

# Florida Atlantic University

## Italian American Oral History Archive

<b>Interviewee(s):</b> Edmondo Catania and Angie Catania	<b>Interviewer(s):</b> Domenica Diraviam
<b>Place:</b> Boca Raton, FL	<b>Length of recording:</b> 58:49

**Date of interview:** February 18, 2019

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**Name:** Edmondo Catania

**Place and Date of Birth:** South Philadelphia, PA, 09/23/1944

**Generation:** 2

**Family Origin:**

- Paternal = Naso, Sicily, Italy
- Maternal = Capo d'Orlando, Sicily, Italy

**Spoken Languages:**

- English
- Proficient in Italian (understands some Sicilian dialect and communicates at an advanced novice level in standard Italian)

**Relocation to Florida:** 2012

<b>Time Count in Minutes</b>	<b>Description of Interview Content</b>
0:07	Beginning of interview with Edmondo Catania
0:56 - 3:00	Grandparents settling in Philadelphia and description of the old neighborhood
3:30 – 5:00	World War II and parents' newlywedded life
5:00 – 6:45	Memories of food and festas in Philadelphia, anecdote about grandfather's bakery
7:00 – 8:20	Grandfather's funeral and father's commitment to Ed's future
8:30 – 10:40	Ancestral property in Sicily and Ed's first trip to Italy at which time he met his relatives who had not emigrated
10:40 – 11:40	Memories associated with food and navigating the language during the trip to Sicily
11:50 – 14:30	Piecing together family history through Zio Giovanni's stories and property ownership
14:30 – 15:00	Cultural distinctions between maternal and paternal hometowns in Sicily
15:00 – 16:00	Hosting a dinner and delivering a speech of appreciation to the relatives in Sicily
16:00 – 18:00	Parents visit to Sicily regarding the land and the continued pursuit of claiming the ancestral property
18:00 – 22:00	Talks about identifying as Italian growing up in Philadelphia and throughout life, compared to the ethnic identity of his sister, cousins, and next generation
22:00 – 26:00	Memories of his father including: his father's letters from when he was in the service, the dedication Ed gave at his parents' 50 <sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, wartime stories he associated with his father.
26:00 – 29:00	Ed's professional life, marriage and family life
29:00 – 30:00	Use of Italian, English, and dialect in different settings
30:00 – 32:45	Family professions: baker, tailor, steam fitter, military serviceman; involvement in racketeering

33:00 – 34:00	Taking in paternal grandmother and resulting rift in family relationship
34:00 – 35:00	Current generation's association with Italian ethnicity
35:20 – 37:30	Career and travel
37:50 – 40:20	Involvement with the Sons of Italy in Boston area and his mentors that led him to become involved in Italian American radio.
40:30 – 46:30	Moving to Florida and becoming associated with Sons of Italy in Boca Raton, assuming positions on the board, and becoming involved in philanthropy to grow the organization
46:30 – 51:30	Favorite Italian memory of being reunited with the relatives in Sicily for the first time and learning that he had another cousin in Massachusetts and Sicily as his paradise
51:30 – 52:40	Angie adds her memories of the affectionate mannerisms of Ed's aunts.
52:30 – 54:00	Descriptions of photographs and artifacts
54:00 – 56:50	Story of working in the orchards with Zio Giovanni, cousin Dario visiting the U.S. during 911, and Ed and Angie meeting cousins in Argentina.
56:50 – 58:40	Continues to describe the photographs and artifacts and results of DNA testing.
58:47	End of interview.

**Key words:**

Italian Americans; Sons of Italy; World War II; Sicily; Capo d'Orlando; Naso; Army; Navy; South Philadelphia; Bakery; Tradition; Ethnic; Microhistory; Family; Marriage; Italian Language; Repatriation; Citizenship; Boca Raton; Food; Farming; Immigration

## **List of the Italian Expressions and Traditions Mentioned in the Interview:**

Festas (referring to street festivals in Italian American enclaves)

Agnello (means “lamb”, Ed intended to say “anello”)

Anello (means “ring”)

Zingaro (means “gypsy”, Ed intended to say “zanzare”)

Zanzare (mosquitos)

Cittadini (means “citizens”)

Contadini (means “farmers”)

Lardo (means “fatback”)

Prosecco (bubbly wine)

Prosciutto (dry-cured ham)

Liquore (means “liquor”)

Bocce (lawn ball sport related to British bowls and French pétanque)

Morra (hand game that dates to ancient Roman and Greek times)

Porchetta (fatty and moist boneless pork roast)

Quanti quante volte in Italia? (means “How many times in Italy?”)

Prima volta in Italia? (means “First time in Italy?”)

Edmondo, come stai? Quanti anni? (means “Edmondo, how are you?  
How many years [has it been]?”)

# Oral History Interview

Edited Transcript

Interviewee: Edmondo Catania (EC)

Interviewer: Domenica Diraviam (DD)

Interviewee (2): Angie Catania (Edmondo's wife) (AC)

Date: February 19, 2019

Place: Boca Raton, FL

Transcriber: Domenica Diraviam

This is an oral history of Edmondo Catania. It is being conducted on February 19, 2019 at his home in Boca Raton, Florida. It concerns his family history as Sicilian immigrants in Philadelphia and his current sense of identity within the Italian American community.

DD: Can you please start off telling me about your parents and your family that immigrated to the United States?

EC: I can. My grandfather on my father's side came first, came two times, 1919 and 1924. My mother's family came over, my grandfather came over, in 1924 to seek a better life, and then went back and got my family a few years ago. He started the bakery shop, you know, all kinds of breads and pastries and things like that.

And um, and we lived in South Philadelphia, and we lived in an all Italian community. South Philly, we lived with people like Bobby Ridel and Frankie Avalon were all in the neighborhood at the time, unknown people so it was a real a real fun place to be. Pat's Steakhouse, I don't know if you ever heard of that, where they served steaks right around the corner, always smelling it. And the smells of Italian food was always going on.

So, we lived there for a number of years and then my father decided to move out of the three story bakery and we went to Springfield in the suburbs of Springfield County where he could be closer to his work [.] He was a hard working riveter and worked two jobs doing that, working baking pizzas three days, three nights a week and he worked with my grandfather in the bakery on weekends so we hardly saw him and that was always a problem for me. I didn't have a father really, but he was working. He was working to make money and keep us going and provide for us and make us all go to college. We didn't want for anything.

So, and my mother she was a stay at home mom and she uh, she grew up in a little town in a little house in South Philadelphia on the same block as Mario Lanza. So, that was neat. So, she would hear him singing outside. My father's side of the family was a little bit different and more rebellious, always arguing, things like that. Dad had to start [.] he got over here about eight years old. And he, his father told him that he couldn't go to school. He didn't know any English when he got here. So, he didn't want him to learn, he just wanted him to go to work and make money. So, he started off in the tailoring shop with his older brother, and then as he got older, he went he started working at Baldwin locomotive. He made steam engines.

Then the war broke out. And he decided to go into the Navy for six, before the war broke out. He decided to go into the Navy get his um, the, it think it was his, I forget what it's called. His citizenship, I guess. And then uh, six months he was out and then the war broke out, it finally broke out and he wanted to go back into the Navy, but he also wanted to marry my mom and the Navy wouldn't let him have a honeymoon, so my father went in the Army. So, he was in the artillery. And he went through Europe. Two weeks after D-Day he got there, and then went all through Europe into Austria. Finally, when he came home, oh my mother went to visit him in January 1944, and that was when I was conceived in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And gee I'm getting choked up [pauses teary-eyed]. Anyway, so I didn't see him for a year after the war was over but, I don't know. I thought, anyway.

So, we had this nice life then in the suburbs, always went to Catholic private school and two years of Catholic college and I thought that I was too good for college. I decided to go into the Navy too and so where I did grow up pretty quickly so and that was a good thing for me. Then I came, I got a job offer in Boston, came to Boston, met my first wife and then I had, I had my two sons and we lived there for about 20 years and we were divorced after that. And I was a bachelor for about thirty, thirty years or so before I met Angie...

AC: Again

EC: Again, yes. Anyway, but my days in South Philadelphia were terrific. There were always festas, and there was there was food and people were cooking, and the place, you can eat off the sidewalk. That's how clean it was. And I'd see all these people come in after church, coming into the bakery. And I, I would work behind the counter. I'd help them out and do things.

We also had, my father had friends who were not on the good side of the law so that was a, that was a time. Matter of fact I think he had to leave Sicily at some point. Nobody could remember the true story. But I think he had to leave because of something he did. Some boss down there or something. So, but he had so he helped 'em out. He would take the money when the heat was on and he would do this kind of thing. So, I remember one day sitting in the, in the, hearing this racket at two o'clock in the morning. I get up at 2 and I go into the kitchen. And my mother, my grandmother is making meatballs and spaghetti for all these guys sitting around the table and on the middle of the table was all this money. And I said to my grandfather, "Grandpa, this is, the bread business is really good." They all started laughing. But anyway, things like that would go on. I would go on trips with my uncles so that you know again when the police were making it a little difficult, that they would go instead of the mob guys going into the bars and the restaurants my uncle would send me inside to collect to bring the bread and collect the money because the money was also the numbers money too[.]

It was like doing two things at one time so. So, I grew up that way and seeing both sides of the street. My father, when my grandfather died, I think he had a funeral, my mother's father we're talking about, I think he had a funeral, a flower, I think eighteen flower cars. From everybody that he worked with and did all that stuff with. So, and there was one fellow, he came up, a big muckity muck in the mob. He started talking to me. I hadn't seen him since I was a little kid. He goes, he'd come up and give me fifty cents or a buck or something like that. And so, he came up to me said, "Hey if you need anything getting out of school, why don't you come see me." And my father overheard and said, he come up to me and said, "If you go to work for that guy I kill you myself."

EC: So, he didn't want me to be tied into any of that stuff. So, He was a hard-working guy and he proved it by all the hours he put in. So, that's basically my life growing up. When my mother died in [19]95, I found all these letters. I was going through all the letters from Sicily. It was about the

land that they owned in Sicily that was being cultivated by my grandmother's cousin. And they were talking about this and that. So, I wrote to them, and I told them and then I went back, I wrote to them, and then a year after they said, "Why don't you come and visit us?" And I knew no Italian or anything. But I said, "Sure, I'll come and visit." And I went to see the land. Couple years later, I put it into my own name so that I own it. The property. And I offered it back to them, you know because I wasn't going to do anything with it. But I just wanted to own it because it was mine. So, yeah so and so but when I was there, this was when they started telling me about my grandfather.

My father's mother and father, I met her, his twin his mother's twin sister who still lived in Sicily. Not a very small side of the family. But when I arrived off of the train, they were about 24 people standing at the train station. And I could tell who my family was because they all had blue eyes. So, it was kinda neat so. And from there it just was the first couple of days were really bad until I had the translator come up from the bank. He was the only guy in town who could speak any English. He was always like tagging along. And we managed to get by. And since that time, it was what [19]95 so over 20 years ago, I met this woman on my mother's side from my grandfather's second marriage. It was like she looked exactly like my mother. It was like I was looking at my mother again. And the first smell, I smelled, when I went into the kitchen (because they were all gonna have dinner) was the meatballs. And these were meatballs, the veal meatballs you know the way my mother and grandmother used to make them which I never paid attention to. I just would eat 'em and not do anything like that so... then I started hearing stories and translating. I started practicing my Italian. I'm probably the 10th grade level, not a tenth grade, probably a sixth grade pretty much. But after a few months, after a few days, we start laughing at each other and talk to each other. And I would say stupid things, like I bought Angie an agnello

DD: not an anello [both laugh]

EC: And they would all think that was great you know. Or I had too many zingaros in the room, you know that kinda thing.

DD: Zanzare... [laughing]

EC: Yeah right exactly. Things like that they helped me with. And so we all laughed about. And they all loved me for practicing. And I learned a lot of that and I met a lot of family, and it was... My grandfather was basically, when he was able to buy property, and this why I wanted the property, it was like 800 lira or 2000. I forget how much it was. And it was chestnuts and olives and then it sloped on the top of the mountain, sloping down on the mountain and all terraces. And it was really beautiful. So, he got into chestnut farming and things, but all my relatives were into cittadini [contadini] I guess you'd call them. Which was good. I have a surviving uncle who could tell me all these stories. And remember I only heard from Zio Giovanni, he's like 97. So, he is the only one left who can put both ends of the bridge together, so I can find out what was going on. They had to come here. My mother's brothers, they came to America, but then the second marriage, her grandfather, he had four sons and they all went to Argentina. And a couple went to Australia so, these people are all in you know, the family when I 'm over there. If they're there when I'm over there we always get together and it's all it's all good stuff. And I learned a lot from them. Angie can attest. Pipe in anytime Honey, if you think of something I'm not thinking. So, they came. When I got all the news, the information, and it's like all this stuff I have here [indicating a stack of old original documents], the paperwork, I think these are all deeds, they're all written by hand. We came from a little town called Naso, it's in the Nebrodi mountain range in Sicily. It's on the, it's between Messina and Palermo, right in the middle of Capo d'Orlando is the name of the town where most of

my mother's family lived but on my father's side, they lived up in the mountains. And this was called Naso - the nose - it probably looked like it looking at it.

There was a difference in the two cultures. My father's side were, basically basic, basic kind of peasants, but they have a heart bigger than gold as far as I'm concerned. But they just cared about the land. They did their thing that their fathers did, that their grandfathers did. They didn't change, if they couldn't own the land they became masons and brick builders, whatever they could whatever they could do to survive and stuff like that.

I like it great, when we go up to visit, they just killed a pig. And the first appetizer we had was lardo and all kinds of salami [Angie says in the background, "and prosecco" and corrects herself, "and prosciutto"] and sausage. It's just like an experience. And drinking fennel liqueur which is awfully good. I don't know if you've ever had that. So, in these cultures, I just learned a lot. But my grand, my aunt, who is on my mother's side, who looks exactly like her, I stayed at her house. She would always arrange, she'd be my secretary. And she would always arrange for who I'm going to see while I'm there. Who am I having dinner with here, who I'm having a coffee with? Who I'm having lunch with there. You know, I mean, I was like, always on the go, and then I'm coming back over here for another dinner. But every morning, she would tap on the on the on the roof with her broom to make sure I was up so I could get my coffee and get going.

So, that was the kind of life I had. And I fell in love with it. I was like in heaven. I couldn't... like I went back every year. The family just got bigger and bigger and bigger. I learned more about everybody. So, we were kind of jealous at some points you know. Like I was gonna, like I'm the rich cousin from America, that kinda thing. And we talked about our economic situations.

But I think last year we were over and I decided that I wanted to thank everybody for all their hospitality. Now I never had to go to a restaurant if I didn't want to, they wouldn't come to a restaurant with me. So, I had no choice in the matter. So, I hired out a restaurant and I think we had about thirty-five people; women, children, everybody in the family. And I just I had a speech written. I wrote it in English and then I told everybody, I had it translated for me because I would have been really lousy if I, but so anyway I practiced, and practiced, and practiced. Everybody understood it.

AC: It was very emotional.

EC: Thank you. Just remembering all the people who died, my aunts that had died over the years. So, that's about it. And um...

DD: So, if I can ask you, 1995 is your first trip to Italy? And what were your impressions prior to what did your family impart to you about how Italy was? Or did they ever go back?

EC: My mother and father went back because they had a situation with the land and my father wanted to go back and see his mother's sister who was ill. So, in 1972, they asked me to go with them. But I had just gotten married. I had two little boys. I was in the process of setting up my career. And so I said I couldn't go, which you know I kick myself. And my mother didn't like it because she thought the girls in the town were always going through her bags when she was out. They were always going through suitcases. And she kept missing this and missing that. She didn't like that too much. [Angie laughs in the background]

There was one cousin that I met, and he always wanted the land. My father and mother wouldn't sell the land. But he always kept asking and asking. And so, he figured he'd get it from me. And I said uh, I said no. No, I'm gonna keep it. I'm thinking of you know, making this a legacy for my family. But it never did turn out that way. But when I said I was going to put the land with my name, they,



Pippo, Zio Pippo was his name, and he looked at his wife, and he had got that look, like you know, "I told you this was gonna happen [Ed furrows his brow and looks down his nose with disdain], he was gonna do this. He was gonna take the land." Without saying a word. Silent talk, so which I had learned from my mother being punished all the time. Anyway, so they went. My father thought he was in Paradise. And mother couldn't wait to get home. But my father had that that feeling. He stood in the same place where he grew up. That house that he lived in overlooked the ocean and down into Capo d'Orlando, and it was like a like a million-dollar property that you find somewhere in Malibu or something like that. So, it was rustic still.

DD: And so from 1944 to 1972, when you spent all those years here in America, did you identify as your typical American or were you raised in, did you realize you were more Italian?

EC: I was all Italian.

DD: huh.

EC: I always was all Italian. And I tried to instill it in my boys, but they were always running around and then they started the, the you know they just weren't interested in it as much as I was. And I did everything I could as far as being Italian. even joined the Sons of Italy up there just to be a part of the Italian people.

Um, when we had the family gatherings together, it was all the time they were playing bocce. They were playing morra and all those games that they would play. The men always sat in the kitchen. My father's brothers always sat in the kitchen. They played chess all evening long.

After they did all the eating and drinking, my mother would make pizzas for everybody. You know, make 100 pizzas out of one little tiny stove that we had there. So, every Sunday was dinner at our house. And we did it for years until high school, when people started dying and the older cousins started going off doing their things.

That's when we drifted away. And I went into the military. And so, it stopped. And then I started getting back into it, because I it seems like I always made Italian friends. You know they are all over the North End of Boston. I'd be hanging out there more than I would be in my own town. And so, that's, I was always there. Yeah...

DD: Do you have siblings and cousins that you grew up with?

EC: Uh, I have older cousins. Two of them have just passed away. And um and my sister is she's younger by two years and she lives in Naples, Florida now. And she has the onset of Alzheimer's. So, we see each other as much as we can. She is still mentally strong you know strong so, I'm hoping that that stays for a while.

And she's not as Italian as me. She married a fellow of German descent. And their kids, they drifted away. The one daughter is very interested in Italian culture. And she's always talking to me about her history. I did do a family tree before Roots as a matter a fact, so I could get as much, as much out of it as I could, so I can keep the history going. I gave copies of the gene-genealogical tree, to the kids. Someday they'll want to know what's going on and they'll have the history. I was in South Philly, my mother's, where I grew up was South Philly. My father's family, brothers and sisters, lived in West Philadelphia. So, it was about a half an hour away but, by train, by trolley at the time. So, I'd go and visit them, and they'd come and visit us. But we were mostly in South Philadelphia.

My mother had two brothers and they were always around. They were always there for me, especially my uncles, when dad had went into the military, they were always there for me. So, I never forgot that.

I have, oh I guess I have about 500 letters that he wrote to my mother. I went through them one day. You know, they're mostly talking about my mother bitching about his family. They don't, they don't treat her nice. She wants him to come back and wants 'em to write to 'em and tell 'em, you know straighten them out. That kind of thing and stuff. On the 50th anniversary I read [gets choked up] here I go...

AC: Yes, you gonna cry again, I know you.

EC: So, anyway, I read one, and I made it like it was something I pulled out of the air, where I read it from some other story. And there was this Civil War thing that they were talking where this guy wrote love letters. Made me think of doing this for them. And so when I read it he came up to me. He says, "Who wrote that?" I says, "You wrote it." So, [pensive]

EC: But dad never had a grade school. He had to quit at eight, he couldn't go to eighth grade. He had to go to work. When he got here at eighth grade. He worked hard. He as I was growing up, as I was growing up um, he tried to teach me the culture where he grew up and how he lived and how his life was. But when he went into the Army, he went through, two weeks after D Day. So, he saw a lot of action. He was at Nuremberg and Dachau. And um, [pause] and uh, so but he never talked about it. So, all the history that I got from him, I had to do research with the Army and the records I wanted to know.

I did hear a story where, you know, he needed a pair of boots, and there was a pair sitting on the hill, and he went to put 'em on, and they had two feet in them. He was, I can see why he never talked about it. But anyway, when he grew up, you know, he always loved opera. He always loved the music. He would force me to sit down on Sunday afternoons after dinner and listen to Aida or whatever it was that it was which I love now and listen to it and he would explain it to me. You know, I wanted to go out. I wanted to do things. But I did it. I listened and when he died, I was living in Boston at the time. When we went to the funeral there was a gentleman who lived across the hall. And he was a professor at Swarthmore College. He came to the funeral. And he said, "Where, where did your father graduate college?" [pause, emotional] He never went to college. I said, you know the school of hard knocks he got it from. He said, "I thought he had a PhD or master's degree." he said.

Nope, I said, "In life, maybe." So, so that that was that was probably the best compliment he could have gotten from anybody I thought. But he was a hard-working guy and I would get angry at him because I played football and he'd never be at any of the games. I didn't have enough sense to realize that he was a tired guy all the time.

And finally, you know, in his last years he got dementia and I would take him off my sister's hands. My mother had passed away. And he we'd meet in Connecticut. We'd meet at a restaurant, Olympia Restaurant, New Haven, Connecticut. I'd pick him up, take him for a couple of weeks. And I had healthcare people. I had daycare services. Well I had to work and stuff like that. We had some issues and he would get up in the middle of the night, start making coffee, but he didn't have the coffee pot. You know this is where, this is where he was at. Had to take all the knobs off so he couldn't do that. He always walked around with a picture of my mother. That was his favorite picture, so [sniffles] for some reason he recognized that picture. That was it. Gave him a military funeral. And that was the extent of it.

DD: And you also were in the military. Was that as a tribute to him or I guess, or just on your own?

EC: No, I figured, I was I was on the road to juvenile delinquency. I needed some discipline. You know my father and I fought a lot. I wanted to go one way. He tried and... oh this is a funny story. He tried getting me to work like him. You know blue collar job, working really hard was never for me. I was a white-collar guy. That's was how it was gonna be.

But I worked a couple of summers. I carried the plaster that they did the walls up the four stories in the hot on my shoulder and I didn't like that. It was too much. I worked in a metal shop and I come out I was all dark with that all the bits of metal that I'd be grinding all day long. Yeah and so it wasn't for me. And so I told him, "Don't do this no more. I'm going my way." I went on to the Navy. Went back, came back and I got a job offer in Boston, and at one of the major publishers, in Boston; DC Heath and Company. I don't know if you know them.

I spent like 15 years there as head of department of thirty-some people you know I did it all. I might have fibbed on my resume a little bit. But anyway, I did it. I did what I had to do to succeed and I succeeded. I got married and had two boys. Gave them a good education. Um, one went to college. One went into the Army and both of them are doing extremely well with EMC, one the largest corporations in Massachusetts storage systems and things like that. So, I'm proud of what they've done. And then my wife and I, I was traveling too much on business. I was always going. She wanted me home. We finally went our separate ways. I regretted that day ever since, every day.

I don't know if you want to hear this but, quickly; we were going on a cruise and I knew that, her husband, who I'm friendly with, wanted to come down to Florida, so I offered with her permission, to give them the house. She, they accepted and came down, and they spent ten days and the cruise was only seven. So, we had them for a few extra days. But we're best of friends. I worked hard to keep the relationship sane for my for my children and you know for us, because it's better to have peace than war all the time as far as I can see.

DD: And family is a strong value in Italian culture, right?

EC: Yes, exactly.

DD: So, with regard to language, you said you never grew up speaking Italian, but Italian was spoken all around you.

EC: Yes, I did. I learned some of the dirty words obviously but uh. And that's the thing that I really hold against them because, you know, you see the families today whether it's Spanish, Portuguese, or whatever, they all speak it, at least in the home and most of them speak it in the stores the supermarket when they walk around. But my family never did. They spoke and argued amongst themselves in Italian, my grandparents in dialect. When we came in it was all English again. Like we were the we were the stars in the day and we had to be treated. You know my grandparents just treated us royally all the time. So, ...

DD: How did you communicate with your grandparents, if you didn't speak...

EC: They spoke a little English. My father's side, they didn't speak, she refused to learn English. I don't know why. But she never, my grandmother did. My grandmother learned a little English. My grandfather learned some English. On my mother's side, but they still would speak to us in English. My mother's mother, she was just very doting. I was the oldest son, the oldest grandson. So, I was

like the King of the Hill. When we leave, I get \$5 and my sister would get 50 cents. So, so that was it, and I just always wave it to her, as we were riding in the car.

DD: Those were the days, huh?

EC: Yeah, they were the days. They were, they were great. And when they died, it was it was a big loss. But like I said, with my grandfather in the bakery shop, you know, you know how the people were. They'd come in, and they'd look for their tribute. A couple of them were from my father's town. So, they never really pushed him for tributes. But they asked him to help every once in a while, to pick up money. It was the only thing that he would do for them. When he went to the bakery, get the money for the rolls and the numbers' money as well.

DD: And you talked about bakery and tailor. Your dad was a tailor?

EC: Well, he started as a tailor, and when he was a boy. And then just wasn't enough, and he went to Baldwin, Baldwin Locomotives and started working there as a steam fitter. Then the war broke out. It was just before it broke out he wanted to go into the Navy. He got his citizenship. And then after six months duty, went into the Army. He spent close to two years there, so.

DD: Was your family impressed with you becoming a white-collar worker, or did they value... manual labor?

EC: Well let's see, my parents and my grandparents were just happy as a clam. But all my aunts from, who married my father's brothers, they were not very happy. They were always jealous of what I would do, and they'd always brag about what their boys are doing. So, there was this constant battle between... Ultimately, when my father's mother died, we took in, my mother took in, my mother and father took in, they never talked again for thirty years. The poor brothers, they had to listen to the wives. They never got together. They never got to play chess anymore. It was a sad sad state of affairs. My grandmother - It was a weird situation because my father's, my father's mother, was sick and they wanted to put her in a home and my mother said, "No, no. We'll take her. And we're paying all this money to put her in a home. Just, I'll take her and you can give us some food money." So, so this is what broke the family. So, they said, "Well, we're not going to give you money. We don't think you're gonna give it towards taking care of our mother so I'm not going to do it." My mother said, "Alright, then get the hell out of the house. Don't come back." And they took the mother, my grandmother in until she died two years later.

You probably heard stories like that too. There was a lot of a lot of family jealousy in families and we were no different. A very dysfunctional relative base.

DD: With regard to being an Italian American, and the way it's presented differently in each of the generations, you're saying, that your children don't really follow it. What's the difference? How do they identify as Italian American?

EC: My oldest boy doesn't identify. He's Italian America when he wants to be. And my youngest boy is starting to feel it more and more and more. And since I've been involved in the Sons of Italy down here, as you know running it and um, I send them the information; the things that I do, the meetings that I go to, the newsletters that I put out, the website. They get all this information. I um, and they say that they thought I was coming down here to die, you know. And actually, it's turned out to be the best life that I've had since leaving Boston. But they're starting to see it.

DD: Do they call you Nonno?

EC: Yeah, they call. Actually, they call me Pop Pop. I wanted just to honor my father. And that's what my kids called him, Pop Pop, so. And that was the change, that was the change from the Italian thing. You can see that we were pulling away from it at that particular time. They call me, I would love have loved to have been Nonno but with did that to honor my father so.

DD: We didn't talk very much about your career and that time. Do you want to share anything about that?

EC: [Hesitates] Yeah, my aunts would say that he is not going to amount to anything because he doesn't go to college. Both my sons are going to college. I had two years and I figured that was more than enough. If I was going to get into the business. I didn't think. I wasn't going to teach, I wasn't going to be a doctor or an engineer. So, I figured I can go in two years. Get an education in the military, learn discipline. I was a navigator in the in the in the in the navy.

First off, I started off in the deck, chipping and painting again. I was doing that blue-collar stuff and I didn't like that at all, so. A friend of mine on the bridge he was he was the chief Quartermaster, which is a navigator. And he, I said, "You need any help? I'd like to come up." And I would go up and have lunch with him and sit and talk. I just got fascinated by navigating from one place to another. He said, "Yeah, I need somebody." So, I went up and worked on the bridge. I never got my hands dirty again. It was nice and clean. And I took them all the way through Europe and back. That was great.

Then when I got out I got a career - a job offer in Boston publishing and went up there and started out as the assistant manager and worked my way up to managing thirty-five people. After that I spent five years at Lotus Development Corporation, doing all their manuals and things like that, because they had no idea. And I set up the whole department. I got another thirty-five people doing that. That was it. I just ended my career on that kind of work. I thought it was very rewarding. And, mom was always, "Oh Ed just got this promotion or Ed just got that promotion. And he's got thirty-five people working under him. How many did you say Little Joey had?" You know, that sort of stuff. Started throwing the needle back, I guess.

I traveled all over the world. Which I loved, like there wasn't an airplane I didn't like. I'd go a couple days early if it was some place I hadn't been. You know, I'd just go exploring. I got involved up in Boston with a fellow. He died about five years ago at ninety-eight. He was a world war two fighter pilot. And he married a friend of the family. Uh, she was seventy-eight at the time. I think he was eighty-three or four. And they got married after her mother died. She didn't want to marry until her mother died. And her mother didn't die until she was about ninety-nine. So, so they married late in life.

He became like a mentor to me. He worked in an Italian butcher shop all his life. A real Italian guy. Pearl, his wife - Lena was her mother, adopted me like a son. They'd invite me for dinners. When she got sick, I would go over make her a fried egg because she liked the way I cooked the egg. She didn't like it brown on either side. It had to be perfectly white. So, before I went to work or something, I would go over and make her an egg.

We became very, very close and she did all my translating, Pearl. And I ran a radio station with her. She had a radio station. Her father did it for sixty years. And she did it for about forty years. And every once in a while she'd get sick or she'd want me to help her out. I would go. I would do the English commercials I wanted to do the Italian commercials, so I would have to practice all the time. She never let me do it. [Interviewer chuckles] I would do the English side, there was a half hour

Italian and a half hour English. We would have all this Italian music. I used to send her little dedications over the computer that she could see.

He also belonged to the Sons of Italy since 1944. When he started getting older, he asked if I would drive him. I said, "Sure I'll drive you." And then I looked at it and saw what was going on. And I kind of liked the idea. They had the pasta nights. You know, they did porchetta nights. And they do things to keep people in. They had a nice clientele and they had their own lodge which I wish we would have. I got involved and he died. And Angie and I were seeing each other at the time and we decided to move to Florida. So, I came down here. My first thought was to meet like-minded Italians. So, I looked for Sons of Italy organizations. I looked in Coral Springs. There's one in Pompano. And I went to the one in Boca, which I really liked the one in Boca. We met some a nice people who are friends today. They took us out. Remember Sonny's, Sonny's Gelato?

AC: [in background] On US 1.

EC: On US 1.

DD: I don't. No.

EC: They would play, we'd go bowling and go get gelato after. there'd be all these Italian Canadians. You know the snowbirds that are down. And Gino with the accordion. You have to go to Trattoria Nonna. He plays every night. On the weekends. Yeah, and it's a really good place too. Yeah, it's in Boca on Southwest Eighteenth Street. You'll love it. Mention me and the Sons of Italy and they might do something. Or kick ya out. I don't know.

I was attending our first meeting together and they needed a trustee the on the board. And this lady turns around and says, "He looks like a smart enough guy." So, I said, "What do I have to do?" "You just have to come to the meetings." After about a year, I was Vice President, and then two years later, I was President. So, and I've been President, this is going on my third year now. And I want to do something for the national group. Sons of Italy have been, not for anything, but I have met so many people. I mean, they are a lot of au authentic Italians, a lot of Italians like me, a lot of Italians who want to be Italian, that they never grew up feeling that way. And you when you attend these meetings, with all these people, so many different cultures, so many different backgrounds and different areas of, you know, food is different here. And we have Argentinian Italians. They have a lot of Argentinian Italians. They come to the meetings. And it's a happy, happy, happy time. I mean, people love it and they just love the way we do things. When I became vice president, we were we were up to about thirty members. Back in the early days, when it was like a social club. The Sons of Italy doing all that fraternal, and the requirements of charities and things like that. It had to be social, but that's the way it was. And they had hundreds of members at the time.

They got away from that. The old timers they want to strictly be Sons of Italy and they didn't care about this. But they were having social functions. They'd have a pasta night or a potluck night or do something and it diminished. People were dying, nobody was coming in. We had thirty members when I joined when I was vice president. I decided to change it around. I have to fight all the Mustache Petes. These guys just won't be flexible at all. We had battles at all the board meetings. And finally, I did a couple of things and it worked out. And then people told people. And they talked. So it went from thirty to about seventy in about two years. So, that's where we're at. We're about eighty right now.

DD: That's very impressive. And you're very fortunate because there's Italian in the schools here; a greater Italian presence in this county.

EC: But they were not very civic minded the Sons of Italy either. You know they helped, they really didn't help much. They just attended the meetings, talk about, you know, doing this or that; the charities that they were forced to pay for. And that was the extent of it. But we we've gotten, I've started to get involved in community activities. We're helping Gumbo Limbo. We belong to the George Snow Foundation, which we give a scholarship out. And we give them money and they invest it. And we gave them like about three or four thousand dollars. It's now up to six seven thousand dollars.

Only that money can be used for scholarship that the George Snow Foundation pick the recipients. It's a monstrous monstrous organization. You're talking about millions and millions of dollars. Every year they have they have a ball and you meet, you get to meet the recipient that they picked for you - for us. And they come to sit at our table and we talk. We chat. And then they go away. Well, I never liked that because I want them to come back and say, "This is what I did. Thank you." You know, not thank you, but let us know what you're doing in your life. They are Italians too.

That's one of the focuses. They have to be Italian. Gumbo Limbo. We got into community activities, doing that kind of thing. We're trying real hard. The Veterans Affairs we do quite a bit, the Honor Flight groups where they go take all the old veterans up to Washington DC. We contribute to that. and we contribute to veterans and the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars).

It's more community, then. Then we have our charities of cancer, autism, Alzheimer, and we try to take care of that. And then the scholarships and the members. And we didn't have a scholarship this year. We gave one to Pope John Paul couple years ago. I don't know if you know. And then Ilaria (Serra) was working with another lodge, the Dimitri Lodge, Tony Phillips - I don't know if you met him. I stayed clear of it. I didn't want to do anything to step on his toes. But he folded the lodge and wound up going down south starting up another Italian American group.

Really, it's more of a social thing too. He does some good things. You know, he copied me, I copied him. We help each other out. We'd be the two rebels of the group. Like we got to do more social, listen. Well last year, at the national meeting they had, they had a nice announcement that some genius person stood up and said, "We have to be more social now." And so when my president of Florida group came back, she looked at me when she was telling me because she knows I had been at war with all these guys for like two three years. And they said, "We have to be more social. We have to do different things." And that's what you have to do. So... a little vindication.

My favorite Italian [memory was] when I got off the train in Capo d'Orlando, when I finally went over the first time and I can see it like it was yesterday. I see all these blue-eyed Italians on the, from Capo d'Orlando on my mother's side, all the old ones in my father's blue, green and brown eyes.

So, but anyway, the first question I was asked, and I knew I was in trouble. And I had said this in my speech when I gave it to them. He said, "Quanti quante volte in Italia?" I had no idea what he was saying. Oh, "Prima volta in Italia?" is what he meant. My other aunt who passed away, she gave me her bedroom. She slept with her daughter in another little bedroom.

For two weeks I had the master bedroom and when we had dinners and all these people coming. And thank God for the kids learning English in school and the banker, of the Banco di Sicilia in Naso because he would come to dinner all the time. I think he had the best time of his life [interviewer laughs].

AC: That's for sure.

DD: He ate well, huh?

EC: He ate well. And then I would go down. My uncle who was ninety-eight on my who married on my mother's side, took me around to visit my mother's side of the family. They went to Zia Sara, who was my mother's cousin. My mother's mother and her mother were sisters. So, and I met her, and we were all crying and then she's telling, and I'm trying to pick things up. And then she said, "Oh, I have my daughter lives in America." And I said uh, "Really?" and I said, "Where?" I'm thinking America is a big place. So, she said, "I'll give you the phone number." She wrote down the phone number. It was Waltham, Massachusetts, and it was like 20 minutes away. I've had this cousin for all those years up there. So, we became really famously close. And we go visit together. But these were my favorite stories.

My stories growing up, unfortunately with my Italian American cousins here were not close. We were always fighting. I was the youngest all of them, so they were either four years older than me or five years older than me or two years. No one was my age, except for Marguerite. She was one of the cousins. And she and I were, still today, very close.

But we were always fighting, and we were always in contention. Our mothers were always pitting us together. So, one became a cop, the other one went to college. The other one, they both went to college, on that side. So, you know, they were the college graduates and they were touted, I was gonna do it differently.

But then, Italy was my paradise, is my para-, Sicily is my paradise. We were going to go for a month, this month in April. Life got in the way. We got some funerals to do. We have some things to do. I couldn't pull it off. But we're going to do a month. We're going to spend it in Sicily. We're gonna sit right down the coast of Borgo San Gregorio and just listen to the ocean. And invite people to dinner. And eat and drink and when I when I finally got my cousins to go out and eat we say, "I'm gonna take you to this place. We're gonna go eat at the Lido on the ocean." We walk in the Lido and the guy comes running up to me. He says, "Edmondo, Edmondo, come stai? Quanti anni?" and all this stuff.

And so, we're talking. My cousins are looking. And I go to another restaurant and another restaurant, and they never knew that when I went home, I didn't always go home. I was always going someplace. And sit around and have a coffee because I didn't want to waste a moment. And so...

AC: I have the same experience. One of his aunts don't speak English but she took his hand all day long, you know for a while. And it's like you're talking to the to the person. When we have the dinner, the thank you dinner, one of the cous- of the aunts comes from the mountains and she do the same thing to me. She just rubs your hand, and look at you, and smile to you and it's like a whole conversation without a word. And they are a great cook. Especially the one in the mountains. Well everybody, but... Because everything's fresh. They have their own pigs. They do, they have everything in the backyard. So, whatever you eat you know it's great. You enter to the house and they have this, the pasta hanging...

EC: This is where my father went to Sicily... [in 19]72 [see photo 01]. That was his mother, his mother's twin [see photo 02]. So, he liked died and gone to heaven when he saw her. And that was kind of neat. That was her daughter. She wound up going to live in Rome. And that's that's me [see photo 03] and...

AC: And your cavalieri.

DD: And your Dad and Mom?

EC: Yeah.



DD: How old are you in this picture?

EC: About a year. And this is my father's father who was a carabinieri [e] [see photo 04] And these are all the next generation. [see photo 05] These are all, I don't know who these people are.

AC: They got names on the back. They are the Liparis.

EC: This is my father's mother. These are the Liparis?

AC: Yes, those are the Liparis.

EC: This is my father's side of the family. I had them tell, I had them tell me, they, when I was with them, they told me who all these people were.

DD: And your dad, he was from the mountains. And your mom was she from the city or from seaside?

EC: No, she was in the town, she was in the town next to him. They moved down after, years after, into the city and they bought other farm lands around the area in Patti and different locations. And they never worked in the mountains again. They had all these coastal fields that they cultivated.

DD: And your mom and dad met here in the United States?

EC: Met here.

DD: Right because they were both...

EC: You know how the Italians move. They, every, a cousin from Naso... Well somebody says, "Oh my cousin from Naso lives in Philadelphia. You know him. Go see him when you go there." And that's where they settled in Philadelphia. They met all these, the same like-minded you know, neighbors and friends. And that was a lot of fun seeing all that going on.

AC: You can tell them about the day you worked with Zio Giovanni. [she laughs]

EC: Zio Giovanni, he's ninety-eight. He stopped working about six years ago. His legs gave out. He can't... Well, I figured every time I wanted I went there I wanted to help him out. I wanted to go out I wanted to just be there and do these kinds of things. He says, "Okay." So, he knocked on the window at five in the morning. And I got up and I had my coffee ready and went out to the field. And we walked up the mountains, and down the mountains, and this side. Climbing this tree. Pulling out these figs. Getting these clementines, checking the grapes. And I'm dying you know. And he's giving me a basket. He climbs up the mountain. And he was in his he was in his eighties when I started doing this. He'd be passing the figs down, put 'em in the... I'd eat two and put one in the basket. So, and that was and finally he looked down at me see all these little pits. He said, "Stop eating my profits!" you know [interviewer laughs]. So, these kinda things. But I was exhausted. I died. I did that twice, and I said I said, "If I work with you one more day you're gonna kill me."

DD: Did any of the relatives that you went to visit in Sicily, did any of them make it over here to the United States to visit at all?

EC: Not yet.

AC: Um, yes, um, Dario.

EC: Oh Dario, yes. Dario just came here. My cousin's son. He came here during 911 [September 11, 2001]. Oh, of all times. And then he got scared because they wanted him back. It took about two

weeks for us to get them on a plane to get back to get back to Sicily. But he was having such a great time. Yeah, he just loved it here.

This is my mother's mother. [see photo 06] And this is her son, my mother's brother. This is her brother, Giuseppe, or Salvatore, and his wife from Buenos Aires.

AC: That we met on our trip to Argentina.

DD: Oh, so you went to Argentina to meet to meet your relatives that are down there as well.

AC: We really went, because I found, I was on the computer one day and I found a week in, [brief cut in audio] on Facebook. We contact and we decide to see them one day. So, we were in the hotel, you know. How we're going to recognize them when they arrive? When, when the guy entered to the hotel, I says, "That's your cousin." This part is Ed [places had horizontally across middle of face] younger.

And we have a great [emphatic] week.

EC: I have naturalization papers. I have all kinds of things. Passports. I have this kind of stuff. You probably you know what this is, but... [see photo 07] Right here. This is my, I think my grandmother could only write her first name. And I think she signed whatever this is. And I don't know what that is. But, and this is the original documents. I think that's a copy. So, and then I have passports and stuff. Whatever you like to do. I mean, I don't know how far you want to go. I can I can go another hour if you want.

AC: His genealogical tree until 17 something.

EC: Yeah 1730. On my father's side. On my mother's side, they can only go back to 1868. I don't know why. I can't find out but that's something I gotta get back on to.

DD: So, did you do this when you went to Sicily, you went to the town...

EC: No, I had this all done before, and then I finished it through ancestry and that's when we did our DNAs. I am 80% Greek Sicilian.

DD: Surprise? No, not at all.

EC: No, I mean, it makes perfectly good sense. I was looking at all these other charts that all these other people have and they all have a Greek route and then that route went to Persia and India and all. And obviously came to Sicily, where they lived for like 3000 years. And they intermarried. But my family goes back to the same town generation after generation after generation. And one of my great, great, great, great, great grandparents, her name is Bonanno like, like the lodge.

DD: How interesting. Wow.

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**IMMIGRANT IDENTIFICATION CARD**  
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Causerano  
SURNAME

Catena  
GIVEN NAME

Italy March 14, 1921  
COUNTRY OF BIRTH DATE OF BIRTH

Italian gray  
NATIONALITY COLOR OF EYES

PORT OF ARRIVAL STEAMSHIP

DATE ADMITTED STATUS OF ADMISSION

IMMIGRANT'S SIGNATURE

**ORIGINAL** IMMIGRANT INSPECTOR

07.