

Ethnic Group: Italian
Interview Number: 8
Date: Aug 25, 1993
Place: Toronto
Language of Interview: Italian

Biographical Details

Sex: female
Age: 54
Place of Birth: Italy
Marital Status: widowed
Religion:
Education: elementary
Occupation: unwaged, "worked at home"
Children: two sons, one daughter

COMMENTS:

My grandmother set up this interview. The respondent (a widow) is one of my grandmother's friends who live in my general area. The interview was conducted in her home, in her kitchen (which was spotless). Also in attendance was her daughter, her eldest child. Her daughter sat through the interview adding points here and there, but the respondent did most of the talking. When I arrived, I was escorted into the kitchen. One of her sons was making himself a sandwich. We exchanged "hello's" and he left the room with his sandwich. Her daughter then entered the kitchen. We each sat down (she, her daughter and I). The interview went smoothly. I discovered that her sons and I went to the same high school. They were one grade ahead of me. (She has two sons at the same educational level because they are only one year apart and one skipped a grade in elementary school. He is now in Law school. He was the one making himself a sandwich). Her daughter and I found that we had many mutual friends. (She is a high school teacher.) They offered me a coffee and ice cream (a very typical Southern Italian custom. They also happen to be from a town only kilometers away from my home town in Italy). The respondent left to watch an Italian TV show after the interview was over, but her daughter and I sat drinking our espresso and chatted. The son joined us for an espresso in the kitchen. He and I finally recognized each other as fellow students of the same high school. "You looked familiar to me when you walked in," he said to me. We chatted. He then left his sister and I to look through some photographs and talk. The respondent joined us again at the end of our conversation.

I. BACKGROUND:

I: When did you first come to Canada?

R: In 1965.

I: Place of origin?

R: Calabria (region in southern Italy)

I: Where did the family settle?

R: We came directly to Toronto by airplane. I got married in Italy but after 10 months I left, and came to here with my husband. I was pregnant at the time because after a month here I had my first child. I got here on August 8 and my daughter was born on the 7th of September.

I: What did the family do in Canada?

R: I worked at home my whole life. I have never worked outside the home.

I: How many relatives in Canada?

R: I had two brother-in-laws here before we came. My husband was in Canada since

1956. Then he went back to Italy in 1964. He went back, we met, got married and moved here.

I: How many relatives abroad? Still keep contact?

R: I only have two brothers in Italy. My sister moved to Australia. One brother is in Australia and one brother is here. He came to Canada after I did. We write to each other and call each other every once in a while, at Easter and Christmas, or if there is anything we have to tell each other.

I: How much contact do you have with other Italians? Non-Italians? R: Most of my friends are Italian, but I have a few English friends too [non-Italian].

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE

I: When did you get married?

R: I got married on September 27, 1964. And in August 1965 I moved to Canada.

I: How old were you at the time?

R: I was 25 years old and my husband was 30.

I: Did your parents get married at approximately that age too?

R: Actually, my mother was younger when she got married, and my father too. The generation before me used to get married at a younger age. But then, by my generation, people got married when they were a little older.

I: At what age do you feel that your children will get married?

R: I think that they will be even older than me. [Her daughter is 27 years old and not married.] It's better to wait and find a good one. And I hope God gives you the good fortune and good health, so that you can marry the right guy.

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

R: We did not know each other before 1964. He was from a different town. We met, got married and moved to Canada in one year.

I: How much education did you have before married?

R: I finished grade 5 [end of elementary school]. That was very common in Italy. My town did not have a high school so our parents did not send us. My husband's town had a high school. Parents did not allow their female daughters to travel outside of town to go to school. Sons may have gone to high school. In my family, there were 8 children, six boys and two girls. My oldest brother is a doctor, the youngest is an engineer. The other four boys in the middle are all hairdressers. The women stayed home. Some families were different but our family did not allow us to further our education. Now in Italy, everyone goes to school, women, men, everyone.

I: What was your occupation before marriage? After marriage?

R: I did not work before I got married. It was not common in our town for a woman to work outside the home.

I: What was your spouse's occupation before marriage? After marriage?

R: He had a body shop here in Canada. We still own the body shop but he passed away.

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

R: It was a little different than my parents' wedding. Long ago, they invited fewer people. They would have the wedding reception in their home or in the garden. When I got married we had the reception at the "Mira Mare," [a hotel located on the beach. The hotel is in a different town, neither her hometown nor his]. We held the reception at the restaurant. I invited 400 people [exceptionally large]. But we were

from two different towns. When the couple comes from the same town they have many mutual friends [at times many of the same distant relatives too]. Since I came from one town and my husband from another, we ended up with 400 guests.

I: How did you meet your husband if you were from different towns? R: When he came to Italy, his mother wanted him to get married. He was 30 years old, you know. She wanted him to get married because she felt that if he returned to Canada without getting married, he would never return to Italy. They wanted their son to become "sistimato" [settled, with a job, wife...]. My in-laws were very well off. They wanted him to get married so that he would settle down in the town with his parents. So, he looked around for a girl friend. When a man came from Canada, everyone wanted him to marry their daughters. They would say, "This one is good for you." He looked and he looked but he was not interested in anyone. Then, one night, you know how every town has a big feast day for their patron Saint [like a country fair with food, fun, fireworks, booths...], well, my town was celebrating. His friends convinced him to come to our town to look for a girl friend. [These used to be one of the only events where young women were allowed in the piazzas at night, without criticism. The entire town attended these events, so it is a great opportunity to meet potential spouses]. That's where he saw me.

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

R: I really don't know. It would have been a different life because there is a different type of lifestyle. I don't think that we would have done badly there either. I would have lived well there too.

I: Are Italian marriages today like yours?

R: I don't think so (laughter). When I got married it was done for love. Now, people get married but there is no order in the marriage. After many years of dating today. I "dated" my husband for six months. Well, not actually dated. We just saw each other from afar most of the time. But within six months we were ready for the wedding. Now people date for years and years and years, maybe even ten years, but they end up getting divorces.

I: How do you feel about divorce? Under what circumstances is it acceptable? Do you know any people who are divorced?

R: To tell you the truth, I do not favour divorces. I do not like divorce but if two people really don't get along. If you can avoid it, it is better. If there is absolutely not love, they should divorce, but if there is even a bit of love left in the marriage, they should stay together.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Do you have children? What are their names and how old are they? R: I have three children, a girl and two boys. The first, my daughter is 27 (she was sitting with us). One son is 25, and the other is 24.

I: Are any of your children married?

R: No, none.

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

R: I wish them many good things: To have a good life, and everything good, which they need. I want everything for them.

I: Do your children speak Italian?

R: Yes, they speak Italian, mostly our dialect. My daughter speaks Italian very well. She is an Italian teacher in high school.

I: Do your children follow traditional Italian customs?

R: Oh, yes.

I (turning to the daughter): Do you think this will continue after you move out?

Daughter: I think it all depends on who I marry, and if that person is interested in continuing the culture.

Respondent interrupted: I hope they marry Italians, then they will more likely keep their culture (she laughs).

I: How would you feel if your children married a non-Italian?

R: Well, I have to be satisfied with that. I have to accept that. There are good and bad people of every race. It depends on the family and their values.

IV. RELATION TO PARENTS

I: Are your parents living?

R: Both my parents are dead.

V. RELATIONS TO OTHER RELATIVES

I: You have a brother in Toronto? How often do you see him?

R: Very often.

VI. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ETHNIC GROUP NORMS

I: What is the most important thing to the Italian family?

R: Unity. To be united. In our hearts we have to stay united.

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

R: To tell you the truth, in my opinion, four is perfect. Two boys and two girls would make me happy, but I have three. But one more daughter would have been good. Four would have made me happy.

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

R: No. If my children moved there, I would go too because I want to live among my children. But I think that my children will stay here. If my children move to Italy, I would go too, where they go, I go. The last time I visited Italy was in '89. My parents were alive then, so I visited more often. Now it does not appeal to me as much. We used to take the family often. When my husband was alive, we returned every two to three years. He died in '84. I went back in '87 when my mother died and in '89 when my father died. To be honest with you, I don't have a desire to visit any more.

[I asked the daughter if she would visit her mother's home town.]

Daughter: I would go there to visit. I've been with friends to see the culture but to live there, no. I have a job here. [It was common for families to go to Italy for a month or two. The children often found this boring, especially if they just stayed in town.]

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

R: To tell you the truth, I feel Italian, but I am Canadian too. I like to say that I am Canadian, too.

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

R: I hope that there will be but I do not know. Today's youth are not as attached to Italian tradition but some parents are not either. I just don't know. In the home, children should speak Italian because outside the home it is rare to speak to somebody in Italian. If they speak it at home at least they retain some of the

language. By me talking to my children in Italian it is always a second language for them and knowing another language is good.