is almost too much, especially with today's economy. Long ago, people had even ten children. By today that is difficult.

R: Say you have a daughter, it is nice for her to have another girl to get advice from, instead of asking a brother.

R: But after they get married the relationship can change. It also depends on whom they marry. Troubles come when brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws don't get along. If there is "l'accordo" [agreement] between the two families [in-laws], everything is better. It is nice to spend Christmas and Easter with the whole family, even after they get married. Even Saturdays and Sundays can be spent together, on picnics. The kids can play together.

S: The most important thing is that we are united.

R: When a family does things together from when the children are young, this continues into adulthood. As long as siblings don't hate each other or are jealous of each other. I don't have any sons.

I: What do parents expect from children?

R: For them to get along, and not be jealous of each other.

I: What do children expect from parents?

R: They expect to be treated equally. All one's children are the same. If we have something, we give them each a part of it. In our region of Italy, thirty or forty years ago, the male child usually inherited the parent's home. Now, even in Italy, they don't really go by that rule. Let's face it, some people used to put aside a lot of things for their daughters when they got married. It used to be very common. There are good points and bad points to this. If we buy our daughter something for when she gets married but she doesn't get married for 15 or 20 years, things change. Things go out of style, take dishes for example. We may buy white ones for her. She

may eventually come up to us and say, "I wanted coloured ones." Then they are lost.

S: We bought our daughters things which would not change; sheets bedspreads.

R: But what ended up happening?

S: Well, yes, when it came time to give those things to my daughters, they said, "I don't like this, you keep it mom."

R: So we had new linens. We are stuck on old ideas. But when you become a mother, you may do the same thing.

S: It's just too much to buy at the last minute. It gets too expensive to buy that stuff all at once.

R: You'll see when you are a mother. Now, I'm sure when you go out, your mother says "be careful," and you say to her, "don't worry, mom." But, when you become a mother, you will say the same things to your daughter. A mother always fears the worst. With the way things are today, you go to school, you young people. You have to watch out for the type of people you associate with. There are drugs out there. It is just too much. Things are really changing. When we first came to Canada, a person could sleep outside, now you have to lock yourself in.

I: Were did you live when you first moved to Toronto?

R: In York. We did not move very far. We lived there for 10 years and we have been in this home for 26 years. We had relatives in the area.

I: Were there many Italians in Windsor?

R: Well, it was and still is a little place. The Italian community there is more united. But everyone was closer there, all races. Here it is more business-like. Everyone here is concerned about work and money. There, in Windsor, people bought a home, and did not worry about moving out of that one, into a bigger one. Here, the more you have, the more you want. You have to worry about what other people have, and try to out-do them. Even the weddings. The weddings are so different when you compare here and Windsor. They are smaller and friendly. Maybe when you get married you will move to a small place like that. It costs less to live there, and the pay is the same. My youngest daughter used to live in Oakville. She paid less for a lot of things, even car insurance. [She is now in New Jersey for a year. Her husband got transferred there. "We miss her, and hope she will move back, but we head down there every two to three months to see our grandchildren."]

S: But I like this area [Etobicoke].

R: We've spent a lifetime here [26 years].

S: There are many Italians in this area.

I: Do you think that you will ever go back to Italy? When was the last time you've been there?

R: Just for a "stroll." [visit] We were there last year. To visit relatives. Every four or five years you need to "stroll" over there. I would not live there. I would like to, but my family is here. The children and the grandchildren. If you go there for a visit, you will like it there, but if you got there to settle down, you will find that you will not like it. Many Italians moved back after immigrating to Canada, but they came back to Canada. I have spent 25 years of my life in Italy and 36 years here. I like Italy but my family is here.

I: What do you identify yourself as? (Italian? Canadian?)

R: Personally, I would say that I am Italian. Sure, I live in Canada but I am Italian. My children may think differently. They would probably tell you that they are Canadian-Italians.

S: Me too.

R: My daughters who were born here still wanted to get dual citizenship. Like me.

I: What do you think that the Italian family will be like in the future? Will there be an Italian family?

S: It seems like the Italian youth continue to speak Italian.

R: I think that things will improve. Ten, twenty years ago, there were fewer Italians. Look at what happened in 1982 when Italy won the soccer game. At the same time,

there are many young Italians who are entering politics. They seem to be keeping Italian culture alive, and I hope that they do.