

Ethnic Group: Italian
Interview Number: 9
Date: Sept 1, 1993
Place: Toronto
Language of Interview: Italian

Biographical Details
Sex: female
Age: 59
Place of Birth: Italy
Marital Status: married
Religion:
Education: elementary
Occupation: candy factory worker
Children: two sons

COMMENTS:

The respondent lives on the same street as my grandmother. It must come as no surprise then, that my grandmother arranged the interview. My grandmother told her about the project and she volunteered to be interviewed. I interviewed her in her home. She had just finished preserving tomatoes in jars for making sauce in the winter (a very common thing for Italians to do). She was boiling the jarred tomatoes when I went to her home (from time to time, throughout the interview, we stopped so she could go check on them in her basement kitchen). The interview was conducted in her upstairs kitchen, which seemed to be rarely used. We sat at a glass table facing each other. She seemed like a busy woman, apron on, always on the go. I mentioned that if it was a bad time, I could come back another day. She said that this was her day off, one of her slow days, so it was the best time to speak. On most days, she had to work all day outside the home, and then come home and cook dinner for her family, and clean the house. She was very friendly and motherly.

I. BACKGROUND:

I: When did you first come to Canada?

R: I came in 1963. With my family. I think it was March, no, April. I came with my husband and two sons. One was 5-1/2, and the other was 18 months old. I came with my whole family because my sister "called" us over [sponsored].

I: City of origin?

R: I am from a small town near Cassino [near Rome], 18 km from Cassino. We used to shop in Cassino. Cassino was destroyed by the war, you know? Now it has been rebuilt. I was 8 years old during the war. I remember it a bit. It's a beautiful place, in the mountains.

I: Where did family settle?

R: We stopped in Halifax because we came by ship but then we came to Toronto. We lived with my sister. We then moved to the Oakwood area. There were many Italians in that area. And we moved to this house in 1977. My sister lived in Canada since 1958. Her husband came here in 1954. I planned to come here in 1959 but immigration was closed for 6 years so I had to wait. When immigration opened again, I came right away.

I: What did you do before coming to Canada?

R: I was a housewife. Then my husband started working at the post office in town, so I helped him deliver telegrams and registered mail. Then I had a child, so, you know. My husband worked at the post office for 8 years before we came here. He was actually trained as a carpenter in Italy. So, once in Canada, he worked as a

carpenter. He still is a carpenter. He really liked working in the post office but he was thinking of the children when we decided to come here. In Italy, in those days it was difficult to find work. You had to pay someone to give you a job. So, for our children's future, we came to Canada. For two years after my mother-in-law came to Canada I did not work. She came in 1963, so in 1965 I started to work. And I have worked in the same place ever since. I have worked in the same candy factory since 1965.

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

R: To tell you the truth, I work with English [not Italian speaking] people. I like Italians too, but I like everybody. I communicate better with Italians. I did not go to school to learn English, so it is harder for me to communicate, but I like everybody. At the same time, I like to promote the Italian language, and keep my culture alive. Because I work with English-speaking people, I have to speak it more often, but my husband works with Italians so he rarely speaks English. He really is embarrassed to speak English in public. He hates making mistakes. When the phone rings and somebody speaks to him in English he calls me over to translate for him. He understands it but he hates to speak it. I don't mind making mistakes in front of people as long as they understand me. Men are shy, I suppose. They may also hate to look ignorant. He could try, but he works with Italians all day, so he is not confident enough to speak it. They understand it though. They just don't want to try.

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE:

I: When did you get married?

R: I got married in 1956.

I: How old were you at the time?

R: I was 22 and my husband, well, I was born in 1934 and he was born in 1932. We got married young. He was 24.

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

R: We had known each other for 4 or 5 years before we got married. We are from the same town.

I: How much education did you have before married?

R: I finished grade 5 [end of elementary school]. If we wanted to go on, we would have to study outside our town, and who would have given us the money to do that? They also did not allow young women to leave the town to study. Elementary school in Italy is very difficult, and they punished us severely. It's not like that here. It was tough back then. Here you can't even touch a student, but in those days they would strap us. But at least a child would learn. My husband finished elementary school, but he continued in a different town. He had a little more schooling so he can learn his trade [carpenter].

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

R: Oh yes, he worked as a carpenter in a large company in Cassino [neighbouring town]. He always worked in Cassino. After we got married he changed jobs. His younger brother, who worked in the post office, got transferred to a post office near at the beach. When this happened, my husband's younger brother came to our house to see if my husband wanted to take his old job. He took it. He worked at the post office for eight years until we came to Canada. But wages were really low in Italy. That is why we came here. At least here they got a good education, but there, I don't know. Now-a-days, it is difficult here too. At least here there are some good economic periods. In Italy they continue to struggle to find work. To be honest with you, I really did not want to come to Canada. My mother still lived in Italy. But I thought about it, with two little kids, what could we do. My husband told me that we just had to immigrate. We really had to. So, my sister "called" us over.

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

R: Receptions were all done in the home, but it was beautiful and small. The town was small, but in those days there was little money around. After the war things were difficult, and my husband had just started to work at that point. I had bridesmaids too [rare in Italy]. It was nice.

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

R: Well no, for all of us who got married in those days... Well, you know how husbands are... We put up with a lot [as women]. The youth [young women] would not put up with that today. They get divorces. To be honest with you, I never had problems, not here and not in Italy. He is a good person, he likes to work. Everything we accomplished we did it together, like I'm sure happened with your parents, and basically all immigrants. Italian men are tough. The women are more passive, so that we can keep peace in the home. Even when something is wrong, you have to say yes. Italians are like that. A lot of times they share an opinion but other times one sees things one way and the other sees things differently. But they are not serious problems. Sometimes even if you are sure that they are wrong, they still insist that they are right. I just say, "okay, okay." What am I to do, start a war? As long as they are not serious things, we can get through it (she laughed).

I: Are Italian marriages today like yours?

R: They are not very different. Some things have changed. They are flashier today. There is more money around. But they are not very different from mine. All the weddings that I have been to appear to the same as mine but after the ceremony, you really don't know what happens between the two. But there are many that keep up the family traditions. I was at a wedding on Saturday, it was just like the way it was in Italy. The food and music was Italian. The older generation likes to see that. It was really nice. We were about 310 people. The mother of the bride and I worked together for 25 years. We are three Italian friends at work, our other friends are Greek. The three of us have never argued once. We are close. And it was a nice wedding. A few years back weddings involved 400 and 500 people, but not any more. Now you invite your most intimate friends and relatives [250 or 300 of them]. This woman from work invited me because she had few friends from her hometown. The groom's side was bigger so they agreed that a few of the bride's mother's friends and a few of the bride's father's friends would be invited. When the bride and groom are from the same home town, there tends to be a smaller wedding but if they are from two different towns, the wedding is big. Today, inviting guests from the same hometown is not as common, so 300 are the average size wedding. It is too expensive. It costs \$100 per plate. It's too much.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Do you have children? How old are they?

R: I have two sons. One is 35 and then other is 31. My oldest is an engineer. My youngest studied business.

I: Are they married?

R: No, they are not married. I would like them to get married (she laughed). They date people but just can't decide. They say that they are too young. Look, my son, the oldest, and the young one too, they have been to so many of their friends' weddings. I know all their friends, too, because they are all Italian.