

Interview with Michael Sinicropi

**Interviewer: Gordon L. Swartz III**

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**A MULTIFACETED, RETIRED EXECUTIVE SPEAKS OUT  
ON ITALIAN IMMIGRANT HISTORY**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MICHAEL SINICROPI OF WEIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA**

**MICHAEL SINICROPI:** Go ahead, you ask me whatever questions you have.

**GORDON SWARTZ:** Okay, we'll go ahead and start then. The first thing I'd like is your name and the date. Just so that will be on the tape.

**MS:** The name is Michael Gabriel Sinicropi. Sinicropi's spelled S-i-n-i-c-r-o-p-i. I'm a resident of Weirton at the present time. I'm the son of Patsy Sinicropi who was an Italian immigrant and Jessie Meuller. That's the maiden name of my mother. My mother was born in the United States of America in a little town called Millwood, Ohio, on the outskirts of Mt. Vernon, Ohio. My father was born in South Italy. I was born in East Liverpool, Ohio. At the age of three I was taken back to Italy. Raised in Italy, I learned to be familiar with other languages. After all, my mother was an Austrian by background. In fact, I like to tell a little story all the time about that. My father was a Catholic. My mother was a Lutheran. On Sunday morning, depending on which car you got in, that's the church you went, and for some reason or other we never ask any questions, and we were raised in this environment you see where we were very, very familiar with different religions, very familiar with different people, and maybe this was a mark that help us.

**GS:** You said your father was born in the United States.

**MS:** He was born in Italy.

**GS:** He was born in Italy.

**MS:** Yeah, my father was born in Italy in a town of Regecolabria, right on the southern tip of Italy. It's a town of 190,000 people. The main commerce in this particular town are flowers, agriculture, fruits. Artisans are very popular. People who have a little company that is within the family. Maybe they making shoes, maybe they making purses, maybe they making something like that. In fact in my visit recently, a couple of years ago, my brother-in-law was explaining me this particular phenomenon in Italy where the government doesn't know how to collect taxes because nobody is incorporated, and yet every family is a corporation in itself. They do these things with their hands. That's why they are called artisans. An example, Guicci will come on down from Milan, and he will say, "Michael, can you make fifty purses with this design?" So I will say, "Sure." So he gives me half of the money in advance. I make the fifty purses. He comes back, pays the rest, picks up the purses, takes them in Milan, marks them

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"Made by Guicci," and sends them all over the world where they reach the market maybe two hundred dollars a piece, you see. Guicci doesn't even have a production line. They never had one, and yet they sell everything from watches to purses, and this is an industry. They're a family industry. You might say why the Italian government is not really going after these people, because they stay out of the state maintenance, no welfare. So the state, at a certain point, it feels that they're better off having people making money than have a bunch of people, because of the taxes, be forced, you know, into a different level, social level, and so on. This is a part of Italy, and that is part of a mentality that was transferred here. In fact, I'm sure that you know that a lot of Italian people came here who couldn't even speak the language, but they were very good on making things, different things, before they joined a big industry like the mills and bridges and so on.

49 I'd like to go back one moment on family trace. My mother was the daughter, as I said before, of a man by the name of George Mueller who emigrated from Austria into the United States of America, but before he did that he married a woman who's name was Sophia Anchelage. She was a Croatian. Keep in mind at that point in time there was such a thing called the Austrian-Hungarian Empire that comprised all those countries, Northern Italy, Croatia, part of Serbia, Slovenia, Hungary, and all those countries. So, he married this Sophia Anchelage. What means that really you can say that I have fifty percent of Italian lineage, I have twenty-five percent of Austrian background, and I got twenty-five percent of a Croatian background. So it makes me a perfect American. So the old man came here, George Mueller. He stopped in Buffalo, New York, for a little while, and then he was a driller. You know, Germans are very much mechanical-minded and very good ones. So, he knew, somebody told him you got to go in the Midwest because there was large colonies of Americans, of Germans. So he went in this little town, Millwood, Ohio, not too far from Mt. Vernon, Ohio, maybe seven miles, and he went to work for the Cincinnatti Gravel Company. They had a plant there, but the type of gravel and sand that they were doing were the silica sand. It's white like snow, and it's sent to the factories who make glasses and other things of this type.

71 Also, let me go one minute on my father's side now. Something a little different. Italy became Italy in 1860. In fact, Italy is no older than the United States of America, as a country. Not to be confused with the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire stayed over there for quite some time, but, at the end of the Roman Empire, Italy and most of Europe split in many little different states, all it took was a count and twenty soldiers, and he would be controlling a certain territory. That's when the counts and the dukes and whatever was born. That's the period of the Depression, the thousand years of a depression. When we came out from that depression, Italy has different characteristics. The southern people were influenced by the Greek civilization, the Arabian civilization, the Spanish civilization. The northern people were influenced by the Germans and the French on both side. So you might find someone in South Italy with black hair. Then you move in North Italy and you will find people with blonde hair, just as blonde as you can make them and so on, the characteristic of a different race. However, they seems

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to get along very well. There is no problem in the sense of nationally. For they all believe in Italy, they all fought to make this Italy independent. My family on the side of my father played a part in this. The first movement for the independence of Italy was started in 1821, and there were attempt by armored groups to start this movement to liberate Italy from the Austrians, the Vatican City, and other parts that they were used to dominate Italy in so many little pieces. On my grandmother's side, the maiden name was Romeo. Two uncles of my grandmother, Dominico and John Dominico Romeo were both congressmen in the reign of the two Sicily that comprised everything from Naples to South Italy inclusive of Sicily, the island of Sicily. That was probably the major piece of Italy organized in a formal state. They both died in 1821. One was decapitated because he was a revolutionary, considered a revolutionary and killed, and the other one died in battle. In fact, if you go in the city of Regecolabria, you will find the name of the Romeo brothers in many, many places, you know, even a street named after them or a building, and so on, and so on. So there is a little historical background within our family. A lot of people, they think, that most of this background has been reflected on Mike Sinicropi, that would be me, more than any other member of the family. I am the one who went to politics. I am the one who writes. I am the one who publish books. I am the one who became a scientist, and so on, and certainly I have to thank my father for that.

112 My father, he only had five years elementary school. In those days, three years was normal, five years was the exception. So the man he could write a letter. He could express himself a little better than an average person. He believed in education so much that practically you would think that he was sick. See, when it came to education, my father would never compromise with us. We were a family of four boys and three girls. That is the one area in which he only had one psychology. That psychology was a 2' x 4'. You either go to school, or I kill you. This how much they believe in our school, and sometime they would put together the effort of an entire family just to get one out. Out of the seven kids, they would be satisfied if one became a doctor or became an engineer or became a lawyer. So. And, so, being the oldest in the family, I had to make it through the school. He wanted me to be a doctor. I graduated from a school called Lachio Scientifico. What means in America would be a scientific high school. You see, where you have one high school here, and everybody takes a certain course within the same high school, in Italy you have a different high school, and that's true for most of Europe, that there are different buildings, completely different setups. You have the classic high school. You have the scientific high school, the technical high school, the industrial high school, and etcetera. I was considered an advanced student, so they let me go into the scientific high school, and I graduated from the scientific high school, and then I went to the University of Palermo, and I joined the faculty of political and economic science. Because of that, my father ordered me out of the main table. For one month I had to eat in the kitchen, and the only person I had with me was my grandmother. He wanted me to be a doctor. You see, in those days, those were the major professions. Either you be a doctor, a lawyer, or a priest. You see they were very much a rewarding type of a job. My father couldn't see me in any other form. He might have been right, but then, as time slipped over, I managed to do very well anyhow. Whatever, I did go back to science. I did become a chemist. I worked in the

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lab for twenty-eight years for Stavage Industries, and then another company offered me a job. I moved to Missouri for thirteen years. I became president of Universal Coal and Energy Company, the major, the biggest private coal industry in the midwest, located maybe twenty-three miles north of Columbia, Missouri, on Route 63, and it was a tremendous experience, actually, for me to become an executive of a company, because it involved more than I had anticipated. I had the quality control background, but then all in one time I was faced with the administrative background, how to deal with people, how to deal with unions, and things of that sort, and in the midwest in this area here, a little town called Moberly, we were just not too far from this little town, they always looked to me like if I was someone who was from a foreign country and who represented interests maybe that they weren't the best interests for them, and yet we were paying people fifteen dollars an hour when the average income over there was around six. It took a little while. I had to show those people that we could turn this ground in a very fertile farms. We provided them with water they never had. We built ponds to retain the topsoil. We built ponds to retain the water. We put fishes in our ponds. We build roads for the farmers. In the wintertime, when their cows would get stuck in some place because of the high snow, we used our helicopter to form a, you know, whatever feed they needed, and, by the same token, this helped me a great deal, that I became a prince. I was not anymore a stranger. I was a prince. I was someone with who they could, they could deal, but because of my background this helped, you see, because I was just a pirahna with them. They would ask my name, and I would say, "Michael Wilson Sinicroppi Mueller Anchelage. Pick the one you like best." See. So that gives you a little bit of an international flavor.

173 My story, probably, is the story of all immigrants. I might have been a little more fortunate than them because I had an education. So that made it easier. See, education comes in different languages, and how we learn that in the last ten, fifteen years. You know when the Japanese and other countries all in one time were teaching us what to do, at the moment when we thought that's it, but that's because we never put enough emphasis from foreign people, but I, see the immigrants. This is an interesting point. A lot of people, they think immigrants came here strictly because of economical reasons. That's not true. There were some who came here because they were desperate, but there was a religious implications, and there were political implications. You see, Italy was coming out, like I told you before, from a period of time in which whole Europe had been in depression and the Vatican State that comprised practically one third of Italy had not been too easy, even on the Catholics. A lot of people, you know, they would treat a Catholic like a slave, even by their own churches, and that's why there was one factor why they came in United States of America, and some of them came because they didn't have nothing to eat, and some because they were intellectuals, and America was a dream in those days, a land of liberties and freedom and etcetera, etcetera. So they came here for that reason, but they were the few. When they arrived here, they had a problem. They couldn't speak the language, so they were at the mercy of those few smart alocs who were set up, you know. "Oh, I'll get you a job. Don't worry about it, but you've got to give me ten dollars a month." So they went through this process also, this abuse, and so on, that is well documented all over the United States of America. Then there was one group of immigrants that they

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were to go in New York, but for one reason or another, instead of New York, they went up to New Orleans, and then all in one time, you know, they were taken in the South. You could say the middle America, actually, what they call the Bible Belt, and so they went up in the South, and I had an experience. I find a colony of Venetians, people from the city of Venice, that they are unknown for being immigrants. You know, they are merchants, but this group they came in United States. Instead to live in New York, they live in New Orleans. So, they go west. When they got to Missouri, a town called Portosi, on the southern border of Missouri, that's where they have now the penitentiary and they put people to dead and etcetera, and they felt it was a nice land and they stop, and still today, you go over there now on Route 44. That is an Interstate Route, and you see thousands of acres with grape, all kind of grape. They actually develop a wine industry in a place where nobody thought could be done, and they're all Venetians, and I went down this Portosi. I was curious, and sure hell they are. The majority of the people, they are from Venice. They still carrying on in their costumes and so on, but they became very much part of the American structure. So today they making their contributions rather to be a lot.

219 When I came here, when I came back here in 1947, I notice it, that the Italian immigrant still was hanging on what they call in those days the Little Italies, but the Little Italy wasn't doing them no good, because the Little Italy at the beginning sure were a community where poor people were, but then the crime invaded the Little Italys and the Little Poland and whatever you have and changed the structure and the face, and these were not people inclined to crime. They wanted to get out of there. They wanted to get their kids to be something, somebody, in life. So there was this period of time, I think we can say the twenties, in the early twenties, very much in a way of progress for this people. Then comes the war, 1940. Italy finds itself on the other side. Out of 800,000, practically 800,000, Americans who lost their life, and now I'm quoting, not exactly, but as close as I can, General Eisenhower, in a speech he made at the Columbus Day celebrations in New York, he said, one out of every eight soldiers who died during the Second World War carried an Italian name. The very first gold medal, I think you call it Congressional Medal, was given to an Italian soldier fighting for the Americans, who come back here, and I'm trying to think of his name right now, but if it comes to me, I will give it to you, and he went around then, you know, speeches, one thing, another, help collecting some money, but then he went back and he died in Asia, eventually getting the second Congressional Medal. So this Second World War helped the Italian immigrant. When all the soldiers came back home, they had a little money to go to school. The prejudice was not as acute, you know, that was before. They were being accepted by the society, because they had made a contribution. In other words, they had proved in the war that they a part of this country, regardless that Italy was on the other side, what was a very difficult time for a lot of families. So, I would say that was the beginning of a new era for the Italian-American immigrants, and I'm sure that is true of other group of people like the Polish or the Greeks and whatever, but the Italians really went forward. Today you find them in every phase of life, teachers, doctors, engineers, business people, owner of a big complex, scientists. They're all over the place. In fact, the census, one of the last censuses, shows they are the most integrated also group, that nine out of every ten marriages in which an Italian-American is involved,

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be it a lady or a man, are mixed marriage. So actually that is only one marriage out of ten in which two Italians get together, and this is reflected in organizations. At the beginning, the Italians had what they called the Sons of Italy. Everybody knew what the Sons of Italy was. It's a little bit of an organization molded on the sample of the Moose or the Eagles and etcetera, intended to help each other. They called it the Sons of Italy in those days, but sometime after that, here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, they started in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the individuals, the Italian-American individuals, they felt that something had to be done, that you could not live in a country like the United States of America and call yourself the Sons of Italy. It didn't make very much sense. So we started a new order in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1936 that was known as and still known as the Italian Sons and Daughters of America. See, a fundamental change, right. I'm trying to show you the evolution, you know, which the immigrants went, and at the beginning the intellectuals more or less dominated it. You see, the little guy was a little bit, he didn't trust very much people with education, because he had been taken before by some people, you know, who happened to know how to read or write Italian, and they abused the immigrants. So it took a long time. Finally, around 1960, a man by the name of Rigerio Alderset, who is now Judge, Federal Judge of the Third Circuit Court of the United States of America, and at that point in time was one of the national counselors of the order representing West Virginia, he said we're going to have to do something else. He said we've got to do something else. Money becomes an important item in education too. How we going to do it? So we called some experts from Purdue University who come down and studied the situation and suggested to us to start what they call fraternal insurance associations, like the Hungarians have, the Greeks, and all that. So we call this the ISDA, Italian Sons and Daughters of America fraternal insurance association. Now the ISDA was already in place, so we loaned one million dollars to this corporation, because the law required the corporation to be independent, one million dollars so they could start. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania give them the license. The State of West Virginia was the second state to give them the license. Now they got license all over the United States. To make a long story a little short, at the last national council meeting we had, the financial report shows assets in excess of a hundred million dollars, just in a very little time, you see, what they did. First of all you're selling this insurance for twenty-five percent less than a commercial insurance. Then the law requires that you have a backup guarantee. So Lincoln Insurance backs up the entire system. The State tells you what you can charge and what you cannot charge. You cannot use, you've got to use that money. You cannot accumulate profit. The money has to be used for the good of the members, because I understand under this setup, if they would go bankrupt, the State would have to take over and pay whatever liability is left, but, anyhow, we give something like fifteen hundred scholarships per year out of this profits that derive from the insurance, fraternal insurance association. You can buy for practically a couple hundred dollars, a ten thousand dollars' worth of life insurance for a baby just born, and that's what he gets at the age of eighteen, ten thousand dollars, cold cash, that permits him to go out, you know, and do whatever. By the same token he is a member, so he also qualifies for the scholarship that come, you know, from, see. So there has been a evolution, but for the good, not for the bad.

330 Politically, we are among the most conservative people in the world, but let me define that, why we are conservative, because the entire history of our family is, circles around poverty. Not very much to eat. Not very much to buy clothes. Not very much of this. Not very much that. At a certain point we got money. We got the house. We got the boat. We can buy the car. We got a little money in the bank. Now we don't want to lose all this stuff. So that makes us very conservative. That is a fact. The worst thing you can do to an immigrant is tell him that you're going to take a part of his garage or you going to attach part of his pay. You got resistance. Even if he don't express it. You see that what makes them highly conservative without their knowing it, really without them knowing. For example, during the depression years, the Italian-Americans were mostly Democrats, more or less Roosevelt-type of Democrat, liberals. Today, twenty-five percent of Italian-Americans are voting Republican, very conservative, you see. Education brought that. You see, as the society went from one social level to another social level among the Italians, they went to the right rather than to the left, and also this is due to a character. They say that you cannot put two Italians in the same room to agree. Never happen. They will argue their head off. They're very independent. Italian people, by character, they are very independent people, and, when you interfere with that kind of freedom, they get pretty mad. They can be pretty dangerous. Family is very important item in the structure of their society. Family comes first, no matter what, and everybody knows. They're unwritten laws, and I'm going to tell you something, when I went in Italy, the night before I left, you know, they had a little party at my sister's, and there were a lot of people in there, and I became the center, not only because I was visiting. I turn around to see for a moment, I forgot about the customs, I turn around to my sister Antoinette, and I said, "Antoinette." I said, "Why all the attention to me?" I said, "I realize I been here, but I don't know half all these people to start with." She said, "Our father is dead. Our grandfathers are gone. You the old man. And the unwritten law says that you the boss, and you're responsible. You're supposed to help anybody, and you're supposed to look after everybody." Is some kind of unwritten law that they have that sometime can be very, I mean, very challenging, you know, because people expect you to resolve some of their problems, even within the structure of the family, and so on, but, anyhow, I very proud to see, you know, that they have moved in the right direction. When you see today the turmoils we have within the country, where, hey, some people, they are practically challenging the United States as a country. Right here! Within. Not out, and, you know, we can one time say it, we never going to be destroyed by any power, outside, but we could destroy ourself within. There are some symptoms, that they are not too good, and I'm glad to see that the immigrants are staying put. They are not being fooled by all this show of militia and what to tell the government. Sure, we do have a system that permits you to fight for what is unjust, you know. You don't need a militia. You don't need another army. We don't need a civil war. These people are planting a seed for a civil war. People don't understand that, but, because, you know, we also got our bellies full, and a refrigerator full of food, but this is a very dangerous problem. In fact, I wrote, by the way, two articles already. They are printed on Aerostar, one entitled "Terrorism" and the other very historical, terrorism within the history, and I've been working on another one for them, "Anarchy." What I'm trying to do is convey them the message, "Hey, hold it. You don't know what terrorism is. Don't stretch your damn luck too far," because you

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actually destroying yourself at a certain point, and I remind them of things like the one happened in France. There were fifty people a day were killed just in Paris. See people don't understand about the civil war, or civil. That can be very dangerous, because the way this country, the structure, if we start breaking in pieces, only God knows where we're going to wind up. We can wind up worse than the Russians are now. What has kept us together is that we have this excessive freedom that permitted everybody, you see, to operate within this society. Even if you don't like the other guy on the other side doesn't make no difference, but the fact that you have the same rights he has and that you can claim the same freedom. It's all kept us together, and, finally, you know, we learn how to do things other races do. Like I was talking about the marriages before, what the heck, and now we know what the Polish cuisine look like, or what the Austrian cuisine looks like, or the German cuisine, is different, but there is a danger, and I can see that, and, in fact, I've been dedicating my time writing a lot about this subject, because of the experience I had in Europe.

420 Let me jump back one moment here. In 1943 the Americans moved into Italy, South Italy, started landing, the Fifth Army, American Army, and the Eighth British Army. After they passed the town of Regecolabria, they put posters outside. They asked all American citizens, please to report at certain point. See, they knew that there were a lot of American citizens in Italy, people like me who had been born here but they had been taken back there. So me and my mother went there. My mother knew they needed some medicine. She had some problem, you know, some liquid in her lungs and so on, and they help her out. They give her all the medicine she needed and etcetera, but then the guy turn around to me, and he said, "Michael,". He said, "I've got bad news for you." He said, "You over draft age. We have to draft you right now." So, and I'm sorry I didn't brought those papers here. I could show to you. I was actually drafted in Italy, by the District of Columbiana, where I was born in East Liverpool, Ohio. Within fifteen days I was made away, and I was ordered to the town of Tarent where is one of the major ports, military ports of Italy on the Adriatic Sea. Then I was transferred from Tarent to just about east of Naples where the Italian Army Academy was. It would be the correspondent of you, your West Point Army. So, by the time we got here, the number was, was reduced, because I wasn't the only one, there were around two hundred and some, in the same situation I was. So what they did, the ones who were going to college, they retained us. The rest they sent back home, anyplace they want. In fact a lot of those kids, they got a free trip back to United States of America, but they were American citizens, so they had to fight. We went through a six-week course in a town called Casserta, in a palace which used to belong to the king of Italy and the American command took over, a beautiful place. They asked us if we would go behind enemy line and supply informations about the movements of the German troops and so on and so on.

463 So, in those days, what the Germans had built up was what they called the Galtic Line, the Galtic Line run north over Naples all the ways into the Adriatic Sea. Now, most of the Americans were on this side of the Galtic Line, south. So in one side, there would be the western side, you had the Fifth Army, on the eastern side, you had the English Eighth Army, and you had this always hills, inclusive of Montecasino became

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famous because there was a monastery that was destroyed. It was a rainy year, 1944, the winter of 1944, when the Americans decide to move forward. I find myself north of a city called Forgia, in a little town called Cherignon. I was collecting data on what was coming in and out of that airport. At the same time we were blowing depots, too. We had been trained how to blow fuel depots that the Germans had. How we did it? With one of the smallest weapons United States of America had. It was a 45mm, little thing, no bigger than, and we had three type of shells. One was penetrating. So we would shoot few of those and cause, you know, some of those drums to split, and a few to run out, and then we would fire some of these incendiaries, and that would cause the fire, and then we would disappear. We actually would hang this mortar, that what it was, a 45mm mortar. We would hang them on a tree and just go. We knew exactly what it was. You could carry this with one hand. So I imagine when you're twenty years old you do a lot of things. We're lucky. Most of us made it back here. We see each other. There's one guy right here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, \_\_\_\_\_. Except we all grow older now. We all got families. We all got kids. I stayed with the United States Army, and they moved me in the northern part, North Austria's where they got this problems now at the borderline within Croatia and Italy and so on, and then we were spying on the Russians, and I'm going to tell you a little episode for example, some of the things they were used to ask us. We were too young, you know, yet to really understand. I remember they give us a camera, a German camera, Zeis. It make something like seventy-two pictures it could take, and they told us, "We want you to take photographs of welding, any welding you see, in the tanks. Just take a picture." But, the Russians started getting a little curious, you know. We were getting too damn close. We always had the excuse, you know, "I'm taking your picture," but really I was focusing on something else. I wasn't taking the picture. So I imagine the Americans had some information that they were closing down on us, but before they took off I remember telling this officer, I said, "Do we have to take this damn picture," I said. He said, "Yep, very important," and I ask why. He said, "From the welding we can tell how good their tanks are. That's how simple it is." He said, "Maybe we don't need," he said, "a hundred and twenty shells to knock him out. Maybe we can do it with a 75mm cannon, you see." So this some of the things that you learn when you in that kind of life, and also you learn about another identity, except that my identity was student. I had all kind of papers that made me a student of \_\_\_ University. That is an international university located in Toscanacas, not too far from Florence, in that area there.

531 So, as you can see, I was caught in a web, really. There were bunch of things that did happen that I couldn't do nothing about, but I was lucky enough to come back in the United States of America, made a good career, became an executive of a big company. I made a contribution to the community. The Italian Government named me Grand Knight of the Republic of Italy for the contribution that I made to get the relationship between Italy and the United States better. I was very much part, not with a given job, but as a consultant for the Kennedy Administration. I'm the guy who brought Kennedy here in 1959 when nobody knew him. We got him over here. We give him a reception in the house of Judge Ralph Pryor of the Circuit Court, and that's when he asked us the question. He said, "I'd like to run for President, and I'd like to run in West Virginia. I feel if I can make it in West Virginia, I should be able." See, because, he had the religious

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element at that point in time. People, they were wondering if a Catholic would be elected President at all, and in 1959 in the house of Judge Pryor we told him go ahead and run. I been a very good friend of the Kennedys. So I became the manager for their campaign on the First Senatorial District. I run their campaign. I took care of their finances and whatever you have, but, if you go back and look at the elections, he broke even all over the State, but he carried the First Senatorial District by something like thirty thousand votes, then he become pretty powerful candidate at that time.

564 I also am the promoter and the director of a radio program. It is called "Cosmopolitan Cultural Hour." It broadcasts out over WEIR. This program got forty-two years now. It's done both in English and in Italian language, and the intent of this program was actually to promote the heritage, and with the other hand to convince our people that now they were citizens of the United States of America, and that it would be a good idea for them to become citizens of this country and etcetera, etcetera. So we offered free help in problems of naturalizations, immigrations, other little problems that immigrants, you know, gets through. Help them to get their social security from Italy. Now this something a lot of people don't know, and parts of \_\_\_ even been from Italian descent, but they average their social security. They call it Presidentia Socia. We call it Social Security. Just about the same. They don't pay for the Presidentia Socia. The State pays for them according to the years and the months you work. When you work, the State puts so much money aside for you. So they average around two thousand dollars per month. Up here in the Northern Panhandle there are people picking up two thousand dollars per month on a retirement plan that they gained right to in Italy when they worked there. Also the military years that are spent in the army, they are credited like if they were working, and you got people in Follansbee, Weirton, getting seven hundred, eight hundred, twelve hundred out of the Socia. Now we help them on that, you know, because these people they don't have no way to know, but because of the program I get in touch, you know, I stay in touch with Rye, that's a radio out of \_\_\_ Italiana. That's the main network in Italy, and they send all this kind of material to us, you know. Just to give you an idea, I bet you I have forty thousand records album. I'd be surprised if I have around five hundred tapes. I actually give them away to people, all material that comes from there, videos. Now they start sending videos, you see, but they are very good. A lot of videos, you see, they are produced by different companies, especially English companies, and, you know, the English people are very much lovers of history. These are learned. I was married to an English woman for a certain period of time. See, my first wife died when we were very young with leukemia. Then, when I was in Missouri, I met this English lady, Mary O'deo, and she was from I would say the county of Yorkshire, just north of London, and lot of her relatives live in Edmonton in North Canada. So I have also that experience. You know I have been married for two of these women for four years, and we learned a lot of things. The only reason that marriage didn't work wasn't because our relationship, it was because she had a couple kids in the late twenties, and one of the kids caused me some problems. He got in a wreck with a bunch of people from the University of Missouri. The next thing you know, everybody figure, "Hey, this guy's president of a coal company. He got millions coming out his ass." So I'm being sued by everybody, and I'm lucky I get out with it, but then that's why I had to tell her I cannot assume any responsibility for this kids. They're too

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young. I'm too old, and her previous husband, a very nice person, Sarat, who worked for the Air Force in Washington, D.C., he wanted to take a kid back, but she must hate his guts for some reason or other, and I never tried to find out why. She stood her ground. She said nothing to it, and that's it. That was it, but, like I said, we didn't split on an argument. It was more or less a situation. Nothing you could do about it. I couldn't convince her and that was it, but that give me an opportunity to learn about other people, and one thing I learn about the English people is that they are highly intellectual. They love anything that is cultural. They don't push nothing apart. I remember we visit London, her people, and they took us in a place. They were building a super highway. Just to show you how much they really protect anything that is cultural, and only one time they find some ruins. They recognize the ruins were Roman ruins. You know that they detoured the damn road, just to save those, and then they excavated, and this guy was taking us for a tour show us how the Romans were using coal that they find in England. They call it "black star," and they were creating this kind of a fire at the entrance of a house, a building that was warming after the war, and then they had the water circulated. They had to do that on a gravity base. There were no pumps in those days, and this damn thing was circulated from one room to the other room, and bringing some heat and certainly some steam with it too, bnt this is to show you how to them that was historical, and even if it represented the history more of another country, they protected because that's a part of their history, and they wanted to make sure a future generation would know, yes, there was time when the Romans were here. That's how simple it is.

688 Today I am involved just about in anything you can think about. I am a national counselor with the Italian Sons and Daughters of America. I write for the \_\_\_\_\_. I write for the Aerostar and the Weirton Times as a guest, you know, as a guest writer, and I love history. So I'm always involved. I always go back to Italy to see if I can find some answers. Like they say, history has a way to repeat itself. What's happening to us now is very dangerous. Again, I'm saying it's very dangerous, because history shows that countries where this kind of problems started in a very small form, they grew to be very dangerous to the unity. So maybe it's time for us to wake up. It's time to tell our young kids, don't play no games. You got a good country here, and keep it as good as it is now. Pass it down to the other generation. Whatever torture we have, we didn't do so bad. What the heck, in seventy years we went from the jackass age to the moon. So we have more than any other country that has, and I hope that we're going to be very careful of this. Churches, organizations like this, even events like this, you know, that they open to the general public.

724 **GS:** When did you come to the upper Ohio Valley? You probably said.

**MS:** Like I said, I was born in East Liverpool, Ohio.

**GS:** But then you went to Missouri, you came from Missouri back to here.

**MS:** No. No, first I came here. I came back here in Weirton, West Virginia, where I married my first wife Teresa who died with the, what they call acute leukemia, at the age of forty-five.

**GS:** Oh, okay.

**728 MS:** And I worked for Stavage Industries. That is a miracle in itself. For here is a guy, Michael Stavage. He came from Sicily. He couldn't read, and he couldn't write. He never did learn to read. He never did learn to write. He built an empire. When he died, was worth at least seven hundred million dollars. Had five or six hundred people working for him. He had a photographic memory. He come in the lab where I was used to work, and he would ask me certain questions, because we were paid by BTU's and so on, and he would ask me, you know. He understood all that, even that, and he would remember too. He would take me with him in the meeting, and he would say, "Now anytime they ask those kind of questions you answer." Hell, he would answer before I did, and I would shook, because you know, you know there is chemical engineers on the other side, and they know if you are giving the right answers or wrong, and he was a miracle in itself, and I work for him twenty-eight years. I work for him twenty-eight years before I move with the American Industry Resources Corporation, who sent me in Missouri. They send me Missouri to liquidate a company that was called Universal Coal and Energy. They had gone through nine million dollars. Nothing was coming back. He told me, "By Christmas I want this company liquidated." After couple months that I was there, I ask for a meeting with the man. We met at the country club in Columbia, and I told him, "You crazy. You don't want to liquidate this company. Is a potential," and I show to him what the potential was. He said, "I give you three months then." Well, in the three months I was able to really shift things. First of all I restructured the entire company. I took away too many people and too many bosses. I had something like seventeen bosses, a hundred eighty-two miners. Well, I fix that pretty fast. Instead of three shifts, I went down to two, and number three shift became a maintenance shift, so that when I started in the morning everything was ready, instead of fighting and so on. I took a little times that I walk with heavy shoes for a little while, because I had to deal public relations, so I start building recreational little complex for the schools, donation to the high school, donation to the college they had, I think one of the biggest metallurgist college in Lafayette, a little town not too far from us. So we send them a donation and a donation to the Christian college in Moberly. We did all this kind of things. I did all this. This was all my idea. I always believed in public relations, and I went after people in a bigger way, and, eventually, you see, we built a six-miles road for them that was very much appreciated. In the winter, you know, they get heavy snow, and sometime the cattles, they get stuck. They can't come back, you know. We used to use the helicopter, you know, work overtime taking those that hay and all that stuff and dump it, you know, so that the cattle now they would have a place where they could stay and eat at the same time. Like I said, they are farmers over there that we, they were no man's land. When we got through, they jewel. We got ponds to collect topsoil. We got ponds to collect water. We have a diverted certain runway with the water, you see. See, fortunately, Missouri is rich of limestone. They are five to eight feet of limestone right on top. You got maybe three inches of topsoil, ten inches of subsoil, and then you got ten feet of pure limestone. They are the biggest producer of limestone, I understand, in the United States. So we bought a little portable plant to crush all the limestone, and we used that you see to build this runway for the water, one

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thing and another, because we had all we wanted, and, not only that, but the limestone had a tendency to take the acidity away from whatever comes in contact with them, and I remember after we start operating, we were planting something like fifty thousand trees a year, and that was a high school project. You see, get all these high school kids, and we give the high school maybe five thousand dollars so they could take them in someplace at the end of the year. They always, the project, they take them, you know, maybe in Hawaii, one place and another. That's what they do in Missouri. So this was a project, and, you know, we would have our people, you know, mark the area, and then we had all these little plants, you know, pines and other plants, and a little hit to the head too, between that and that, and then all the foods they wanted, all the drink, you know, they get. So we used to plant fifty thousand trees per year minimum, and we left, I mean, we left the place. They still calling me. They actually still calling me from there. They asking how things are going, and one thing, another, but they call me even my birthday.

781 Here in the upper Ohio Valley, my contribution has been mainly participation. I was vice president of the planning commission for the three counties. I was that when we were used to operate under the H O something, big, that was Jefferson, Brooke, and Hancock county. That was in the days when we used to get matching funds from the government. I was the founder of the Weirton Crime Stop Committee at the times when crime became a little bit of a problem, and then I help the Weirton police to organize the auxiliary unit that was not permitted to carry any weapons. We used the auxiliary group to help out. I give you an example. There is a football game. Instead of to have the regular police, you know, sending so many people over there. We would use the auxiliary police there. The only thing they had was the stick. So that the police could still do whatever they had to do. I was president of the Weirton Lodge of the ISDA for something like twenty-eight years. I am a member of the Historical Society of the United States of America. I am a member of the, what they call the law association enforcement. I was named as a natural resource of the United States of America included in this particular record that I hear often. I don't know, if I had the thing in front of me I could read it to you, and, like I said, I became Grand Knight of the Republic of Italy for the contributions that I gave in that line, because it was time, you see, right after the war, where even the American Government find it difficult to make certain decisions related to Italy. They wanted Italy on our side, and eventually did have. I work very close with the Cancer Society, Cancer Society, the Heart Society. I help them collect money and things like that. I help the, what they call the International Festival that we used to have in Weirton years after years. I was always very active on the city administration, not as a man on the payroll, but more or less as a guy who didn't worry about appearing in front of them and making a point, but it was always a constructive point. I never did get involved with, you know, in a litigation-like point. I was used to bring to the attention, but, lately, I think I got everybody shook up up there because I come to them with new idea, see. Weirton, like every other city, is having some problems. The problems are financial. The sources of the money are not there. So they had a meeting up here at your park. Rockefeller was there, Panata was there, and others. Now I'm the chairman of the Democratic Party for Hancock County. I've been the chairman for fifteen/sixteen years, and they invited me. In the course of the

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conversation, I turn around to Leo Panata, and I said, "Leo, what's left for cities of our size." I said, "We die," but he turn around. He looked to me. He said, "Michael, whatever is on a pipeline. That's it." I say, "What that means?" He said, "Whatever money's been adjudicated already." We don't got no money. He said, so, he said, "The truth is," he said, "the committee going to have to start learning to do things on their own. There is no." Which is the truth. It is becoming evident every day. So I was thinking little bit about, you know. In Weirton they were playing around with an idea. They call it 20/20 Vision. That 20/20 Vision is a good plan, but the problem is to integrate that plan you need millions of dollars. This millions are not there. So I surprise everybody. Had a bigger meeting, even the Weirton Steel people were there. I said, "I have a word, privatization. I don't know if you people ever heard of that," I said, "but the city's going to have to start thinking in terms of privatization, privatization of a public service. Lease and sublease all the real estate you have. Get the hell out of all this kind of business. You know the business, your government. I realize there are certain things you do that look like a business, but there has been certain period of time in which all the city they got involved in all this real estate, and now you see they are tied up. They don't know what to do with all these buildings. They don't know how to get the tax. People don't want to pay no more tax." So, I said, "Privatization. I give as an example. Immediately, we have a community center is an authority in itself. However, at the end of the year, they might be fifty thousand, eighty thousand dollars on the hole, and the city's plugging the hole. Now those are the tax payer. Now I suggest that you get someone is in this kind of business, recreational business. He will be more than happy to take this building over. He will be more than happy to spend a million dollars needed to bring it up to date. He will put more machines than you can dream in there. He will run it as a business, so that at the end of the year you get a little check, and you don't have to worry about insurance, you don't have to worry about bank. This is privatization. Get all this stuff out of the government," I said, "for Heaven's sake." You know, it shook them up pretty good, because, since then, you know, they call me to little meetings that they have with Weirton Steel and companies. They like the idea. I said, "There are people there that they would be happy to invest the money," and then I throw a bomb, I told the people from Weirton Steel. I said, "What about that island?" "Well, we got a bunch of junk, you know, up there and so on." I said, "I brought a constructor here, which is the truth, Angelo Melori. This guy has a construction company. He only construct big thing, you know. He gets big projects all over United States of America, and I met him, because, by the name of the company, you would never tell, you know, that a guy by the name of Angelo Melori is the owner, and I talked to him. So I had him as a guest here, and I show him Weirton, and we were on Marlin Heights. We looked down, and you could see this island. He said, "Man," he said, "I wish I had that island." I said, "What would you do?" I (he) said, "I build you the biggest recreational complex in the United States of America, because it's in the middle of the river, make a difference. I build hotels. I build anything that is necessary, without interfering." He said, "You close your eyes and dream for a minute." Well, I did close my eyes and dream, and I can see it is possible, if you got the money to spend, sure. What the heck, if they build a Disneyland over there. Why not somebody can do something in middle of the Ohio River, but, then, you see, maybe that's, that's why Angelo Melori's so big, because he can dream, and he can think, and he can transform

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this thing in reality. Maybe that's why Mike Sinicroppi sounds like a fool once in a while, but, you see, this is the idea, so that I can see, and sometime they wonder about a sidewalk, or they wonder about a pole. It's alright to a certain point, but they've become so much a part of everything we do that we look like a bunch of little kids, you know, arguing about I want the yellow can instead of the black one or whatever, you see. That's what we do, where they talking about what you can do with it. You can do lots. This guy really teach me, and then I took him to Weirton Stadium. I don't know if you're familiar with Weirton at all, but they got the Weir High Stadium right behind the mill, but, anyhow, think in terms of an area like this. Here's the mill. Here's the stadium. From here to the bridge are all old houses. The old peoples are dying. The houses are falling apart, and it is becoming a ghetto, because this house are being rented for a hundred dollars a month tops, so you know what kind of people are attracting. He took a look at that. He said, he said, "Here we can put in excellent project. Will be two-phased project. If we take the property out of these people, we got to find a place to put them. So," he said, "I suggest on the northern part we build complexes for people who are too sick, for people who are half sick, for people can't live by themself and park their cars and rent and live like if they had a home, and the rest," he said, "all the way to the bridges," he said, "we put the biggest shopping center," he said, "you ever saw. Who cares about downtown? There will be new downtown. What you got now," he says, "is an old, decrepit place ready to fall apart." But, you see, and at some time I transfer some of this ideas to some of these people, and then I'm not always successful. There are people, you know, they're scared a little bit. Weirton Steel is a little bit hesitant. Sometime I get the feeling they don't want nobody in beside themself, and don't you think I didn't tell them that too, because they don't give you an answer. They just look at you, you see, when you say something, and I try to point out to them, "Look at the money this would bring in, the tremendous amount of money," and then, you see, Weirton can be, for example, also a service town. Water. We could supply water all ways to the Robinson Town in Pennsylvania. Now I'm familiar with that area. See, from Robinson Town all the way to Paris, to the borderline, there is no water. See, we mined all that. There is no water that is drinkable. There is no water that can be used, nothing, but Weirton got all the water in the world. All they've got to do is improve the water system and one thing, and sell to all those communities, and get all this damn revenue back. This is where I find little difficult, you know, to understand sometime the political mentality of some of our govenments. They seems to be stuck on something, and they don't seems to be able to get out of it with a fresh idea, something different, something, you know, that you can project way. Certain, I might never be able to see the island, you know, as a tremendous, but I can dream it. I can see the future generation would have something like that. So I have been involved lots in this area here. I always like to give the community all the contribution that I can. What I'm doing, I'm paying back for, let's face it, a good life that I made. That's how simple it is.

911 **GS:** Have you been involved with the Italian Festival since the beginning?

**MS:** Not since the beginning. I think I came in the picture maybe ten years ago. Yeah, ten years ago somebody asked me, said we need another board member from Hancock County. I said okay. I had been here, you know. I always liked Wheeling for some

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reason or other, because it looks more like a city than some of the other little communities we have. Wheeling could be an intellectual center. You already have the basis for that, you know. You have this country, for example, music, theater, one thing, another, then you go up, you park, and you got a museum over there. In other words, there a lot of spectrum, cultural spectrum in Wheeling. You got a symphony orchestra, all this kind of stuff, you know. People don't realize, you know, that. Well, history will judge us. They're not going to judge us by the tonnage of steel that Wheeling Steel produced. They're not even going to talk about that. We're going to be judged by other things. What made us great. Documents like the Declaration of Independence, our Constitution. Those are the things they're going to talk about, like the Romans now. Yeah, you talk about one thing, another, but they all bad, but they are remembered mostly because they were able to give the first set of law to a world, you know, that they had conquered. That's why they're known mostly, and for what they were able to steal. You see, the Romans were funny people. They were very aggressive, crude sometime, cruel, but, if you had something better than they had, they took it from you, you know. They did this in Greece. They took, actually, old intellectual and transferred from Greece to Rome to educate their kids one thing, another, but this caused an intellectual vacuum in Greece that sometime, kidding around, I tell someone from Greece, "You guys have not recovered yet," I said, and the Romans had an opportunity, you know, to teach their kids something different that there was more pride, more elegant, more finesse, and so on, than they had.

938 **GS:** That's what this group I'm working for is trying to do, I believe. The Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation is trying to save some of that culture.

**MS:** But you can see, you see, from this conversations there are a lot of ideas that come out of it too, you know, that can be. Don't take them for granted. Think about it. Catalogue the ideas. That's what is important to do.

**GS:** Yeah.

**MS:** And then, if the opportunity presents itself, bingo. I don't know if you remember. You remember the last mayor they had in Pittsburgh, not the woman, a Richard Caliguri who went down as the Renaissance-type of mayor for Pittsburgh. Now this was a guy that he talked like I did. He was an immigrant. He came from the same part of Italy that I do, the lower part of Italy, the southern part, but he envisioned Pittsburgh as a different city than what it was at that point in time, and he changed it. He changed it. He worked. It is unfortunate, you know, that he died with some kind of sickness that he couldn't recover. Even communities like this, they got to think a little different. They got to think in different terms. You know, I get a kick sometime, they hollering, screaming about this, about that, and nobody brings up, and when you bring up some idea like I try to do, then they don't show. Then after two, three months they call you, say they want to know what you're talking about. Why? Then I find out why. You see, this guy who just quit, the publisher of the Aerostar, a guy by the name Pappas something. He just quit to go to another paper, but I understand from one of the reporter there that they went down there and they ask him what do you think about that debate, he said, we

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had at the community center, and Pappas told them. He said, "Sinicropi told you the only fresh idea he brought up, and the rest was repetition." He said, "Oh. Nobody brought anything up new." He said, "This guy is challenging you." He said, "Let him apologize everything." Why you want all these problems and all these headaches when you can have better society, because, if you're going to take over the Weirton Community Center, you aren't taking over the community center to lose money. You are taking over the community center to make money. All they got to do is pass a couple ordinances to protect the interest of the citizens, and let them do it. Let the private property do it. I believe in private enterprise. I always did. I always will.

970 **GS:** Are you a member of any of these Italian-American Clubs?

**MS:** Yeah, the Weirton Club certainly is the main organization that I belong to. Then there are some national groups like the Italian-American Historical Club, and things of that sort, you know, on the loose.

**GS:** Okay. What's the name of that one in Wheeling? You just said it.

**MS:** Which one?

**GS:** The club. Is it just the Italian-American Club?

**MS:** Yeah, they call it the Italian-American Historical Club?

**GS:** Historical.

**MS:** Is all over the United States. Is an association, and from the name you can tell what they're after, they're after.

**GS:** We're trying to put together a talking tent for this Italian Festival, too, with different ideas. I wanted all the clubs represented somewhere along the line, especially. On the last one we'll have on just clubs.

**MS:** You see, this is, this festival, really, is an asset to Wheeling, any way you look at it, you know. Anytime you attract that kind of people here. What's the difference? Now, if this was restricted, I wouldn't be a member. I'll be very honest with you. I have never been a member of an organization where the doors are closed, you see. I feel comfortable with anyone. I don't care who they are, where they come from, as long as you know, they stay within the framework of the law, fine, and this is open. Even the scholarships, we don't pick out scholarship among the Italian-Americans. The scholarship we give, we call you. You the first fella who's called. You say, "Joe Jones is the best student." He gets the scholarship from here. So, really, this is a part of Wheeling. I tell you. Something happened here that left me a little bit. I don't know. Sometime you wonder how far politics can go. You know, the commissioners, they used to give us one thousand dollars a year to help. Okay. That money is derived by taxes they collect on hotels and other things, alright, but that's what we do. We bring a

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lot of people here who occupy a lot of beds and such. You know that they cut us off. Ohio County commissioner cut the thousand dollars donation to the fair. How much donation we make? Soon after the festival we're going to move one hundred thousand dollars into the scholarship fund to make it permanent. The scholarship fund is handled by a bank, the administrative side, and then we have a committee within. The committee, you know, more or less, is like a supervisor type of a thing, and they have the authority to replace one of the members if he dies and so on. It operates on its own, outside of the festival. That's why we put the money over there, so it would be there, you see. This kind of left, between me and you, a little bad taste around. There were a lot of bad comments about the commission, and not only that. Last year they donated five hundred dollars. Never give it to us. Don't mean nothing. Thank God, you know, we've been, financially, we've been able to navigate. Let's put it that way, but, if you can bring in Wheeling, West Virginia, one hundred fifty to two hundred thousand people four days, what the heck you care who puts the thing together? I don't give a damn if the Chinese do it, you know. That don't make no difference to me. You have to look at this from another angle. What does to the community. What does to the business people. People that never saw Wheeling before, they coming down. I have people in Weirton. They tell me, "Hey, you know, they got a nice place down there, nice, you know, stores and things like that." You'd be surprised how much sale you do without saying anything, and, thank God, I cannot recall a problem. You know, you get all those people in a town like this. We didn't even have a fight last year, nothing, nothing. What this, you know, says very much about the communities around here.

1029 **GS:** Yes, it does. Let me ask you.

**MS:** Yes.

**GS:** You mentioned the radio program you do. Could you explain that just a little bit?

**MS:** The "Cosmopolitan Cultural Hour." Yeah. I, first of all, I provide news. See, our people, they like to know who was born, who died, who got engaged, and who got married. So I do that on a capsule-type, maybe two minutes an hour, as part of my social news. Then I have news from Italy. The night before, I actually record the news out of Radio Rome, because I've got a permit to do that, and then I only use, you know, make a transcript of it, but I only use the news that I think, you know, very important here, because a lot of news don't mean nothing over here from Italy, okay. Then I might give a little story, called "Commentalia" concerning when the events will come around. For example, Fourth of July is coming around. There's a good chance that I will dedicate my program to the Fourth of July, and I will say something about the historical importance of the Fourth of July, and so on, and so on. This is how you educate your people, you see. Memorial Day come around. I do the same thing. These are all situations in which, you know, I have an opportunity to talk. Then I get anywhere from fifty to seventy requests per week. People birthday, people anniversary. No way in the world I could play a record for each one. So, what I do, you see, I use maybe ten, fifteen names per record, okay. The records are a combination of classics and classic songs, traditional, and whatever you have. That's what it is.

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1054 **GS:** I think I had a lot of questions, but you, as long as, well, you've talked, you've answered practically, I think you've answered them all. So.

**MS:** Well, I hope I did help you certainly. You know these are things that with time, sometime you can dig a little more, but I always say I really, I really think that, I hope to God you people going to have a lot of luck in this heritage. The northern panhandle is a characteristic area. Pennsylvanians are not wrong when they say we stole it from them. We probably did, but it turned to be very nice piece of ground, and what you guys are doing is very good. Ain't no question about. Anytime you have this kind of intellectual endeavor, would be the word, is a contribution, not only to us, because we already learn about it from each other, but it is so important to the future generations, because I am almost sure that some place in time some people are going to try to look back, see, and see what's going on, why this happen, and then, by some of this documentation, you know, that is put aside from all this data that is collected, then we'll understand a little more, you know, why certain things, because is not only Mike Sinicropi doing this. It's just that Mike Sinicropi has a certain point of view. He has a certain background. He has a certain history. Somebody else might be a little different.

**GS:** Oh, yeah.

**MS:** So, between the two, you know, you collect quite a little bit.

**GS:** This will be, eventually, you know, categorized.

**MS:** Now there is one thing that I didn't say, but it just came to my mind, and that is to do. Most of the foreign groups like the Italians, at the very beginning, they grew around the church. The church was the only place that they could go for comfort and whatever. So the churches played an important part at the very beginning of the immigration.